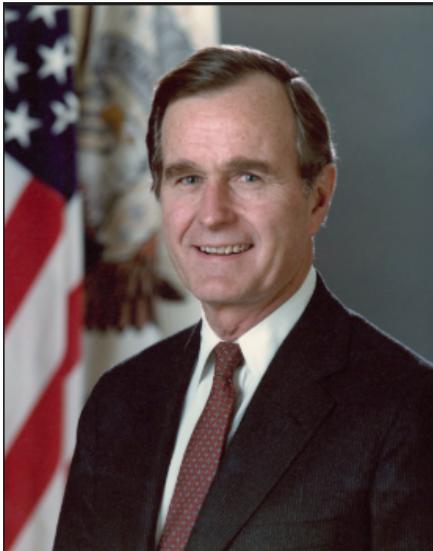


Presidential Viewpoints on Social Security

Name: _____ Date: _____

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)

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>.

William J. Clinton



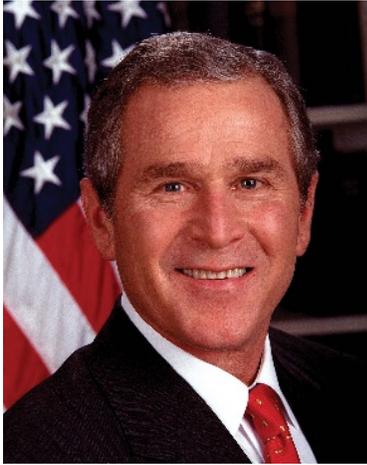
Now, I think it's important to point out, just in passing, that behind every one of these entitlements there's a person. That's why it's so controversial when they're debated in Congress. It's not just organized interest groups, there are people who believe they are literally entitled to receive something 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 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)

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 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)