



Ohio Forum Focuses on Cutting Vs. Expanding Social Security

Walter Gottlieb

April 12, 2023

National Committee president and CEO Max Richtman brought the organization's message of expanding and strengthening Social Security to Ohio today. He participated in a forum in Sandusky, OH, co-sponsored by the local nonprofit, Serving Our Seniors. The forum, entitled, The Future of Social Security Retirement Income, was attended by more than two hundred citizens, mostly seniors who are already collecting benefits.

Richtman appeared alongside Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), a champion for seniors who represents the Sandusky area in the U.S. Congress. (Rep. Kaptur earned 100% on the National Committee's most recent legislative scorecard.) The forum was moderated by Sue Daugherty, executive director of Serving Our Seniors, and also included a representative of the conservative/libertarian Cato institute, Romina Boccia. According to the site, Influence Watch, the Cato Institute "has received funding from a number of right-of-center organizations, including the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation."

"This forum isn't about politics of it. It's all about informing all of us of the realities of it. How will we, as a nation, sustain these important programs? That's the big question and our panel crosses across the spectrum of politics." – Sue Daugherty, moderator and CEO, Serving Our Seniors

The forum featured lively exchanges between audience members and panelists, with Richtman advocating for revenue-side solutions to Social Security's financial challenges. (The combined trust fund is projected to become depleted in 2034, absent Congressional action.)

Boccia urged the kind of reform championed by conservatives, including reducing benefits for future generations of retirees, at least partially privatizing the program, and the creation of a special commission to propose Social Security reforms

(presumably along the lines of the Simpson-Bowles commission in the 2010s). That commission's recommendations, including some benefit cuts, were never adopted.

Richtman made clear NCPSSM's opposition to the kinds of solutions offered by Boccia, especially benefit cuts for future retirees, who will rely on Social Security even more than today's seniors do.

“Our message is that Congress needs to act. If there's no action, that's not acceptable because there would be automatic cuts in 2034. What we favor is bringing more revenue by having the wealthy begin paying their fair share. And in exchange for contributing more, higher earners should realize higher benefits than they do now. It's important to maintain that fundamental principle of Social Security.” – Max Richtman, NCPSSM President & CEO

Richtman endorsed legislation from Senator Bernie Sanders and Rep. John Larson (who soon will be re-introducing his Social Security 2100 Act), both of which would bring more revenue into Social Security by adjusting the payroll wage cap – and in Sanders' case – using investment taxes to help shore up the program. Both Sanders' and Larson's bills also would boost benefits across-the-board, in addition to targeted increases for the most financially vulnerable seniors

According to Richtman, most of the audience at the forum seemed to support the push to expand and strengthen Social Security, rather than cutting benefits or privatizing the program. Polling bears this out. A recent Data for Progress poll indicates that a majority of voters across party lines oppose raising the retirement age for today's younger adults – a prominent GOP proposal of late. Other polling shows significant bipartisan support for expanding benefits by having the wealthy contribute more. (Earnings over \$160,200 are not currently subject to Social Security payroll taxes.)

Republicans have generally rejected revenue-based solutions, insisting that “entitlements” need to be “reformed” or “looked at” (in other words, cut) in order to reduce federal debt, even though Social Security is self-funded and does not contribute a penny of red ink. The Sandusky Register newspaper reported that, despite the Cato Institute's presence at the forum, other conservatives did not accept invitations to participate, including freshman Senator J.D. Vance (R-OH) and the DC-based Heritage Foundation.