



Lobby Day Talking Points 2021 Winter Legislative Toolkit

Agenda to Strengthen Retirement Security

End the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID Pandemic continues to devastate the country. More than 430,000 Americans have lost their lives, and more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of those were over the age of 65.

Ending this deadly pandemic is critical. It is not only putting our health at risk, but wreaking havoc on the economy.

Our economy shrank 3.5% in 2020, which hurts all Americans.

A new relief package is overdue and must include:

- Funding for additional PPE and greater vaccine production and distribution in order to vaccinate Americans, including older Americans who make up 80% of COVID deaths;
- Funding for state and local governments, which saw shrinking tax receipts due to the pandemic, to prevent further layoffs or furloughs, to fund first responders and provide public services;
- Extending Unemployment Benefits beyond March;
- Greater stimulus payments to families, including retirees; and
- More housing and nutrition assistance for those struggling to pay for food and housing.

Expand Social Security

We earned OUR Social Security benefits through years of hard work. We paid for it, and it should not be cut to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy or other things.

This Congress must take action to strengthen and expand Social Security by making the wealthy pay their fair share into the system.

In 2021, the wealthiest Americans stopped contributing to Social Security by January 4, having satisfied their obligation under current law.

If these Americans paid the same percentage of their income into Social Security as working people do, benefits can be increased for current and future retirees, AND the Trust Fund will be more solvent. Today a worker in an Amazon warehouse pays a higher percentage of their income than Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, who doesn't even pay the maximum Social Security tax because of his compensation structure.



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Congress must also resist any effort to cut Social Security. A change to the retirement age or changing rules to make it harder to get Social Security disability benefits are CUTS and we must avoid that.

Strengthen and Expand Medicare

We earned OUR Medicare benefits through years of hard work. We paid for it.

Medicare must be strengthened and expanded. The average retiree pays \$5,000 in out of pocket medical expenses not covered by Medicare each year.

Medicare experts predict that spending on prescription drugs will outpace growth of other health spending. Reining in the cost of prescription drugs, by allowing Medicare to negotiate lower prices the way that Medicaid and the VA do today, would save taxpayers billions each year. The drug prices Medicare negotiates should also be made available to all insurers, which will benefit all consumers.

Congress should direct Medicare to take the \$450 billion in savings from drug negotiations savings and use it to expand benefits for vision, dental and hearing.

Lowering Prescription Drug Prices

Americans pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs and they are going up every year. Seniors are bearing the brunt of this, because they need more medicines to stay healthy.

Pharmaceutical corporations are raking in record profits. And they are spending millions to prevent Washington from taking action.

25% of seniors report not taking a drug their doctor prescribed due to cost.

Rein in Anti-competitive Pharmaceutical Industry Practices

Congress should also enact the Pandemic Treatment Access and Affordability Act (H.R. 597), sponsored by Representative Jan Schakowsky, D-IL, which would strengthen oversight of federal dollars used for vaccine research and development and prevent price gouging.

The federal government has spent tens of billions of taxpayer dollars on research and development (R&D) of vaccines and treatments for COVID-19, including \$23 billion for manufacturing and purchasing. Despite this public investment, there is no guarantee that these taxpayer-funded drugs will be affordable, accessible, or available to all those who need them.



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By prohibiting exclusive licensing and ending monopoly control, H.R. 597 ensures universal access to all taxpayer-funded drugs used to treat or prevent COVID-19 or any other diseases during a public health emergency and ensures its affordability.

Protect Earned Pension Benefits

We have earned our pension benefits over a lifetime of work, often giving up salary increases or other benefits to protect them.

Retirees and workers should not lose their hard-earned pension benefits when corporations go bankrupt or when employers do not fund them.

The government was quick to provide corporate bailouts for Wall Street after the 2008 recession. It should be equally willing to protect retirees whose pension benefits are at risk.

Congress should include the pension relief provisions for multiemployer pensions in any COVID-19 relief package.

Repeal WEP and GPO

Congress should pass the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82), which would repeal the Social Security Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO). The WEP and GPO provisions claw back the Social Security benefits of workers or their spouses or survivors, if they worked for a period of time in jobs not covered by Social Security.