



# Federal policy on Social Security, 2017-2018

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The Congressional Budget Office projected in December 2016 that Social Security's trust funds would be depleted by 2029, leading to a 29 percent reduction in benefits in 2030 to keep the program solvent.<sup>[1]</sup> In its annual report in 2016, the Social Security and Medicare Boards of Trustees estimated the timeframe for insolvency would be slightly longer, with the trust funds being exhausted in 2034.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Question on Social Security and ...



Donald Trump discusses Social Security and other federal assistance programs during the third presidential debate in October 2016.

Social Security, which pays out retirement and disability benefits for workers and their families, cost \$905 billion in 2016 and accounted for nearly one-quarter of federal spending that fiscal year.<sup>[1]</sup>

Because of the program's expense and projected

insolvency—as well as the growing population of senior citizens in the U.S.—it was frequently discussed during the 2016 presidential election. Donald Trump described himself on the campaign trail as "probably...the only Republican that doesn't want to cut Social Security."<sup>[3]</sup> Trump named several individuals to serve on his transition team and in his administration, however, who support the privatization of Social Security, including former Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert (R) and U.S. Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-S.C.).

## Trump Administration



**President Donald Trump**  
**Vice President Mike Pence**  
 Cabinet • Transition team

**This page tracked major events and policy positions of the Trump administration on social security from 2017 and 2018. This page was updated through 2018. Think something is missing? Please email us at [editor@ballotpedia.org](mailto:editor@ballotpedia.org).**

# Social Security policy in Trump's first year

## First budget proposal

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said on February 26, 2017, that Trump's first budget proposal would not seek cuts to the Social Security or Medicare programs. "Don't expect to see that as part of this budget. We are very focused on other aspects and that's what's very important to us and that's the president's priority," he said.<sup>[4]</sup>

# Trump administration officials on Social Security

## Donald Trump



- In an interview on January 8, 2017, Republican National Committee Chair Reince Priebus said that Donald Trump did not want "to meddle with Medicare or Social Security." Priebus, who Trump announced in November 2016 would serve as his chief of staff, continued, "He made a promise during the campaign that that was something he didn't want to do. But what he wants to do is grow the economy, help shore up Medicare and Social Security for future generations."<sup>[5]</sup>
- The Trump transition team announced on December 10, 2016, that David Black, general counsel for the Social Security Administration (SSA), and Tom Leppert (R), the former mayor of Dallas, would lead the SSA landing team helping to prepare the agency for the administration transition in 2017. In a 2012 run for the U.S. Senate in Texas, Leppert advocated privatizing Social Security.<sup>[6][7][8]</sup>

## Policy positions

### Domestic affairs:

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- At the No Labels conference on October 12, 2015, Trump said that he and other ultra-wealthy Americans should voluntarily relinquish their Social Security benefits. "I have friends that are worth hundreds of millions and billions of dollars and get Social Security. They don't even know the check comes in," he said.<sup>[9]</sup>
- While speaking at the Iowa Freedom Summit in January 2015, Trump said that he would save Social Security by increasing wealth in the U.S. "We have to make our country rich again so we can do that, so we can save Social Security. Because I'm not a cutter. I'll probably be the only Republican that doesn't want to cut Social Security. I want to make the country rich so that Social Security can be afforded and Medicare and Medicaid. Get rid of the waste. Get rid of the fraud. But you deserve your Social Security," Trump said.<sup>[3]</sup>
- In his 2011 book, *Time to Get Tough*, Trump defended Social Security. He wrote, "It's not unreasonable for people who paid into a system for decades to expect to get their money's worth—that's not an 'entitlement,' that's honoring a deal. We as a society must also make an ironclad commitment to providing a safety net for those who can't make one for themselves. Social Security is here to stay. To be sure, we must reform it, root out the fraud, make it more efficient, and ensure that the program is solvent. Same goes for Medicare. Again, people have lived up to their end of the bargain and paid into the program in good faith. Of course they believe they're 'entitled' to receive the benefits they paid for—they are!"<sup>[10]</sup>

## Mike Pence



- The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, an advocacy group that opposes the privatization of Social Security and reductions in benefits, gave Pence a rating of 0 percent on issues related to Social Security and Medicare during his time in the 112th Congress.<sup>[11]</sup>
- In 2010, Pence indicated that he would consider cutting Social Security benefits or raising the retirement age. "I'm an all-of-the-above guy. We need [sic] look at everything on the menu," he said.<sup>[12]</sup> Pence also said that while Social Security must be reformed for Americans under the age of 40, the government must "keep [its] promises to seniors and near seniors."<sup>[13]</sup>
- Pence backed a proposal that called for greater privatization of retirement accounts in 2005, saying, "Conservatives want to see personal retirement accounts that have immediate relevance to younger Americans, that they can see the value, and that will require that they be big and that they be implemented in the final bill without delay."<sup>[14]</sup>

## Mick Mulvaney

- In an interview with radio host Hugh Hewitt on March 6, 2017, Mulvaney said that the Trump administration wanted to "protect and save Social Security." He noted, however,

that he was beginning "to socialize the discussion...in the West Wing about how important the mandatory spending is to the drivers of our debt." Social Security Disability Insurance, according to Mulvaney, "is one of the fastest growing and probably one of the most abused mandatory programs in the country." He continued, "I know the national narrative, and the national narrative is we're not going to do anything on mandatory spending. But I think really what this President is interested in doing is not affecting the benefits for folks, and saving these programs long term. And I think there's a way to do that."<sup>[15]</sup>

- U.S. Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-S.C.) was named by Donald Trump as his choice for the director of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on December 16, 2016.<sup>[16]</sup> The OMB is responsible for helping the president prepare and manage the federal budget across federal agencies. "A review of the bills Mulvaney has introduced reveals a strong appetite to cutting government spending, especially Medicare and Social Security. He has repeatedly pointed out that both entitlement programs are headed for bankruptcy and must be reformed," *The Hill* reported following his nomination.<sup>[17]</sup>

### The 2016 Republican Party Platform on Social Security

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## Footnotes

1. *Congressional Budget Office*, "CBO's 2016 Long-Term Projections for Social Security: Additional Information," December 21, 2016
2. *Social Security Administration*, "A Summary of the 2016 Annual Reports," accessed January 3, 2016
3. *Bloomberg*, "How 'The Donald' Would Save Social Security," January 24, 2015

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