

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Ms. HARRIS) and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROMNEY). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 55, nays 42, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 178 Executive]

YEAS—55

Alexander	Gardner	Perdue
Barrasso	Graham	Portman
Blackburn	Grassley	Risch
Blunt	Hawley	Roberts
Boozman	Hoeven	Romney
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Rounds
Burr	Inhofe	Rubio
Cassidy	Johnson	Sasse
Collins	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Lankford	Scott (SC)
Cotton	Lee	Shelby
Cramer	Loeffler	Sullivan
Crapo	Manchin	Thune
Cruz	McConnell	Tillis
Daines	McSally	Toomey
Durbin	Moran	Wicker
Enzi	Murkowski	Young
Ernst	Murphy	Paul
Fischer	Paul	

NAYS—42

Baldwin	Hassan	Rosen
Bennet	Heinrich	Schatz
Blumenthal	Hirono	Schumer
Booker	Jones	Shaheen
Brown	Kaine	Sinema
Cantwell	King	Smith
Cardin	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Carper	Leahy	Tester
Casey	Markey	Udall
Coons	Menendez	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Murray	Warren
Feinstein	Peters	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Reed	Wyden

NOT VOTING—3

Capito	Harris	Sanders
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The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 55, the nays are 42.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Stephen P. McGlynn, of Illinois, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Illinois.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, we have recently seen yet another manufactured crisis by the Democrats for the benefit of the upcoming election. This is in regard to scaring the people about some notion that only Republicans would think about taking away Social Security and Medicare. It is not true that any Member of this Congress will do that, but it always comes up as TV advertising against the Republicans; you are going to scare old people into thinking Social Security is going to be gone if you vote Republican.

So this is another election season. If there are not any real issues regarding Social Security, the Democrats make one up, and they do it, of course, to scare the people into believing that some people want to destroy the program, not realizing that it is such a part of the social fabric of the American population that nobody would think of doing it.

We saw it in the last Presidential election when Secretary Clinton didn't have a basis to attack then-Candidate Trump on Social Security because Trump campaigned on the basis that he wasn't going to cut Social Security, but that didn't stop them from making things up. With their lacking any real ammunition, Clinton's allies here in the U.S. Senate decided to manufacture a crisis.

Now, why does something that happened in 2016 come up now? It is an example that this is an ongoing situation, and it is happening in 2020.

Back in 2016, three prominent Democratic Senators conjured up false claims about a nominee for the position of public trustee of the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. That nominee happened to be a Republican who was nominated—can you imagine this?—by a Democratic President. He was already on there as having been nominated for another term.

The false claims published in the Huffington Post were that this nominee, promoted by President Obama, was a Koch brothers-funded individual because he worked at an educational institution that received grants from the Koch Foundation. I don't know whether they even made an attempt to connect this individual to the Koch funds, but it is irrelevant at this point. The Democrats claimed that this single individual somehow duped all of the other trustees, including all of the other Obama administration officials, into buying off on assumptions that would lead to an overstatement of the financial crisis facing Social Security.

According to the three Democratic Senators, this was so bad that the Chief Actuary of Social Security felt compelled to write special notes to trustee reports and identify how shocking the assumptions were. Of course, that would have meant that one single public trustee who happened to be a Republican duped outstanding Democrats who were also trustees: Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, HHS Secretary Sylvia Burwell, Labor Secretary Thomas Perez, and then the additional Democratic public trustee. If you had bought into the Democrats' allegations at the time, it would have meant that all of those Obama officials had been duped and had been too inept to see what had been going on and that only the Chief Actuary could have seen the light.

Well, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance at that time investigated those allegations and showed that they were flatout lies. Even the Washington Post identified

the lies in an op-ed titled: "The show-down Democrats don't need to have." The Post concluded that the ultimate victims of what they called "petty politicization" would be "the perceived nonpartisanship and objectivity of key government reports—that is, the very values Senate Democrats claim to be upholding."

The Democrats used their misinformation campaign to run a smear job on a very qualified and well-respected nominee. They also used it to run ads against anyone who voted in favor of that nominee, including ads against me in my most recent reelection.

Unfortunately, even though Social Security's Chief Actuary was clearly implicated in the Democratic lies, he remained silent as then-Chairman Hatch and even the Washington Post identified how ridiculous and false the Democrats' claims were.

The Chief Actuary's position, apparently, is that, even if his office is being implicated as supporting clearly false and very public claims during an election season, he will just sit quietly and let them go by rather than admit to or apologize for being used once it is pointed out to him that he is being used.

All of that was 4 years ago. It is 2020 now, and it is all happening again. Here we are in another Presidential election season, and, of course, like clockwork, we are getting another round of misinformation from the Democratic candidate and his supporters in the Senate. The Washington Post Fact Checker labels the current scheme in a headline that reads: "Biden campaign attacks a Trump Social Security 'plan' that does not exist."

Now, that was a Washington Post article. Not often does the Washington Post talk about things that might defend Republican positions against the Democrats.

This time around, the misinformation stems from a letter written to Social Security's Chief Actuary by four Democratic Senators, including the minority leader, the ranking member of the Committee on Finance, and Senator SANDERS, who has been counseling former Vice President Biden.

In a letter, these Democrat Senators asked the Chief Actuary to analyze hypothetical legislation—now, those words "hypothetical legislation" have to be emphasized—what they say, even they wouldn't support eliminating payroll taxes. Of course, those Senators could easily find the information that they were seeking by looking at the latest Social Security trustees' report. Instead, for purely political reasons, they wanted to draw in the Chief Actuary once again.

The same Actuary of 4 years ago is being used here once again, and the Chief Actuary at Social Security seems to gladly have played along and written a response. He wrote that his office was not aware that anyone had proposed the hypothetical legislation.

Nonetheless, he identified that, without payroll tax revenue and no replacement from the general fund, the trust funds would run out of money pretty quickly.

Of course, this is obvious to anyone who has even slight knowledge of these programs, but information was not the aim of the Democratic Senators' letter. Instead, it was to put forward a silly hypothetical case that doesn't correspond to anything that anyone has or is proposing. Of course, they attributed it to the President of the United States.

I know you all now see the purpose of this replay—because it is an election year. They used the Chief Actuary's response to claim that authoritative sources have shown that President Trump has a plan to essentially defund Social Security, and in due course they engaged in the cottage industry of groups which exist here in Washington, DC, that regularly scare seniors and the disabled, especially before an election, about some sort of backdoor plan or Trojan horse plan to destroy Social Security, and the Democratic Senators used the Chief Actuary's response to feed the Biden campaign with a false talking point about Social Security.

So you see the motives of these Senators in their using the Chief Actuary as their tool. You see it pretty clearly. The Biden campaign has run ads, stating, among other mistruths, "If Trump gets his way, Social Security benefits will run out in just 3 years from now."

Let's go back to the Washington Post. Even the Post's Fact Checker gave those ads four Pinocchios, meaning that they contained a whopper of a lie. The Fact Checker also concluded: "To make a long story short, Democrats ginned up a letter from the chief actuary to describe a plan that does not currently exist."

In a followup letter that Ranking Member KEVIN BRADY of the House Ways and Means Committee and I wrote to Social Security's Chief Actuary, we expressed our concerns about the Democrats having, once again, used his office for political purposes, and, once again, it refers back to the 2016 era that I have already talked about. From his response, we learned a few things.

First, we got confirmation that no one has a plan to defund Social Security, including the President of the United States. That confirms that the Democrats' letter was just pretty silly, but not oddly, pure politics.

Second, we got confirmation that the Democratic Senators, during the 2016 election, published lies in the Huffington Post article, invoking the Chief Actuary in an effort to smear a trustee nominee.

Third, we learned that Social Security's Chief Actuary feels compelled to respond to any hypothetical posed to him by any Senator, independent of how silly or blatantly political it would be.

Of course the Chief Actuary shouldn't be so compelled. With that

latter lesson, it would be easy for a Republican Senator to ask the Chief Actuary to analyze hypotheticals corresponding to the allegations made by Senator SANDERS, one of the authors of the letter, concerning the "hypothetical legislation" about Vice President Biden's history on Social Security.

Senator SANDERS, during the primary, has run political ads characterizing Biden's record on Social Security, saying that Biden's claim that he has always protected Social Security are "patently false."

It wouldn't be hard to send a hypothetical in for analysis by the Social Security Chief Actuary to get an answer to reinforce Senator SANDERS' views that former Vice President Biden has not acted to protect Social Security.

It wouldn't be hard to send a letter to the Chief Actuary asking about how Senator SANDERS' plans to reform Social Security—which Senator HARRIS has cosponsored—would harm the middle class by raising payroll taxes, with no corresponding benefits for people with incomes below Biden's \$400,000 threshold for defining who is rich and who is not.

It certainly wouldn't be hard to construct politically charged hypothetical legislation and ask the Chief Actuary about it in order to make political points and use the Actuary's position for political purposes.

It happens that the Chief Actuary doesn't exist for the purpose of political interference.

In my view, though, none of those would be a proper use of Social Security taxpayer resources, in the same way that the Democrats are wasting resources using the Chief Actuary for political purposes. So Democrats should stop wasting Social Security's resources trying to construct false and misleading political points to use in elections to feed their political base and dark money groups who then use the points in social media and attack ads against Republicans. But that is how they wasted the taxpayers' money—by writing the letter and eating up the time of the Chief Actuary for nothing other than pure partisan politics.

They should also stop politicizing Social Security's actuaries and the Social Security trustee's position in their transparent attempt to mislead the public and try to score political points about Social Security.

The American public should—especially during even years, in the runup to elections—turn a deaf ear to scare tactics that Democrats continue to use on Social Security beneficiaries. But when senior citizens who aren't sophisticated in the operation of the Federal Government or the uses of politics to scare people—they might believe this stuff. So you are doing a disservice to a lot of people who shouldn't have to worry about where their next meal is coming from.

As well, I think journalists should be more responsible when reporting on these political shenanigans, although I will note that even the most recent ploy was at least called out by fact checkers and given four Pinocchios.

Rather than acting like demagogues on Social Security, we should do what we can to improve these programs. Social Security trustees across administrations have continually and consistently recommended addressing the projected trust fund shortfalls since protected benefits will continue to outpace revenues.

Some sort of reform is inevitable, but outside of broad reform, there are many programmatic improvements that can help make the programs work better for beneficiaries and today's workers.

While not as encompassing as broad reforms, there are plenty of areas that we and Social Security Commissioner Saul continue to monitor and work to reduce backlogs and improve services.

Just recently, for example, the Senate passed by unanimous consent a bill that we entitled "Improving Social Security's Service to Victims of Identity Theft Act." That was sponsored by this Senator and Senator SINEMA. This bipartisan effort will help people who fall victim to identity theft by providing improved services from Social Security with a single point of contact.

In my view, more bipartisan work to improve the programs is the way we should go. Partisan attacks to scare beneficiaries into believing that people are out to destroy people's retirement and disability benefits do nothing to help working, disabled, and retired Americans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). The Senator from New Hampshire.

CORONAVIRUS

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to urge that we come together and resume negotiations on a comprehensive, bipartisan COVID relief package—the kind of package that this country has been calling for.

Today, nearly 200,000 Americans, including 436 Granite Staters, have died from COVID-19, and we still have as many as 40,000 new cases each day in this country—enough people to fill a baseball stadium each day. As a result, our economy continues to struggle, with nearly 30 million Americans still out of work and more than 1 million filing new applications for unemployment each week. Many Americans have been forced to raid their retirement savings just to pay rent and put food on the table—and that is for those people who actually have retirement savings. Sadly, too many people do not.

The President's recent Executive orders have many State unemployment officers tied up in knots. Those orders affect Social Security and Medicare, and they provide no new help for the nearly 13 million households who could be at risk of eviction in the coming months.