



Debt Commission Legislation Fast Tracks Cuts to Social Security and Medicare

Social Security and Medicare have been the foundation of retirement security for generations of Americans, providing income and health care to millions. Americans earn these benefits, contributing to them with every paycheck.

Rep. Bill Huizenga (MI) and Sens. Joe Manchin (WV) and Mitt Romney (UT) have introduced legislation to establish a 16-member “Fiscal Commission” appointed by congressional leaders. Twelve members of the commission would be members of Congress and the other four would be “outside experts.”

The Commission would make recommendations on how to balance the federal budget to address the growth of direct spending and to improve the solvency of Federal trust funds, including Social Security and Medicare, for at least 75 years. There is no requirement that the Commission’s deliberations would be open to the public.

The Commission’s recommendations would then be delivered to Congress immediately following the November 2024 elections, with the requirements that each chamber conduct an immediate up or down vote on the recommendations without any opportunities for changes or amendments. The bills only discuss cuts without mentioning consideration of revenue increases.

The House bill is H.R. 5779, the Fiscal Commission Act. The Senate bill is S. 3262, the Fiscal Stability Act.

Alliance for Retired Americans Position

The Alliance for Retired Americans strongly opposes H.R. 5779 and S. 3262, and any other legislation to create committees or commissions to do the work of Americans’ elected representatives without input from the American people.

Retirees have earned their Social Security and Medicare benefits over a lifetime of work. The benefits ensure older Americans receive the health care they need, and provide income for more than 66 million Americans. These benefits are critical and they should not be cut.

The Alliance urges Congress to strengthen the solvency of our nation’s retirement programs and expand Social Security and Medicare benefits by making the wealthiest pay their fair share into these programs.

Social Security Does Not Contribute to the Deficit

The premise of the commission is flawed. Social Security does not contribute to the federal debt or the deficit. By law, the Social Security Administration cannot borrow funds. The program has its own dedicated revenue source — specifically, payroll contributions from workers, as well as interest on special interest bonds and revenue from higher earners who pay taxes on their Social Security earnings.

The Commissions Are Anti-Democratic

The bills call for a closed door, fast-track process that dramatically limits public input, excludes the traditional committee process from acting on the legislation, and does not allow amendments or full debate. Additionally, most Americans' elected representatives in Congress will not be able to even debate the proposals, much less amend any commission recommendations.

Outcome is Pre-determined

The mandate given the commissions is narrow and designed to produce recommendations for cuts to Social Security and Medicare. Any discussion of changes to these programs must include ways to increase revenue instead of exclusively focusing on benefit cuts.