

# STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SECURITY

**...don't cut it.**

## **For Immediate Release**

Tuesday, May 31, 2011

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## **New Virginia Poll Shows 75 Percent of Likely 2012 Voters Oppose Cuts to Social Security**

**Washington, DC**— In a [new poll released today](#), 75 percent of likely voters in Virginia's 2012 election oppose cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit. Those opposed include 85 percent of Democrats, 63 percent of Republicans, 79 percent of Independents, and 57 percent of Tea Party supporters.

The poll was released as leaders in Washington debate how to reduce the federal deficit and many members of Congress call for having all options on the table, including deep cuts to Social Security. Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA), a leader of the so-called "Gang of Six" bipartisan group, may include cuts to Social Security as part of a deficit-reduction package. President Obama and OMB Director, Jack Lew and others, have pointed out that Social Security does not, and by law, cannot contribute to the federal deficit.

The poll found that Social Security could be a real wedge issue in the 2012 U.S. Senate race. By a margin of 65 percent to 15 percent, Virginia voters say they would be less likely to vote for a Senate candidate who supports cutting Social Security benefits to reduce the deficit.

The Social Security issue also has the potential to swing voters: by a margin of 54 percent to 4 percent of independents and a margin of 53 percent to 7 percent of those who are undecided in the generic 2012 Senate ballot, voters indicated they would be much less likely to vote for a candidate who supports cutting Social Security benefits to reduce the deficit. Twenty-nine percent of those polled said they were undecided in the contest.

"These findings suggest that members of Congress who recently voted to end Medicare as we know it by turning coverage over to private insurance companies and who voted to make deep cuts to Medicaid, two programs that seniors' heavily depend on, could suffer a voter backlash," said **Barbara Easterling, a Virginian and President of the Alliance for Retired Americans**, which has 50,000 members in the state. "Social Security does not contribute a penny to the deficit, in fact it has a huge surplus. This is money that belongs to all of us who contributed our entire working lives so that we could retire with dignity. Voters want politicians in Washington to keep their hands off Social Security."

"This poll shows that voters are clear in their thinking: Don't cut Social Security benefits, don't reduce the COLA and don't raise the retirement age," said **Max Richtman, Acting CEO of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare**, which has 73,000 members in Virginia. "They also agree on something else: Congress should raise the Social Security tax

cap so that people making more than \$107,000 a year pay taxes on all of their wages just like everyone else who makes less than that amount has to do. This will guarantee that full Social Security benefits can be paid for the next 75 years.”

“Social Security is based on the promise that you pay in and earn the right to guaranteed benefits,” said **Elizabeth La Grua, a 73-year-old grandmother from Staunton, Virginia**. “I can’t believe that our elected officials in Washington would ever think about not keeping that promise. Please don’t let them mess with Social Security or Medicare.”

Significant findings in the poll include:

- When likely Virginia voters were asked “**Would you favor or oppose cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit?**” a total of 75% opposed cutting benefits. Below is a breakdown of those opposed to the cuts by their political affiliation:  
**Tea Party Supporters**...57% opposed to any Social Security benefit cuts  
**Republicans**.....63% opposed to any Social Security benefit cuts  
**Independents**.....79% opposed to any Social Security benefit cuts  
**Democrats**.....85% opposed to any Social Security benefit cuts  
**TOTALS**.....**75% opposed to cutting Social Security benefits**
- Strong majorities of Virginia voters oppose three specific proposals that would cut Social Security benefits by:
  - Raising the retirement age to 69: 61% oppose
  - Changing the COLA formula in a way that reduces the amount beneficiaries receive: 60% oppose
  - Reducing benefits for people earning above \$60,000 – typically what a proposal to “means-test” Social Security would do: 66% oppose
- In an engaged candidate debate, by a margin of 78 percent to 18 percent Virginia voters said Social Security should not be on the table for cuts to address the deficit because it is funded by and belongs to the people who have worked hard and paid into the program, over the candidate who calls for cutting Social Security to avoid burdening future generations with debt.
- There is strong bipartisan support among Virginia voters for lifting the cap to impose Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800 and requiring both employees and employers to pay (70 percent favor, 58 percent strongly). This was supported by large majorities of Republicans (67 percent), Independents (64 percent), and Tea Party supporters (73 percent). By a margin of 57 percent to 21 percent voters say they would be more likely to vote for a Senate candidate who supports requiring employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800.

More than [1.2 million Virginians receive Social Security](#) and nearly half of them are lifted out of poverty by the program’s modest benefits.

The survey of 603 likely voters was conducted March 6-10, 2011, by the national polling firm of Lake Research Partners; it has a margin of error of +/- 4.0 percent. The poll was paid for by Social Security Works, a national organization that convenes the [Strengthen Social Security Campaign](#), which is comprised of more than 300 national and state organizations representing more than 50 million Americans from many of the nation’s leading aging, labor, disability, women’s, children, consumer, civil rights and equality organizations; the [National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare](#), which has 73,000 members in Virginia; and the [Alliance for Retired Americans](#), which has 50,000 members in Virginia.