

It lifts 15 million Americans out of poverty. In my home State of Ohio, if Social Security did not exist, almost half of seniors would live in poverty.

Looking forward, improving Social Security's adequacy is the best way to address the retirement crisis. That is why I am working with Senator HARKIN and Senator BEGICH and Senator HIRONO and Senator SCHATZ on the Strengthening Social Security Act.

My colleagues will talk about strengthening Social Security, but what do they mean by that? They usually mean that strengthening Social Security means we make cuts in benefits. Those cuts in benefits can be raising the retirement age, it can be something called the chained CPI, which is cutting the Social Security cost-of-living adjustment. It can mean some kinds of means testing, so people get less, if they are a little wealthier. It can mean a whole host of things, but each of them is a cut to Social Security.

So the debate here seems to be not: How do we make seniors' lives better—when a third of seniors on Social Security get almost all their income from Social Security. And they are not doing that great with Medicare either. With some of the copays and the deductibles and all that, some get some help that way. But the debate should not be all about cutting Social Security—which it really is, this whole strengthening. We have to strengthen Social Security, is the way they talk about it. We have to reform entitlements. We have to worry about the sustainability of Social Security and Medicare, and I do worry about them. But the fix is not to debate cutting these programs and giving these seniors less.

As the Presiding Officer knows, defined pension benefits are less than they used to be. Fewer and fewer people retiring now have defined pension benefits. Unless they have a government job or a good union job, fewer and fewer have retirement benefits. Fewer people are able to save money because we know in the last decade savings rates have gone down because incomes—while the wealthy have done better and better and better, profits have gone up and up and up, productivity in the workforce has gone up and up and up—wages have decoupled with that. They have not kept up. That means people are saving less.

So originally as to Social Security, you would have Social Security, you would have a pension, and the third of the three-legged stool is you had savings. Well, now the savings and the pension—whether it is a 401(k) or a defined pension—are less than they used to be. So Social Security is more important.

So why are we even discussing the whole idea of cutting Social Security? That is why we need a fairer COLA to start with. The Harkin bill would formalize a Consumer Price Index for the Elderly that calculates the Consumer

Price Index, the cost-of-living adjustment, not the way it does now—a 40-year-old in the workplace—it calculates it based on a 70-year-old who is retired. A 40-year-old in the workplace has a very different set of expenses for their standard of living than does a 70-year-old. Obviously, the 40-year-old spends less on health care, on the average, than the 70-year-old, on the average, spends on health care. So we should calculate the cost-of-living adjustment that way.

That is not what so many people in this body want to do. There is just something about a bunch of Members of Congress, who have good salaries, who have good taxpayer-financed health care, making decisions to cut Social Security and cut Medicare.

I will close with this because I know Senator SHAHEEN is scheduled to speak and I will not take much longer.

But I hear these self-appointed budget hawks, most of whom will not be relying—almost none of whom, colleagues here, will be relying—on Social Security to make ends meet in their retirement. I take a back seat to nobody in what we do about budget cuts because I have been involved with a lot of colleagues on both sides of the aisle on how we deal with budget deficits. But when you hear these self-appointed fiscal hawks, these so-called wise men—and they are mostly men—talking about how we need to reform entitlements, scratch a little deeper. Ask them what they mean by that. They will probably say: Well, we can't sustain this. Ask them: Well, what do you mean by that? Then they will probably say: Well, we need structural reform. Ask them: Well, what do you mean by that? Ask them the question—what do they really mean? What is their idea? Their idea, almost always, is either raise the retirement age or cut benefits in some ways, cut the cost-of-living adjustment, something like that.

I will close with this. As to that townhall I was attending in Youngstown, I was there 3 years ago at a townhall, and a woman stood up and said: I have two jobs, both \$9 or \$10 an hour jobs. I have worked all my life this hard. She said: Do you know what. I am 63 years old. I just have to find a way to stay alive until I am 65—just for another year and a half—so I can have health insurance.

Imagine. This is a woman living right on the edge. She will not have much from Social Security. She has no savings. She just wanted to stay alive until she got health insurance.

That is why it matters so much what we do on social insurance, why it matters that we protect Medicare—really protect Medicare, not protect it by privatizing it. And it really matters why we protect Social Security and not “strengthen” the program by cutting the benefits. That is why our work matters. That is why it is so important we pass the Harkin-Begich-Hirono-Schatz-Brown bill.

Mr. President, I yield the floor to the Senator from New Hampshire.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business be until 7 p.m. for debate only.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ENDA

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, almost 50 years ago Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. This landmark legislation prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, and gender in employment, housing, and public accommodations. Many of us in the Senate remember the passage of that legislation. And many of us, unfortunately, saw firsthand the painful examples of legally sanctioned discrimination that existed before the Civil Rights Act.

I grew up in a State where I went to segregated schools. I can remember the separate drinking fountains and going to the movie theater where if you were an African American you had to sit in the balcony. These practices were wrong, and they ended because of the Civil Rights Act.

Well, this week the Senate has the opportunity to extend our national quest for equal opportunity for all by passing the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. This legislation simply prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

I am proud to be a cosponsor of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, and I give great credit to JEFF MERKLEY for sponsoring this legislation and for pushing for it.

I was proud as Governor of New Hampshire 16 years ago to sign legislation making New Hampshire only the 10th State in the country to include sexual orientation in its antidiscrimination laws. That State legislation went further than the bill before the Senate this week. It not only covered employment, but it covered housing and public accommodations as well. At the time, both the New Hampshire Senate and House were controlled by Republicans. Yet the bill passed both bodies with large bipartisan majorities because it was not seen then as a partisan issue.

Including sexual orientation in New Hampshire's antidiscrimination laws was just one more step forward in New Hampshire's long history of promoting civil rights. No one in America should be hired or fired because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

I realize, as we all do, that no law can erase prejudice. Prejudice will continue to exist after the Employment Non-Discrimination Act becomes law. But that is not the issue. The issue is whether it is acceptable as a matter of law in the United States to hire or fire