

**Resource 3 (1 of 3)****Presidential Viewpoints on Social Security**

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All statements in this resource were taken from Social Security Online. (2011). Special collections: Presidential statements. Retrieved from <http://www.ssa.gov/history/presstmts.html>.

**George H. W. Bush**

And there's one thing I hope we will be able to agree on. It's about our commitments. I'm talking about Social Security. To every American out there on Social Security, to every American supporting that system today, and to everyone counting on it when they retire, we made a promise to you, and we are going to keep it.

We rescued the system in 1983, and it's sound again—bipartisan arrangement. Our budget fully funds today's benefits, and it assures that future benefits will be funded as well. The last thing we need to do is mess around with Social Security.

—Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union (January 31, 1990)

It [Social Security] was fixed in a bipartisan agreement under the Reagan administration, I think in '83 or '84, in there. It is solvent well into the—way after the turn of the century, up until about 2030 or something like that. If it needs further adjustments then, it should be fixed then. You'll still be alive, but I don't think I'll be around wrestling with the problem in the year 2030. And we ought not to fool around with it.

In my budget plan, this Agenda for American Renewal, I say we've got to control the growth of these mandatory programs, but set Social Security aside. It's not a welfare program. It originally was to be a supplement to people's incomes. It's sacrosanct.

—Q&A Session in Atlanta, Georgia (October 20, 1992)

**William J. Clinton**

Now, I think it's important to point out, just in passing, that behind every one of these entitlements there's a person. That's why it's so controversial when they're debated in Congress. It's not just organized interest groups, there are people who believe they are literally entitled to receive something back that they paid into. It is the middle-class entitlements, that have united us and brought us together, that also have the strongest constituencies and provoke the biggest controversies when we get into dealing with this. And these programs are also very important in human terms. . . .

Social Security has changed, literally, what it means to be old. In the beginning of 1985, for the first time in our history, the percentage of our elderly people who were above the poverty line was better than the percentage of the population as a whole. In other words, the poverty rate for the elderly was lower than the poverty rate of the general population.

It is very difficult to say that this was a bad thing. That was—I argue—a good thing. We should not view this whole program, in other words, as welfare. It is not a welfare program. Does that mean that there should be no changes in it? No. It just means that we should be very sensitive

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about the fact that this is something that has worked. Because of these programs, we are a healthier people. We are a more unified country. We treat our elderly with greater dignity by having allowed them to earn a decent retirement and to maintain a middle-class standard of living, independent of whatever their children are required to do, and to make them more independent over the long run. This is a huge deal in a country where the fastest growing group of people, in percentage terms, are people over 80 years of age. This is a big deal.

—Remarks by the President in Addressing the Future of Entitlements Conference, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania (December 13, 1993)

The balanced budget I signed this week protects our hard-won surplus until we save Social Security first. As a result, the new Congress will have the best chance ever to ensure that the baby boomers can retire in dignity, without imposing unfair burdens on our children.

As we begin the process of reform, I have proposed five core principles to guide our way: First, we have to reform Social Security in a way that strengthens and protects the system for the 21st century. We simply cannot abandon a program that represents one of our country's greatest successes.

Second, we should maintain universality and fairness. Third, Social Security must provide a benefit people can count on, regardless of the ups and downs of the economy or the financial markets. Fourth, Social Security must continue to provide protection for disabled and low-income Americans. And finally, any reforms we adopt must maintain our fiscal discipline.

—Radio Address by the President to the Nation (October 24, 1998)

**George W. Bush**

Government has great responsibilities, for public safety and public health, for civil rights and common schools. Yet compassion is the work of a nation, not just a government. And some needs and hurts are so deep they will only respond to a mentor's touch or a pastor's prayer. Church and charity, synagogue and mosque, lend our communities their humanity, and they will have an honored place in our plans and in our laws.

Many in our country do not know the pain of poverty. But we can listen to those who do. And I can pledge our nation to a goal: When we see that wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not pass to the other side.

America, at its best, is a place where personal responsibility is valued and expected.

—Inaugural Address (January 20, 2001)

This spring I will form a presidential commission to reform Social Security. The commission will make its recommendations by next fall. Reform should be based on these principles: It must preserve the benefits of all current retirees and those nearing retirement. It must return Social

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Security to sound financial footing. And it must offer personal savings accounts to younger workers who want them.

Social Security now offers workers a return of less than 2 percent on the money they pay into the system. To save the system, we must increase that by allowing younger workers to make safe, sound investments at a higher rate of return.

Ownership, access to wealth, and independence should not be the privilege of a few. They are the hope of every American . . . and we must make them the foundation of Social Security.

—Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress (February 27, 2001)

**Barack H. Obama**

Social Security is not an individual account. . . . Your Social Security tax goes to pay for current retirees. And hopefully when you retire, young people who are working then, their money will go to pay for your retirement.

So it's an intergenerational commitment that we make to each other. What we say is, look, all of us are going to grow old, so we're going to make sure that there's enough money in there for your retirement; and those of us who are currently working, we pay into the kitty to make sure that that happens, and then we expect that the next generation is going to do the same.

—Remarks by the President in Arnold, Missouri, Town Hall (April 29, 2009)

So when folks with a stake in the status quo keep inventing these boogeymen in an effort to scare people, it's disappointing, but it's not surprising. We've seen it before. When President Roosevelt was working to create Social Security, opponents warned it would open the door to "federal snooping" and force Americans to wear dog tags. When President Kennedy and President Johnson were working to create Medicare, opponents warned of "socialized medicine." Sound familiar? Not only were those fears never realized, but more importantly, those programs have saved the lives of tens of millions of seniors, the disabled, and the disadvantaged.

—Remarks of President Barack Obama Weekly Address (August 15, 2009)

But a great education isn't all we need in this new economy. We also need benefits and protections that provide a basic measure of security. It's not too much of a stretch to say that some of the only people in America who are going to work the same job, in the same place, with a health and retirement package for 30 years are sitting in this chamber. [Laughter.] For everyone else, especially folks in their 40s and 50s, saving for retirement or bouncing back from job loss has gotten a lot tougher. Americans understand that at some point in their careers, in this new economy, they may have to retool and they may have to retrain. But they shouldn't lose what they've already worked so hard to build in the process. That's why Social Security and Medicare are more important than ever. We shouldn't weaken them; we should strengthen them.

—State of the Union Address to Congress (January 12, 2016)