SOCIAL SECURITY & THE SAFETY NET

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Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, SNAP — these are lifelines, not bargaining chips, and I do not say that as an abstraction. I am one of the kids the safety net caught. My mother raised me on Medicaid and food stamps — I still remember licking and sticking the little stamps on grocery day. We did not live well, but we lived. And the help did something a third job never could have: it gave her the space to take night classes instead. The bridge held long enough for her to build a career at NASA — and to carry us off the programs for good. That is the entire purpose of the safety net: to hold long enough for a family to reach the next thing.

Right now that net is under threat from two directions. House Republicans have backed a plan that raises the Social Security retirement age and quietly cuts benefits for every worker not yet near retirement, while leaving the program's real solvency problem untouched. And in July 2025, Congress passed the largest SNAP cuts in the program's history. I will fight both — and I will fight for the fixes that actually work.

Social Security — The Plan to Raise the Retirement Age

For years, the Republican Study Committee — a caucus of more than 170 House Republicans, roughly 80 percent of the entire House Republican conference and all of its leadership — has put out a budget that raises the Social Security full retirement age from 67 to 69. Phased in over eight years, beginning in 2026. The Congressional Budget Office found it would cut benefits by up to 13 percent for every worker not yet near retirement — everyone currently under 60.

Our own incumbent is a member. Rob Wittman's official biography describes him as "a leader in the fight against massive government spending" in the budget process — the same RSC budget that raises the retirement age. To seniors, he says he is "firmly committed to protecting Social Security and Medicare," and promises "no change" for current beneficiaries and those nearing eligibility. Read closely, that promise is carefully bounded: it protects the people already at or near retirement — exactly the group the RSC plan also exempts. It says nothing to the worker who is 45 today, whose benefits the plan cuts by up to 13 percent. "Protecting Social Security" is doing quiet work in that sentence — it sounds like a promise to everyone, while the plan he helped lead cuts it for everyone not yet paying attention. You do not get to help write the plan and also present yourself as the wall standing against it.

And here is the part that should end the debate: the plan does not even fix Social Security. CBO confirmed that raising the retirement age to 69 would not move the date the trust fund runs short

— not by a single year. It cuts benefits and leaves the solvency problem exactly where it found it.

That is the tell. A real fix touches where the money is. This one touches where the political resistance is weakest — younger workers, decades from retirement, who are not paying attention yet. It is not a solvency plan. It is a benefit cut looking for a quiet way in.

I oppose any increase in the Social Security retirement age. The 1983 amendments already raised the full retirement age from 65 to 67. Americans are finishing that phase-in right now. We are not going to start another one.

How We Actually Fix Social Security — Without Cutting a Benefit

Here is the part the retirement-age plan never mentions: there is a straightforward way to make Social Security solvent that cuts nobody's benefits.

Today, Social Security's payroll tax stops at a cap — wages above roughly $184,500 pay nothing more into the system. A teacher pays the tax on every dollar she earns. Someone making $2 million pays it on the first $184,500 and not a cent on the rest.

Lift the cap. Wages above $400,000 should pay the same 12.4 percent Social Security tax that working Americans already pay on every dollar of their paychecks. The existing cap stays exactly where it is for everyone earning under $400,000 — and the threshold is per worker, the way Social Security has always worked, so a two-earner household where each spouse makes $300,000 is fully protected.

If you earn a normal salary — and that is about 99 percent of American workers — you pay nothing new. Not one dollar.

Independent analyses have long found that asking the highest earners to pay into Social Security the way everyone else does closes most of its long-term shortfall. It is not a radical idea. It is the most basic kind of fairness: the same rate, on every dollar, for everyone. The retirement-age plan asks the people with the least to give up benefits they earned. This asks the people with the most to pay the rate the rest of us already pay. That is the whole difference. It is a choice about who pays.

SNAP — The Bridge That Held

My mother raised me on food stamps and Medicaid. She was a single mother in Glendale, California, with no degree and no cushion. She used the programs to keep us fed and covered while she went to school at night and built her career. She did not stay on them. By the time we had settled in Alexandria, Virginia, we were off both — exactly the way the system is supposed to work. Nobody designed SNAP to be a permanent residence. It is a bridge. For our family, the bridge held.

That is what the program is supposed to do, and most of the time, that is what it does. Roughly 42 million Americans use SNAP in any given month. The majority of households on it include a child, an elderly person, or a person with a disability. The average benefit comes to about $6 per person per day. It is not generous. It works because it is targeted, and because the people who genuinely need a bridge actually use it.

In July 2025, Congress passed the largest SNAP cuts in the program's history — roughly $186 billion over ten years. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act expanded work requirements from ages 18 to 54 to ages 18 to 64, sweeping in roughly 800,000 older Americans the law had previously recognized as too close to retirement to be reasonably hit with new paperwork tests. It pulled parents of teenagers 14 and older into the same regime. It cut the federal reimbursement for state SNAP administration from 50 percent to 25 percent — a quiet move that hands states a choice: cover the difference or shed cases. Beginning in 2028, it forces states to pay 5, 10, or 15 percent of the actual benefits themselves, scaled to a paperwork error rate, structurally guaranteeing that states cut SNAP rolls during recessions — the exact moment families need them most. The same bill also sunset SNAP-Ed, the nutrition education program that has operated for decades. CBO estimates roughly 300,000 people will lose benefits in any given month from the state cost-shift alone, and that the average SNAP benefit will be $14 per month lower by 2034.

The Virginia 1st District has more SNAP recipients than people realize. The rural counties of the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula have above-average enrollment. Watermen and their families depend on SNAP through the off-season. Seasonal tourism workers around the Historic Triangle use it through the slow months. And — the one that should make every member of Congress uncomfortable — active-duty military families. A 2022 Defense Department report found that roughly 286,000 servicemembers — about one in four — experienced food insecurity, with junior enlisted at the highest risk: more than twice the civilian rate. The program designed to catch that need is structurally locked out for many of them: when SNAP eligibility is calculated, the Basic Allowance for Housing counts as income — even though the IRS does not count it as income, and neither does WIC. The same housing allowance that is invisible to the tax man and to other federal benefits is the very thing that disqualifies a hungry military family from SNAP. A junior enlisted servicemember with a family — at the rank and pay level where the food-insecurity numbers are highest — can be both food-insecure and SNAP-ineligible at the same time. That is not a SNAP problem. It is a military pay problem and a SNAP-formula problem. Both sit on the House Armed Services Committee, where Rob Wittman serves as Vice Chairman.

What I will defend:

- **Reverse the OBBBA SNAP cuts.** Restore the federal administrative reimbursement, end the state cost-shift, and lift the expanded work requirements that swept in older workers and parents of teenagers.
- **Defend the Thrifty Food Plan update.** The 2021 recalibration brought the standard SNAP allotment closer to actual food costs for the first time in decades. It should not be on the chopping block.
- **Fix the military-families gap.** Exclude BAH from the SNAP income calculation so junior enlisted families with kids can access the program their food-insecurity numbers say they need. The bipartisan Military Family Nutrition Access Act is the existing vehicle. It should pass.
- **Protect SNAP-Ed.** A low-cost, evidence-based nutrition education program that should not have been sunset.

- **Treat SNAP as a stabilizer, not a target.** It is the most efficient anti-hunger program in the federal budget. It belongs in the safety net, not in the cost-cutting column.

Medicaid, SSI, and the ADA

- **No Medicaid work requirements. No block grants. No per-capita caps.** Close the Medicaid coverage gap in the ten states that still have not expanded.
- **Defend the ADA. Reform the SSI asset limit** — and understand how we got here, because the history is the argument. Congress created Supplemental Security Income in 1972 to do something decent: provide a floor for disabled and elderly Americans who had nothing. But they made a quiet technical mistake at the start — they set the asset limit at $1,500 and never built in indexing to inflation. From day one, it was designed to erode.

By 1989, it had. To simply hold the value of that original 1972 promise, the limit needed to be about $4,450. Congress raised it that year — the only time in the program's history — but only to $2,000, still well below where the 1972 figure already stood. They had the chance to fix the original mistake. Instead they entrenched it, and once again declined to index it.

It has been frozen at $2,000 ever since. Today it would be roughly $5,400 just to keep pace with 1989, and nearly $12,000 to honor the value Congress originally set in 1972. A limit that never rises is a benefit cut that no one ever has to vote for — it just happens, year after year, while scoring as savings. And its effect is cruel and specific: to keep the benefits and the health coverage they depend on, disabled Americans must keep less than $2,000 to their name. The program built to keep them from destitution now requires them to stay destitute to qualify for it.

The fix is straightforward and bipartisan. The SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act would raise the limit to $10,000 for individuals and $20,000 for couples, index it going forward so this can never happen again, and end the marriage penalty that today caps a couple at just $3,000. It should pass.

Long-Term Care

I have seen nursing homes from the inside. Not all of them are the same — some are good places run by people who treat the work as a calling. But too many are warehousing older Americans on federal dollars, in conditions we would not accept for ourselves. The universal system I will fight for treats long-term care as part of basic coverage, not an afterthought families discover only in a crisis — with real accountability attached: federal funding goes only to facilities that meet quality standards, pay decent wages, and do not extract profits through accounting tricks. And we do not have to wait for that framework to start. Expand Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services now. Enforce real nursing home staffing standards. Support family caregivers.

Refuse Corporate PAC Money

No money from the financial firms profiting from Medicare Advantage overpayments, the insurance companies profiting from Medicaid managed care, the for-profit nursing home chains, or the private equity firms acquiring and stripping rural facilities.

I am running to defend what works, strengthen what does not, and extend what the country has promised to the generation that needs it now. The only real question is who the person holding this seat answers to when those votes come up.