

*It's broke, with a 22% benefit cut coming soon. So who's really pushing granny off that cliff?*

## John Sununu Wants to Save Social Security

Social Security is only six years from insolvency, with an automatic 22% cut in benefits coming in 2032, and Democrats are naturally assailing Republicans for even contemplating reform. "It's the younger generations that are going to bear the biggest burden," John Sununu, the GOP's Senate candidate in New Hampshire, told an event this year. "I was willing to do it before. I'm willing to do it again."

That's a reference to his last stint in the Senate, 2003-09, when President George W. Bush was trying to save Social Security. Mr. Sununu supported those efforts. His Democratic opponent in November, Rep. Chris Pappas, apparently thinks this is politically damning. But the truth is that America's entitlement system is unsustainable, as has long been obvious. Mr. Pappas is trying to use Mr. Sununu's record of responsible leadership against him, calling him a "leading figure" in efforts "to privatize Social Security."

What a slimy attempt to scare grandma. "First of all, it didn't privatize anything," Mr. Sununu told a WMUR candidate forum recently. What he wanted 20 years ago "maintained a guaranteed government benefit, equal to, or greater than, we have today," with benefits still funded by taxation. "But what it also did, is it made the system solvent," he added. "We need a different approach today, but if it had been passed, we wouldn't be having this debate today, because the system would be solvent."

What if Mr. Bush's push had succeeded? It's impossible to say for sure, but a retrospective last year by Andrew Biggs of the American Enterprise Institute suggests those proposed re--forms would have made Social Security more progressive: Benefits for high earners would be somewhat lower. But workers with low or middle earnings, Mr. Biggs found, would have gotten "total Social Security benefits 3-8 percent above those scheduled in current law." Whatever the counterfactuals, it isn't 2005 any more, and the country is now two decades closer to the fiscal cliff. "I was in Congress 12 years. I never voted to cut benefits. I never will," Mr. Sununu said. But he has too much integrity to mislead voters into thinking it's all hunky-dory. "What we need is a bipartisan solution. It has to be bipartisan if it's going to be successful," he argued. "I want to secure the system for today's retirees, but also for young people."

As for Mr. Pappas, the Democrat's campaign website defies reality. It says he fought efforts to raise the retirement age, while working to "expand" Social Security. He boasts about helping to pass a bill in 2024 that actually made the funding problem worse by increasing Social Security benefits for government workers who also receive public pensions.

At an event this summer, he said Americans "at the very, very top of the income spectrum" must "pay their fair share." But there aren't enough of those people, or enough income, to come near closing the growing Social Security funding gap. *Not*

Mr. Pappas isn't offering voters any real proposal to save Social Security. His plan is simply to win an election by scaring seniors, while quietly leading them toward the crisis of a 22% benefit cut before the end of his first Senate term.

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Other changes, including reductions in projected Medicaid spending, haven't kicked in yet. One change from last year's law makes comparing fiscal 2025 and 2026 tricky. The law changed student-loan repayment rules, and that was accounted for as a one-time spending reduction of \$131 billion in 2025.

The fiscal path ahead will depend in part on the election results. Divided control of the government now looks likely. That sometimes leads to bipartisan deals for fiscal restraint— but it also sometimes yields agreements where each party agrees to back the other's deficit- expanding plans.

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