



Seniors Update 2015

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS

Dear Vermont Senior,

These are tough times for many seniors in Vermont and throughout the country. Poverty among seniors is rising, and with today's high prices for food, housing, and prescription drugs, millions of seniors are one bad break away from an economic crisis.

The good news is that for the last 80 years, Social Security has provided retirement security for our nation's seniors. And for the past 50 years, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Older Americans Act have provided critical health care and long-term services and supports that seniors need and deserve. Incredibly, some of my colleagues in Congress want to cut Social Security, Medicare, and many other programs that are of enormous importance to seniors and give more tax cuts for some of the wealthiest families in our country. At a time when the gap between the very rich and everyone else is growing wider and wider, we can't let them succeed.

Shockingly—and it is truly shocking—one-in-five seniors lives on an average income of just \$8,300 a year. As we continue to recover from the biggest economic decline since the 1930s, we must not turn our backs on older Americans. After all, a nation is judged by how it cares for its most vulnerable, not by the tax breaks it gives to its billionaires. As Ranking Member on the Budget Committee and Chairman of the Defending Social Security Caucus, I am committed to leading the fight to protect and expand Social Security benefits so that seniors have the income in retirement they need to live with dignity.

After four years of hard work, the Senate finally reauthorized the Older Americans Act in July 2015, the landmark law that provides congregate and home-delivered meals and supportive services for seniors. Although the bill does not go far enough to expand these important programs, it is a step in the right direction in terms of supporting the needs of older Americans. Now, the House of Representatives must pass this bill so President Obama can sign it into law.

As the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Primary Health and Retirement Security, I am committed to ensuring that all Americans have access to the affordable medicines they need. It is outrageous that Americans pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs, and I am taking steps to investigate the companies that are responsible for steeply rising prices.

I am very pleased that we continue to make good progress expanding affordable primary health care throughout the state. Vermont now has 11 community health centers with more than 50 sites that provide affordable health care, dental care, mental health counseling, and low-cost prescription drugs to more than 152,000 Vermonters. All health centers welcome Medicare and Medicaid patients. For more information about your closest health center, please call my office.

Please know that my office is here to help. If you are running into problems with Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, prescription drugs, veterans' benefits, housing, nutrition services, or anything else, please do not hesitate to contact my office at 1 (800) 339-9834. Also, for up-to-date information from my office, please visit my website at www.sanders.senate.gov and sign up for my newsletter, the Bernie Buzz.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bernie".

Bernie Sanders
United States Senator

sanders.senate.gov

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The Importance of Social Security

This year marks the 80th anniversary of Social Security, one of the most successful government programs in our nation's history. Through good times and bad, Social Security has paid out every benefit owed to every eligible American. Before Social Security was signed into law, nearly half of all seniors were living in poverty. Today, while still much too high, the senior poverty rate is less than 10 percent.

Yet, our nation faces a retirement crisis. Our population is aging, and according to a new Government Accountability Office (GAO) report that I requested, 52 percent of all older households have no retirement savings. At a time when the average Social Security benefit is just \$1,328 per month, and when more than one-third of our seniors rely on Social Security for virtually all of their income, we must fight to increase Social Security benefits. And in fact, the overwhelming majority of the American people not only oppose cutting Social Security, they support expanding Social Security by raising the cap on taxable income.

That is why I introduced the Social Security Expansion Act, which would lift more seniors out of poverty by raising the minimum Social Security benefit, increase the average benefit by \$65 a month, and more accurately measure

inflationary cost-of-living adjustments. My bill would be fully paid for by asking millionaires and billionaires to pay the same share of their income to the Social Security Trust Fund as everyone else. It is absurd that a Wall Street CEO who makes \$18 million a year currently pays the same amount of money into the Trust Fund as someone who makes \$118,500.

Eliminating the cap on the payroll tax for income above \$250,000 would raise enough revenue to increase benefits for seniors, and extend the solvency of Social Security through 2065. This is what the American people want, and this is the right thing to do—because after a lifetime of hard work, no senior should be forced to decide whether to buy food for dinner, pay for medications, or keep a roof over their heads. As Ranking Member on the Budget Committee and Chairman of the Defending Social Security Caucus, I am committed to leading the fight to protect and expand Social Security benefits so that seniors have the income in retirement they need to live with dignity.

If you would like to share your story about how Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, or Older Americans Act programs have helped you or your family, please visit www.sanders.senate.gov/polls/story-medicare



HANDS OFF SOCIAL SECURITY



Fighting for Lower Prescription Drug Prices

It is unacceptable that Americans pay, by far, the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. Because the United States lacks a national health insurance program that can negotiate with the pharmaceutical industry, drug companies are able, in many cases, to charge any price they want for their products. Today, one-in-five Americans do not fill their prescriptions because they cannot afford the cost.

I have heard from Vermonters and people all over this country that dozens of commonly prescribed generic drugs that used to be relatively inexpensive have been skyrocketing in price. Nearly 10 percent of generic drugs



more than doubled in price last year.

So I launched an investigation and asked 15 generic drug companies why they were raising prices for consumers. When the companies did not provide us with meaningful information, I held a Senate hearing on this issue, introduced legislation to curb these skyrocketing prices, and I asked the Department of Health and Human Services to investigate these sudden price increases.

If you have seen a surprising increase in the cost of your prescription drugs and you want to share your story, please call my office at 1 (800) 339-9834 or go to www.sanders.senate.gov/drug-prices

Protecting the Older Americans Act

Nearly four million low-income seniors—more than one-in-five—do not know where their next meal is coming from. Fewer than 10 percent of low-income seniors who need a meal delivered to their homes receive one. These are the disturbing new findings of a study conducted by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) at my request.

One of the most effective laws to address the needs of vulnerable seniors is the Older Americans Act. Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the Older Americans Act provides funding for many essential services for seniors including meals, job training, caregiver support, transportation, and protections from abuse and financial scams.

Older Americans Act funding helps provide more than 1.1 million meals each year for seniors across Vermont, but because Congress has long underfunded these important programs, there are still seniors



in our communities who are going hungry. The simple truth is meals programs not only ease isolation and hunger, but they also save taxpayers substantial sums of money. We can provide nutritious meals for a senior for an entire year for the cost of just one day in a hospital.

The good news is that on July 16, 2015, the Older Americans Act reauthorization bill (S.192) cleared a very important hurdle when it passed the Senate with unanimous support. The bill is endorsed by nearly 100 national organizations representing the voices of tens of millions of Americans. Making sure that seniors have the food they need and treating seniors with respect and dignity has the overwhelming support of the American people.

For more information about Vermont's senior meals program, call the Vermont Senior HelpLine at 1 (800) 642-5119 or call my office at 1 (800) 339-9834.

Need help on how to get in touch with senior advocates? To find any of the Area Agencies on Aging or for other services for seniors, please call my office toll-free at 1 (800) 339-9834 or call the Vermont Senior HelpLine at 1 (800) 642-5119.

Area Agencies on Aging

These agencies coordinate and support a wide range of home and community-based services, including information and referral, home-delivered and congregate meals, transportation, employment services, senior centers, adult day care and a long-term care ombudsman program. They also provide assistance for adults in need of protection or supportive services.

Central Vermont Council on Aging (CVCOA)

Lamoille, Orange, and Washington Counties

Champlain Valley Agency on Aging (CVAA)

Addison, Chittenden, Franklin, and Grand Isle Counties

Area Agency on Aging for Northeastern Vermont (NEVAAA)

Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties

Senior Solutions (Council on Aging for Southeastern Vermont)

Windham and Windsor Counties

Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging (SVCOA)

Bennington and Rutland Counties



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