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## **Floor Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.) Regarding Amendment to Protect Social Security**

Mr. President, my amendment is very simple. It would protect Social Security from cuts in the fast-track process proposed to be created in the Conrad-Gregg amendment.

It is clear from the public statements of Senators Conrad and Gregg that they have painted a big red target on Social Security and Medicare. That's what this commission is all about. It's a big roll of the dice for Social Security and Medicare.

Social Security is not the cause of our deficit problem. Social Security is running surpluses. For years into the future, Social Security is going to run surpluses. Social Security thus reduces the current unified budget deficit.

Furthermore, over the longer term, Social Security is growing with the rate of growth in the economy. Social Security is growing much more slowly than health care expenditures. Social Security is not the primary source of long-term fiscal imbalance.

Millions of American seniors rely on Social Security. Social Security is a commitment to America's seniors. We should prevent a fast-track process from reneging on Social Security's commitment.

Numerous groups representing seniors have called for excluding Social Security from this fast-track process.

AARP, for one, recommends that Social Security be excluded from the commission's deliberations. AARP says:

"[W]e urge that Social Security not be considered in the context of debt reduction; this program does not contribute to the annual deficit, and its long-term solvency can be resolved by relatively modest adjustments if they are made sooner rather than later."

The National Committee to Protect Social Security and Medicare also focused on Social Security, arguing that it is inappropriate for such a commission. They wrote:

"Incorporating Social Security into such a commission would signal to America's seniors that the President is willing, and even eager, to cut Social Security benefits. Ultimately, older Americans will accept changes in Social Security only if they have a voice in the decision and feel confident that changes are solely for the purpose of improving and strengthening the program. For this reason, Social Security solvency should not be taken up in the context of a fiscal commission."

A consortium of groups from the AFL-CIO to Common Cause to NOW, once again, focused on the problems with allowing the budget commission to change Social Security. They wrote:

“[A]n American public that only recently rejected privatization of Social Security will undoubtedly be suspicious of a process that shuts them out of all decisions regarding the future of a retirement system that's served them well in the current financial crisis.”

The idea of excluding Social Security from fast-track processes is not new. Congress already excludes Social Security from the fast-track reconciliation process.

The text of my amendment is very similar to a provision that appears right now in section 310(g) of the Congressional Budget Act. That Budget Act section prohibits using reconciliation to make cuts in Social Security. My amendment would do the same for the fast-track procedures in the Conrad-Gregg amendment.

The Senate added the Budget Act section on which my amendment is patterned to the law in 1985. Senator Hawkins of Florida offered the amendment. And the Senate adopted it by voice vote on October 8, 1985.

Let me read some of the debate from that day in 1985. Much of that debate is directly relevant to the amendment that I propose today.

Senator Hawkins explained the purpose of her amendment. She said:

“This amendment states that changes in Social Security cannot be made in reconciliation.”

Senator Hawkins continued:

“The whole idea behind removing Social Security from the unified budget is to make changes in the program based on the needs and constraints of the program itself and not for short-term budgetary reasons. Social Security is self-financed and has long-term goals. It should not be subject to the same constraints of programs competing for scarce general revenue funds. If my amendment is not adopted, it does not mean that changes in Social Security could never be made. It merely means that if and when changes are made to Social Security, it would not be in the context of the budget.”

Senator Heinz of Pennsylvania supported the Hawkins amendment. He said:

“I think we first do agree that the legislation needs language that does what the Senator from Florida suggests this does; namely, to put an extra lock on the door so no one can say that Social Security is going to end up in reconciliation. That is the intent.”

Senator Heinz continued:

“This language . . . does a very important job by making a point of order in order against any reconciliation bill that comes to the floor with Social Security cuts in it.

Senator Heinz make clear that under that provision that the Senate was adding to the Budget Act, Congress could still make changes to Social Security, just not in a fast-track vehicle. Senator Heinz said:

“[T]he Finance Committee retains jurisdiction over the programs involving the Social Security Act. And were it required, for reasons having to do with solvency of Social Security, reasons of equity, having to do with either the taxes or the benefits involving Social Security, or any other reason having to do with it that we might see fit, but not having to do with reconciliation and the budget process, we could work our will, as we have in the past, on the Social Security Program. But not as part of the reconciliation.”

Senator Rudman of New Hampshire, the cosponsor of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings budget process, spoke in favor of the amendment. He said:

“[T]he language offered by the Senator from Florida has one single effect. That effect is that any reconciliation taken by the Senate Finance Committee would have to survive a point of order if it dealt with anything that had to do with old age assistance.”

And Senator Domenici of New Mexico, then the Chairman of the Budget Committee, also explained the Hawkins amendment the same way. He said:

“This amendment would with specificity say that any reconciliation bill containing provisions with respect to Social Security would be subject to a point of order. That is what this amendment does.”

That’s what Senators said when they adopted a prohibition on using the fast-track reconciliation process to make changes in Social Security. That’s why all those Senators supported excluding Social Security from the fast track reconciliation process. And I argue that all the same arguments apply today, as well.

Let us prevent Social Security from being cut in a fast-track commission process. Let us keep America’s commitment to our seniors. I urge my colleagues to adopt my amendment to protect Social Security.

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