

# [***Biden Uses Decades-Old Strategy In Attacking GOP On Social Security, Medicare***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67HR-PPP1-JBCM-F00D-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Biden, too, has faced criticism about his position on Social Security benefits in 1995.

**Body**

**Topline**

President Joe Biden amplified his claims this week that the GOP wants to cut Social Security and Medicare, foreshadowing what will likely be a key campaign talking point in his potential 2024 presidential bid a move that breathes new life into an age-old strategy both parties have deployed for the better part of six decades.

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President Joe Biden arrives to speak about his administration's plans to protect Social Security and Medicare and lower healthcare costs, Thursday, February 9, 2023, at the University of Tampa.

Patrick Semansky/AP Photo

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**Key Facts**

Biden, fresh off his Tuesday State of the Union speech, where he drew audible boos from GOP Congress members over his claims that they wanted to chop Social Security and Medicare, headed to Florida on Thursday, where he again attacked Republicans on the issue, telling an audience at the University of Tampa: A lot of Republicans, their dream is to cut Social Security and Medicare. Well let me say this: If that's your dream, I'm your nightmare.

Known as the third rail of ***politics***, Social Security funding has been a campaign issue usually for Democrats against Republicans for decades, as the benefit is wildly popular with voters, and any threat to it is considered political poison.

Biden, too, has faced criticism of his stance on Social Security that reemerged following his attacks on the GOP this week, whena 1995 videoof a speech he gave on the Senate floor suggesting he was open to cutting Social Security cuts in an effort to balance the budget went viral.

In the clip which was featured by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) when he ran against Biden in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary Biden reminds his fellow senators that he twice advocated for freezing all federal spending, including Social Security and Medicare, in an effort to balance the budget, but Biden argued that his statement was instead a warning that if all other federal spending was not drastically reduced, Social Security would also be threatened.

The strategy Biden deployed this week is one that dates back to at least 1964, when acampaign adfor incumbent Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson accused his Republican opponent Barry Goldwater of saying on at least seven different occasions that he would drastically change the Social Security system a sentiment echoed by Johnson s allies on the campaign trail and widely seen as a detriment to Goldwater, who backtracked on his suggestion that the program should be voluntary amid the Democratic attacks.

Incumbent Democratic President Jimmy Carter, in his failed 1980 reelection campaign against Republican Ronald Reagan, alsoaccused his opponentof a flimsy stance on Social Security and advocating for a voluntary system, prompting Nancy Reagan to appear in a counter-ad where she said she was deeply, deeply offended by Carter s claim, among others.

Inan adduring the crowded 1988 Republican presidential primary race, Rep. Jack Kemp (N.Y.) alleged that Sen. Bob Dole (Kans.) and Vice President George H.W. Bush proposed cuts to Social Security, and cast himself as a savior who [rushed] to the White House and [persuaded] President Reagan to stop this plan, referring to his opposition to a 1985 GOP budget plan that would freeze cost-of-living adjustments to Social Security recipients, but was ultimately shot down by Reagan.

In the 1998 race for a Nevada Senate seat,an ad for incumbent Democrat Harry Reid highlighted a statement by his Republican challenger, Rep. John Ensign,that Social Security was a terrible idea, but Ensignhit backagainst Reid on the issue, accusing him of supporting a budget plan that raised taxes for all Social Security recipients earning more than $34,0000.

In the infamous 2004GOP windsurfer adagainst then presidential candidate and Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), incumbent President George W. Bush s backers told viewers Kerry changed his position on a range of issues, including increasing Medicare premiums: He claims he s against increasing Medicare premiums, but voted five times to do so a charge that misconstrued Kerry s five votes on appropriations bills that continued existing premiums.

George W. Bush also made Social Security reform a key platform early in his presidency, calling for an option to invest Social Security contributions into private accounts, a proposal Democrats said amounted to privatization of Social Security that was ultimately scrapped ahead of the 2006 midterm amid fears that it could hurt Republicans in the election.

Former President Donald Trump vowed during his 2016 campaign not to touch Social Security, drawing contrast to his opponents Sens. Marco Rubio (Fla.) and Ted Cruz (Tex.), who said they were open to changes for younger Americans.

**Key Background**

Signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935 after passing both chambers with broad bipartisan support, the Social Security Act established benefits for unemployment and retirees over the age of 65. Thirty years later, Johnson signed legislation establishing Medicare and Medicaid. Both Medicare and Social Security have maintained broad support among Americans. Just 17% of 1,500 respondents in a January/YouGov pollsaid they support cuts to Social Security and Medicare.

**News Peg**

The White House and top Democrats for months have claimed that the GOP is eyeing cuts to entitlement programs in negotiations on raising the debt ceiling claims Biden amplified in his annual address before Congress on Tuesday. Instead of making the wealthy pay their fair share, some Republicans want Medicare and Social Security to sunset. I'm not saying it's the majority, Biden said. On Thursday, he headed to Florida the home state of several of his most prominent detractors to again hammer home the message. In particular, Biden has targeted a plan by Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.) that would require Congress to hold a new vote on federal legislation every five years, a policy that could include Medicare and Social Security, though the plan doesn t specifically mention the two programs, and faces long odds of passing, as it has beendenouncedby Republican Senate leadership.

**Contra**

Republicans have fiercely denied Biden s claims that they want to cut Social Security and Medicare. Members of the GOP conference erupted in protest in response to Biden s remarks on the issue at the State of the Union address on Tuesday, in which Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) stood up and bellowed, Liar! Moments after the exchange, House Republicans reminded the Twitterverse that House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) has repeatedly vowed not to push for cuts to Social Security and Medicare in debt ceiling negotiations, tweetinga clipof him making the pledge.

**Big Number**

**21%.**That s the share of Floridians who are over the age of 65. Biden s visit suggests he is making an appeal to the demographic in a state that has increasingly reddened in recent years. Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is eyeing a 2024 bid for the presidency, won reelection by a wide margin in November, when he became the first GOP gubernatorial candidate to win Miami-Dade County since 2002. Florida has voted for Trump in the past two presidential elections.

**Tangent**

A resurfaced interview of DeSantis expressing tempered support for privatizing Social Security during his 2012 campaign for Congress made the rounds on Thursday after it was unearthed byCNN. I would embrace proposals like [Rep.] Paul Ryan offered, and other people have offered, that are going to provide some market forces in there, more consumer choice . . . Social Security, I would do the same thing, DeSantis told the**St. Augustine Record**.

**Further Reading**

Liar! : Republicans Erupt In State Of The Union After Biden Claims GOP Wants To Cut Social Security (Forbes)

McCarthy Promised No Social Security Cut In Debt Ceiling Deal, Manchin Says(Forbes)

Are Republicans Trying To Defund Social Security And Medicaid? A State Of The Union Fact Check (Updated: Biden Fires Back) (Forbes)

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