

US Senator Maria Cantwell

AARP WA's Celebration for the 90th Anniversary of Social Security

August 12th, 2025

Senator Cantwell Remarks

Sen. Cantwell: Well, thank you, Ed. Oh my gosh, so good to see you. Sue, thank you so much for telling the story of so many seniors from across Western Washington who are in the same position. They want to retire with dignity and they want social security to be there.

So, you're right. We're here to celebrate 90 years. Yes, bring your paddles up. I also want to thank Ron Chew and Margarita Ro and Kathy MacCaul for their leadership, and thank you, Ed, for that introduction.

And I want to say it's a great honor to be with my colleague Pramila Jayapal, your Congresswoman, who is here today as well, because she and I are going to fight every single day to protect Social Security and make sure it's there for future generations.

Now, I know we're going to hear a lot about history today, but it is important to know that since 1935 Social Security has been a bedrock for Americans. It has provided more than \$26 trillion in monthly payments to ensure that seniors, survivors, people with disabilities, don't fall through the cracks, and they can retire and age and live with dignity.

Today, Social Security covers 70 million people in the United States, including 1.4 million people right here in the State of Washington. So yes, 1.4 million Washingtonians should be saying, "Happy birthday to Social Security."

Without this program, nearly 300,000 Washingtonians would fall under the poverty line, underscoring how important it is to keep this program.

The promise that we made was the basis of a contract between the government and our citizens. It is the foundation of trust that we hold in Social Security that if you work and contribute your entire life, you will not be left behind. That is why I personally take offense when the Treasury Secretary says part of the reconciliation bill with the Trump Accounts might be a back door way to privatize Social Security. Not on my watch! Never, never, never, never are we going to be for the privatization of Social Security.

Make no mistake about it, we have fought the privatization of Social Security before, during the Bush Administration and before Social Security provided our elder Americans with the ability to retire with dignity, nearly two thirds of the US population was falling into poverty.

So today, that rate is only 10%. So by any measure, this has been a huge success. Today, AARP knows that about 40% of our seniors would be living below the poverty line without this Social Security that we have, and Social Security has been a lifesaver, particularly for women-- I was glad to see so many women here. Let's just face it, we live longer. We may not have worked as long or paid in as much, so we really need social security to be there for us.

But being signed into law by Franklin Delano Roosevelt on August 14th, 1935, it has been the stability and the ability to retire with dignity. And we must keep in mind that as we continue to focus on this issue, we have to keep pace with the cost of living, right everybody? COLAs, COLAs, COLAs.

So, I like the 5.9% increase in 2020. I liked the 8.7% increase in 2023. I would hope to have seen more than the 2.5% this year. But let's face it, Social Security, in my opinion, and the Cost of Living Adjustment should be based on a market basket of goods that seniors buy because you have to buy more expensive items facing inflation, like prescription drugs, like health care, and like things that help you provide stability in your life. So, let's get a cost of living CPI for the elderly and make sure that it keeps pace with inflation.

So, all of these things are the way we, in this generation, can continue the commitment to Social Security. We want to be here to see and celebrate decades more of success of this great program. We want it to continue to be a steadfast supporter of all people, but particularly those who are challenged in their retirement, particularly women, to make sure that this safeguard is there for us.

Women depend more than men on social security in retirement. And so I just want to say, as a woman who's now reached that age myself where I'm eligible, I am so grateful to know that the security is there for future Washingtonians.

Let's never forget what great success this has brought the United States of America, and what great success it's going to bring to so many more when we continue to celebrate its success. Happy birthday, Social Security.