

REID J. RIBBLE
8TH DISTRICT, WISCONSIN

1513 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
PHONE (202) 225-5665
FAX (202) 225-5729

DISTRICT OFFICES:
333 WEST COLLEGE AVENUE
APPLETON, WI 54911
PHONE (920) 380-0061
FAX (920) 380-0051
550 N. MILITARY AVENUE
SUITE 4B
GREEN BAY, WI 54303
PHONE (920) 471-1950



Congress of the United States House of Representatives

September 17, 2013

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
SUBCOMMITTEES:
CONSERVATION, ENERGY, AND FORESTRY
LIVESTOCK, DAIRY, AND POULTRY
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEES:
AVIATION
RAILROADS, PIPELINES AND
HAZARDOUS MATERIALS
WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

Dear Colleague:

Over the next few short weeks, the federal government will once again be at a fiscal crossroads. If handled poorly, the CR, debt limit, and sequester could lead to more economic uncertainty, market instability, and a continued erosion of the American people's trust in Congress. If managed responsibly, however, we can take a critical step toward restoring the American people's faith in this institution and demonstrate our ability to solve the problems that we have been elected to dutifully manage.

These looming issues present peril, but also an opportunity to achieve something lasting for the American people...and we must rise to this challenge. While we must ensure our government does not default on our current obligations, I also believe this unique situation allows for our conference to lead and address a looming financial and societal catastrophe.

I believe we should utilize this unique time and begin undertaking entitlement reform. Specifically, I believe we should save and secure Social Security.

We, as sons and daughters of Social Security recipients – and parents of future recipients as well – have an obligation not to simply focus on the next election, but to ensure this vital safety net is in place for the next generation and for generations to come. We espouse fiscal responsibility but we need to be honest with ourselves: Do we want to solve this problem or not? And while our conference is conflicted on what paths to pursue in the coming weeks I would present this as an option we could unify behind and actually get enacted into law.

I've heard countless times during my short period in Congress, "Social Security's the easy one to solve." ...and yet we do not step forward to fix it. Instead we kick the can down the road and allow the problem to grow worse. If this is the "easy one," where the problem and the potential solutions are readily clear, then we should not delay. Let's actually fix it for the American people.

While managing discretionary spending is important, it pales in comparison to the management required for future mandatory spending. All of us, from the President on down, agree that we are on an unsustainable long-term fiscal trajectory. With every day that goes by, the cost of correction gets steeper and more difficult to accomplish. The promises made within our entitlement system will someday be broken unless we act. If not now, when? If not us, who? I believe that we have been sent here for a moment such as this.

The President, to his credit, extended an olive branch to us this year when his budget incorporated chained-CPI for Social Security. This proposal would affect current seniors and it demonstrated a

willingness on the President's part to make difficult choices to secure the program. We should do the same.

According to the 2013 Social Security Trustees' Report, the program's 75-year unfunded obligations stand at \$9.6 trillion. Closing this gap would more than offset the sequester amounts, allowing defense accounts to be funded at appropriate levels. It would also far surpass the amount of a debt ceiling increase necessary to complete the President's term.

The math is relatively easy, it's leading that may be difficult. But leading at this juncture has the potential to secure this crucial program and ensure millions of current and future seniors have the security they depend upon – and I remind you, those future seniors are our children and grandchildren, of whom we speak of so often.

In the current political context some potentially viable options for eliminating Social Security's deficit include:

- Continuing and expanding the phase-in of raising the retirement age
- Adjusting the inflation formula used for calculating future growth
- Means-testing benefits for high income recipients of Social Security
- Gradually restoring the cap on wages subject to FICA to its Reagan-era levels

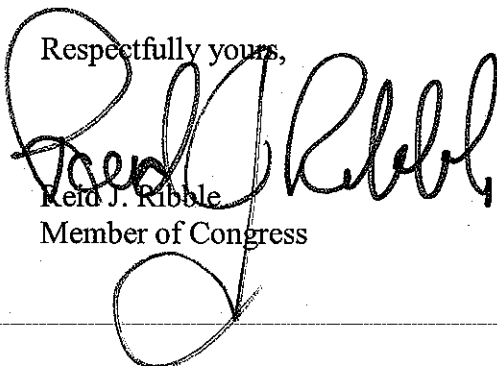
Studies have shown that by moderately adjusting each of these items we would be able to ensure Social Security's solvency for 75 years and beyond. Additionally, this would engage all Americans in the process. Social Security is a national benefit and all Americans, whether young or old, affluent or middle-class, should play a part in ensuring its survival. **However, these aren't the only options. If you feel these are not feasible or are misguided I would ask you to present others that would solve the problem. The most important outcome is that we actually fix this coming crisis.**

We have previously shown that we can achieve significant legislative accomplishments, even when we only control half of one-third of the federal government. But our success rate is higher when we tell the American people what we are for and why those solutions help improve the future. Let us not paint in pastels and ignore this problem until it shatters the security of a generation. Let us paint in bold colors and solve it in these next few weeks.

Acting now will show the American people once again that we are serious about protecting the most vulnerable in our communities, tackling our nation's problems in a responsible way, and getting our fiscal house in order. We should not delay.

- Social Security Disability Insurance Trust Fund Depletion Date: **2016**
- Social Security Trust Fund Depletion Date: **2033**

Respectfully yours,



Reid J. Ribble
Member of Congress