

[POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE]

FIXING SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE

At recent focus groups in Minneapolis and Long Island, we asked voters to **imagine two scenarios. In the first, Social Security and Medicare were reformed. In the second, they were not.** Participants wrote postcards to their grandchildren explaining the consequences of action and inaction. There was universal agreement. These voters felt that making changes to fix the programs would mean a brighter future for themselves and their families. Here is a sample of their verbatim responses:

Reform Happened...

Dear Grandkids,

I am happy to report that your politicians put their own interests aside and realized why they were where they were in the first place. To work together for the good of the country. We've come up with a system that will ensure that you and your children will have a better safety net available for retirement and med. needs. You still need to be responsible to take care of yourself and manage your finances accordingly.

(Minnesota man)

Congress reformed Social Security and Medicare so that if you contribute by working and paying in to the system, you can be assured Medicare will help lower medical bills and Social Security will supplement your income.

(Minneapolis woman)

Social Security and Medicare [were] reformed because enough people cared and pushed and spoke up and made themselves heard, and because of that, you guys will have to worry less about what happens to Grandma and Grandpa.

(Long Island woman)

Reform Did Not Happen...

Sorry that too many people in my generation were either blissfully ignorant of the issues or too selfish to care about someone else to deal with these problems. You now are responsible for starting a new family while you must also care for your parents. Oh, don't forget to put something away for yourself so you can enjoy your retirement and not burden your own kids too much.

(Minnesota man)

Congress did not reform SS/Medicare due to the political dissension of protecting their political parties. They fell short in doing what an elected official is supposed to do — be there to protect you! I am so sorry.

(Minneapolis woman)

I am sorry to say that Social Security was not reformed and the payment I am receiving is not enough for me to live by myself so I would like to live with you.

(Long Island woman)

continued...



third way
fresh thinking

Reform Happened...

Dear kids – Social Security was reformed – Our gov't began to see the extended future picture and supported measures to sustain a way to help our citizens to live better. You will have to work hard to keep it going, but in the long run we all will gain in having a positive society.

(Long Island woman)

I am truly glad that I am able to be less of a burden to you. Many years ago when Congress reformed Medicare it has helped me be able to stay in our home.

(Long Island man)

Dear [grandkids' names], Guess what Congress actually did something and I think they have got it right this time. They extended the age of SS from 62-66 to 64-68 and the system is now solvent. Love, Grandpa

(Long Island man)

Politicians finally decided to confront the real problems facing the country and reformed SS and Med. You will now have more freedom to decide the direction of your lives.

(Long Island man)

Reform Did Not Happen...

Dear kids – Since there was no reform, Grandpa and I live in a nursing home. Lost our house to pay and are getting abused. There were no positive changes.

(Long Island woman)

Dear [son's name], Am truly sorry that I have become a burden to you kids in my later years. But because of the Medicare reforms that never happened when you were younger I am unable to take care of a lot of things than had there been a reform.

(Long Island man)

Dear [grandkids' names], I'm sorry that Congress has screwed up your Social Security and Medicare payments. If they had just made some minor tweaks to the Social Security system they would have preserved your benefits. ... – Grandpa

(Long Island man)

I am sorry that you will not [receive] the benefits as you get older as I did. But the federal government has failed you and has failed your mom and dad. The government knew many years ago that the financial situation with SS and Medicare would eventually fail you. Their inaction over the years will cause you to toil and labor many years after you should be able to retire. Save your money and invest wisely.

(Long Island man)

Explanation of Methods: Pete Brodnitz of Benenson Strategy Group conducted two sets of two focus groups for Third Way, the first two in Long Island, New York, on August 21, 2012, and the second two in a suburb of Minneapolis (Edina), MN, on August 23, 2012. Participants were self-described Independents or Democrats over 45, with 23 identifying as moderate, 6 as liberal, and 3 as conservative.