

So this bill is going to pass. I am going to ask for a recorded vote, because I want all the Members to have the opportunity to step forward on the Democrat and the Republican side and cast their vote, a recorded vote, to say they are in favor of American seniors. They are working with us, and we are working together to make a better life for the senior citizens of the country.

This bill takes effect on January 1 of the year 2000. That means exactly 2 months ago this bill comes into effect. The senior citizens of this country will enjoy the fruits and labor of what we have started here today.

I am pleased to say that the President is with us. Yesterday, while we were marking this bill up in the Committee on Ways and Means, the President was in Miami Beach doing a fundraiser for my opponent at a cocktail party. In fact, I thought it was rather ironic, because it was taking place at the exact time we were voting on this bill.

That is the way the system works. There is nothing wrong with that. There is nothing wrong with Democrat presidents supporting Democrat candidates and Republican presidents supporting Republican candidates.

I will tell the Members that I would certainly guess, and as tradition has it, just as we did in welfare reform and other pieces of meaningful legislation that has come out of this Congress, that the President will invite the Republicans down to take part in the bill's signing. That is the way it should be.

So many people here can take credit for what is going on here today. I am very pleased and proud that it happens during the Republican majority, but we have come together. We have locked away the social security surplus so we are no longer spending it. This makes America's great pension program available for the seniors without penalty.

This is a wonderful thing that has happened. This country has gone through a great transition, and when it comes to working together to make things happen, the best of us comes out when we work together.

I want to publicly thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) and the gentleman from California (Mr. MATSUI), and of course, my chairman, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARCHER), and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SAM JOHNSON) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. PETERSON) for the work that they did in bringing this thing together. This is truly a bipartisan effort. It is truly in the best tradition of the American democracy.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to offer my support to the Senior Citizens Freedom to Work Act (H.R. 5), which repeals the Social Security "earnings limitations." During a time when an increasing number of senior citizens are able to enjoy productive lives well past retirement age and businesses are in desperate need of experienced workers, it makes no sense to punish seniors for working. Yet the federal government does just that by

deducting a portion of seniors' monthly Social Security check should they continue to work and earn income above an arbitrary government-set level.

When the government takes money every month from people's paychecks for the Social Security Trust Fund, it promises retirees that the money will be there for them when they retire. The government should keep that promise and not reduce benefits simply because a senior chooses to work.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, by providing a disincentive to remaining in the workforce, the earnings limitation deprives the American economy of the benefits of senior citizens who wish to continue working but are discouraged from doing so by fear of losing part of their Social Security benefits. The federal government should not discourage any citizen from seeking or holding productive employment.

The underlying issue of the earnings limitation goes back to the fact that money from the trust fund is routinely spent for things other than paying pensions to beneficiaries. This is why the first bill I introduced in the 106th Congress was the Social Security Preservation Act (H.R. 219), which forbids Congress from spending Social Security funds on anything other than paying Social Security pensions.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I wish to reiterate my strong support for the Senior Citizens Freedom to Work Act. Repealing the "earnings limitation" will help ensure that America's seniors can continue to enjoy fulfilling and productive lives in their "golden years." I also urge my colleagues to protect the integrity of the Social Security Trust Fund by cosponsoring the Social Security Preservation Act (H.R. 219).

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, I want to express my strong support for H.R. 5, The Senior Citizens' Freedom to Work Act of 1999. This long overdue measure would allow persons aged 65 through 69 to continue working without losing some of their Social Security benefits.

Today, our seniors are more healthy and vigorous than ever. Many seniors who choose to continue to work find that working greatly enhances their retirement years. They are living longer and often finding that they either need or want to work well beyond traditional retirement age. Further, the time has come to stop penalizing seniors who need to keep working to supplement their Social Security incomes.

This legislation, which I cosponsored, would do away with this antiquated and obsolete punitive limit to Social Security payments. Under current law, senior citizens in this age group lose \$1 in Social Security benefits for every \$3 they earn each year above a certain level, which is \$17,000 this year. The earnings test was designed during the Great Depression to encourage older workers to leave the workforce to create more jobs for younger workers. Today, we are experiencing a labor shortage, not a surplus. With our economy's emphasis on increased productivity, older workers have the years of experience and work ethic that are in great demand.

It is estimated that initially about 600,000 seniors would be affected by the elimination of the earnings test. According to the Social Security Administration, H.R. 5 will increase Social Security outlays by \$17 billion over 5 years and \$26 billion over 10 years. However, in the long term, the measure's cost would be

negligible because of offsetting effects because retirees would no longer receive delayed retirement credits, which under current law compensate for the benefits lost to the earnings test applied to workers above the full retirement age, and the savings from this would offset the cost from eliminating the earnings test.

Lifting the limit on outside income for beneficiaries of retirement security is a key component of my initiatives to extend the life of Social Security and Medicare. H.R. 5 is crucial as part of a broader plan that uses the opportunity of a surplus to extend the life of Social Security and Medicare and pay down the debt.

In 1998, the Republican leadership brought an increase in the earnings limit to the floor attached to a tax bill that would have been financed by borrowing directly from the Social Security Trust Fund. I opposed this bill funded by the Social Security surplus, and supported an alternative that provided for an increase in the Social Security earnings limit identical to the one in the Republican bill, but not from the Social Security surplus. Unfortunately, the bill failed to be enacted.

H.R. 5 builds upon a bipartisan measure enacted in 1996 which I supported, the Senior Citizens' Right to Work Act (H.R. 3136), which provided for increases in the amounts of allowable earnings under the Social Security earnings limit for individuals who have attained retirement age. Now we are going a step further and eliminating the cap altogether. This is the right policy at the right time.

The earnings test is a relic of the Great Depression and the time has come to terminate it. The test is a severe disincentive for older people to work. Not only do older workers suffer a reduction in their standard of living because of the test, the nation's economy loses valuable experience and skills as well.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5, the Senior Citizens' Freedom to Work Act.

This important legislation is long overdue. The earnings limit is a relic of an era when America was in a state of extreme economic despair. Mr. Speaker, today we are experiencing unprecedented prosperity. Our economy is booming. Our unemployment rate is lower than it has been in 30 years. It just doesn't make sense to discourage our nation's seniors from continuing to contribute to our economy by reducing their Social Security benefits.

Many of the seniors in my home state of Illinois continue to contribute to their communities through hard work. Repealing the earnings limit will have a very real impact on these seniors. Instead of being punished for their participation in the workforce, seniors should be encouraged to remain working. Eliminating the earnings test makes sense. It will be good for our seniors and good for our economy. And most importantly, we can do it without jeopardizing the future of Social Security. It is something that all of us, on both sides of the aisle, should be able to agree on.

But, once again, Republicans are playing politics with the issues that affect our nation's seniors the most. They are clamoring to point fingers at Democrats who have long been in support of amending the archaic earnings limit. But our nation's seniors cannot be fooled. Democrats support repealing the earnings limit while protecting the integrity of Social Security.