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Standing Up for Seniors

A one-time emergency payment might not mean much for the 40 Republican Senators who voted against a cost of living increase for senior citizens. But for Carol, in Central Ohio, that payment could be crucial. Since Carol's husband passed away last year, she has struggled to make ends meet. She wrote a letter to me asking, "Why is it that the ones who don't have the money are the ones who suffer most?"



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I often go to the Senate floor and read letters from Ohioans like Carol. It's important that my colleagues understand that our votes have real consequences for real people. In Ohio, nearly 1.5 million seniors will receive no Social Security cost of living adjustment (COLA) for the second consecutive year.

Whether you shop at a major food store chain or buy groceries from a small corner store, you know that the price of eggs, milk, and bread has increased.

Social Security checks for retired workers who have paid into the fund throughout their working lives won't see an increase this year because the formula used to calculate the increase is antiquated. The Social Security COLA is determined by a formula that is built into federal law, and it needs to change. The formula says that seniors shouldn't get a cost-of-living adjustment because there hasn't been inflation nationwide.



But the formula ignores the reality that so many seniors face: while the cost of some goods and services isn't rising, the cost of prescription drugs and health costs are going up. And when seniors spend approximately 45 percent of their Social Security checks on health costs, they're in a tough situation when drugs prices increase but their Social Security benefit does not.

I have been a cosponsor of legislation to revise the flawed formula that determines the annual COLA benefits so that it better reflects the expenses retirees typically face. We cannot give up on retirees.

Seniors are not getting rich off of Social Security: the median benefit received by a retired worker is about \$14,400 annually. But these benefits can mean a good meal and a warm winter for seniors right now.

I'm ashamed that Washington isn't putting seniors first. My colleagues in the other party say they'll

block all legislation – including legislation providing a cost-of-living increase for seniors – until we pass extra tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires. That increase could have made a world of difference for Ohioans like Jim in Northeast Ohio.



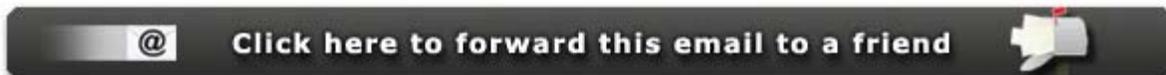
Jim just celebrated his 70th birthday. He and his wife receive Social Security benefits earned over a lifetime of hard work. In a letter to me, Jim explained that he owned a small business for nearly four decades. He's done more than his share to contribute to the economic vitality of America. He writes that he not only paid for himself, but also contributed for his employees. Jim sums it up by saying: "it's not fair."

It is not fair that Washington has failed to put middle class and American seniors first. It is not fair that elected officials, who will eventually collect a congressional pension, turned their backs on people like Jim – many of whom performed back-breaking labor – to help ensure America's economic growth.

For seniors like Carol and Jim, know that I will not stop advocating for what's fair, including the Social Security benefits that you earned and richly deserve.

Sincerely,

Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator



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