

SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY
TRUST FUND

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. REED) for 5 minutes.

Mr. REED. Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of important issues before the House this week, but I wanted to take an opportunity to raise an issue that we have been working on in our office for quite some time.

We, as a body, Mr. Speaker, will be faced with an opportunity, hopefully, to resolve this issue here shortly in the next few months, and that is the issue of the Social Security disability insurance trust fund.

Not a lot of people are aware—and I just read the Social Security trustees report over the summer—that the disability trust fund goes insolvent in 2016. That means millions of Americans who rely on Social Security disability benefits are looking at a situation where their benefits are going to be cut 20 percent because of the insolvency of the Social Security trust fund—2016, Mr. Speaker, that is right around the corner.

When I raised this issue 2 years ago with the White House, with Jack Lew—our Treasury Secretary—in our Committee on Ways and Means hearing, I asked him 2 years ago: What is the plan? What is the solution to this problem?

What I was ultimately told was this is what we are going to do: we are just going to take money from the Social Security retirement fund and move it over to the disability trust fund and bail it out.

Well, in my private life in business, I knew a lot of businessowners, and what that essentially was, it is robbing Peter to pay Paul because the Social Security retirement fund is on a path to insolvency just a few short years down the road.

I said we could do better. That is why I was glad to join with my colleague, SAM JOHNSON, who chairs the Subcommittee on Social Security here in Washington, to change the rules to make sure that that solution would not be the one that we follow here in 2015 and 2016. We can do better.

You know why we can do better? It is because we care. We care about the people that are in the disability trust fund, and we need to listen to those people. This is what their experience is with the disability trust fund today. They are frustrated. It is a bureaucracy. It is a mess.

We have overpayments. We have fraudulent payments. We have a system that penalizes people returning to work, rather than trying to incentivize them and stand with them when they return to work.

We had an individual by the name of Mike Zelly come before the committee and testify to us, and he is in the disability trust fund. He was in a horrific automobile accident 36 years ago and has been in a wheelchair ever since.

These are the people we should listen to. These are the people that know the

disability trust fund the best. What his testimony to us was, he says we should seize this opportunity to fix this problem, take care of the bureaucracy, make sure the overpayments don't occur because, when an overpayment occurs to a disability recipient, guess who has to pay it back? It is the disability recipient because of the Social Security Administration's incompetence. That is not right. That is not fair.

Most importantly, what he talked about in his 36 years in the disability trust fund is that, when he tried to return to work, he was faced with obstacle after obstacle of a bureaucracy that said, if you do that, you will lose your benefit. That is not right.

Mike Zelly offered ideas on how we can improve the system to streamline this bureaucracy. This is the process someone in the Social Security disability trust fund has to go through in order to try to go back to work. We need to simplify it, and we need to stand with the American work ethic for the people in the disability trust fund that want to return to work.

There was a recent Brookings Institution report that came across my desk that I read. There was 40 percent return on the beneficiaries in the disability trust fund that indicated they would like to return to work, but because of the bureaucracy, there was fear. There was a sense that, if they did that, they would lose their benefit, and they just couldn't risk it.

That is why we are offering common-sense reforms here out of our office, out of the Committee on Ways and Means, out of this House, hopefully, shortly, so that what we can do is make sure that those disability trust fund recipients don't look at a 20 percent cut in 2016.

We will hold them harmless, and we will make sure we do what is necessary in order to make sure that our obligations and promises under the disability trust fund are met to those individuals because that is the right thing to do.

We cannot lose this opportunity to modernize the Social Security disability trust fund to make sure that we stand with those that want to return to work and believe in the American work ethic like we do.

I ask my colleagues to join with us on a bipartisan basis, and there has been an indication of bipartisan work that we have been able to show here in the initial conversations.

Let's modernize the disability trust fund; let's cure the waste, fraud, and abuse, but most importantly, let's stand with the individuals like Mike Zelly who want to return to work because it gives him dignity and it gives him a sense that he is contributing rather than being in any way a burden on the system.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair

declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 6 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

Reverend Robert Michaels, Serve & Protect, Brentwood, Tennessee, offered the following prayer:

Lord God, we humbly come before You asking for wisdom, unity, and peace.

We are reminded that September 9, 1776, the Continental Congress declared the name of our new Nation to be the United States of America, no longer United Colonies. Our national unity was strong.

Lord, we also remember unity September 11, 2001, when terrorists attacked our Nation. Again, our Nation stood united, strong, and resolute.

Today, Lord, we pray for that same commitment to unity, that sense of all for one and one for all. We pray for our military and first responders, noble heroes all.

Please, Lord, help our leaders. Grant wisdom and vision; help them serve this great Nation, under God, "with liberty and justice for all." One Nation. One heart. One mind.

We sincerely pray this as one Nation under God, as Jesus taught us to pray, to our Father, who is in heaven.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentlewoman from Minnesota (Ms. MCCOLLUM) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. MCCOLLUM led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING REVEREND ROBERT
MICHAELS

The SPEAKER. Without objection, the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, it is a distinct honor to introduce and honor guest chaplain Reverend Robert Michaels, from Brentwood, Tennessee.