



“Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now”

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Breaking the Social Security Pledge

Even before President Obama released his budget proposal this week for the next fiscal year that begins Oct. 1, preliminary details about his plan to effectively cut Social Security cost of living increases has caused a firestorm among supporters who now feel betrayed.

Under the plan, Obama would shift the way federal benefits are indexed from the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to the “chained” CPI, gradually reducing benefit payments. Without getting overly technical, the chained CPI – a way of indexing living costs – has grown on average by about 0.3 percentage points per year more slowly than the official CPI. Social Security actuaries assume the gap between the two CPIs will continue to average 0.3 percentage points per year in the future;

Former Clinton Labor Secretary Robert Reich said in a MoveOn.org press release that “Social Security is not driving the deficit, therefore it should not be part of reforms aimed at cutting the deficit.” He added, “The chained CPI, deceptively portrayed as a reasonable cost-of-living adjustment, is a cut to Social Security that would hurt seniors.”

White House officials point out that the chained CPI would not affect initial Social Security benefits because they are based on wages. It is the subsequent cost of living increases that would be affected.

According to an analysis by the Associated Press, Social Security benefits for a typical middle-income 65-year-old would be

THE CURRY REPORT

George E. Curry



about \$136 less a year under the new indexing. At age 75, annual benefits would be \$560 less. At 85, the cut would be \$984 a year. While that might not seem huge to some, it represents a significant loss of income from the elderly living on a fixed income.

Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) shares Robert Reich’s outrage. “If Obama is serious about deal-

COLAs are not limited to the elderly. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, approximately 6 million children under age 18 (8 percent of all U.S. children) lived in families that received income from Social Security in 2011. That includes children who received their benefits as dependents of retired, disabled, or deceased workers as well as those who live with parents or relatives who received Social Security benefits.

Democrats are irked that Obama is breaking a pledge he made in 2008 not to cut Social Security. And regardless of how he couches it, that’s the net effect of his action.

“You can’t call yourself a Demo-

crat and support Social Security benefit cuts,” said Stephanie Taylor, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee. “... The president has no mandate to cut these benefits, and progressives will do everything possible to stop him.”

As I have noted in this space before, Obama is an Apprentice Negotiator. We saw that in 2012 when Republicans goaded him into extending the Bush tax cuts. In a failing effort to garner Republican support, Obama keeps offering up programs cherished by progressives, sometimes before the negotiating begins.

President Obama’s new proposal also calls for placing a 28 percent cap on tax deductions and other exclusions. Because the change would raise taxes of the wealthy, GOP leaders are expected to reject the plan.

Social Security provides monthly benefits to more than 50 million retired workers and workers with disabilities, their dependents, and their survivors. Obama faces considerable opposition from his own party, largely because of the importance of the popular retirement program.

“Social Security benefits play a vital role in reducing poverty,” observed the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. “Without Social Security, 21.4 million more Americans would be poor, according to the latest available Census data (for 2011). Although most of those whom Social Security keeps out of poverty are elderly, nearly a third are under age 65.

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Social Security is not driving the deficit, therefore it should not be part of reforms aimed at cutting the deficit

ing with our deficit, he would not cut Social Security – which has not added one penny to the deficit,” Sanders said in a statement posted on his website. “Instead, he would support legislation that ends the absurdity of one out of four profitable corporations paying nothing in federal income taxes. He would also help us close the offshore tax haven loopholes that enable large corporations and the wealthy to avoid paying \$100 billion a year in federal taxes.”

Social Security payments and

crat and support Social Security benefit cuts,” said Stephanie Taylor, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee. “... The president has no mandate to cut these benefits, and progressives will do everything possible to stop him.”

Critics note that any “savings” from the chained CPI would go into the government’s general fund, not the Social Security Trust Fund. Therefore, it does nothing to “strengthen” Social Security. “It’s not the president’s ideal

Coming to Grips with Gay Civil Rights

You can call it the “bandwagon effect,” or “political opportunism,” or, the “wake-up-call effect,” or, less cynically, an old American tradition. Whatever you call it, in the last month it seems everybody and their momma in the political arena has been expressing support for gay rights and same-sex marriage.

The support has come from opposite ends of the political spectrum: from Ohio Republican Senator Rob Portman, who also revealed that his son is gay, to former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who said she was free to speak her mind now that she has left office. Even the Republican National Committee seemed in its white paper exploring the causes and implications of the Party’s decisive defeat last November to call for a softening of the GOP’s hard line on gay rights and same-sex marriage lest it find itself in “an ideological cul-de-sac.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., whose commitment to justice for all got him killed 45 years ago this month, would be pleased. We do know which side this man, who was becoming ever more “militant” in his willingness to challenge the country’s fierce dynamic of exclusion, would be on today.

Of course, it’s not literally true that the opposition to gay rights has melted away. We can still expect plenty of venomous rhetoric

LAST CHANCE

Lee A. Daniels

ric and obstructionist legislative tactics from right-wing clerics, conservative officeholders (and wannabes) and pundits, and the conservative talk-show confederacy.

But the signs are unmistakable that the American public’s support-to-opposition ratio on the

same-sex marriage in the state. The other involves the 1996 federal Defense of Marriage Act, which forbids federal recognition of same-sex marriages performed in the nine states and the District of Columbia where it is legal.

Regardless of how the court rules on these cases – expectations are that the justices will issue narrow rulings effectively gutting both laws – full civil rights for gay and lesbian Americans will become a reality much sooner

That isn’t to say gay rights has pushed into the background the struggle for full equality of Black Americans – or of White women and other people of color.

Rather, it’s to acknowledge what hindsight has made apparent: Because the issue of gay rights has been the most contentious issue of tolerance for the past two decades, the advances gays and lesbians have made in gaining their rights, and the recognition of those rights by their fellow Americans have broadened the boundaries of tolerance for all.

That last point goes to the core of the common bond between the Black freedom struggle and the gay rights movement. Both groups were so stigmatized, so disregarded, so exiled from the American mainstream that they, separately and in different eras, had to forge an extraordinary, decades-long movement to change the thinking about them as a critical minority of Americans.

That shift the respective movements engineered led to the social and political breakthroughs for them and, importantly, for other groups. Just as the gay rights movement benefited from the inspiration and the practical successes of the Black freedom struggle of the last 50 years, so now Black Americans are benefiting from the gay rights movement’s expanding the “space” for greater tolerance in American society.

“A remarkable – and remarkably fast – turnaround in American public opinion” on the issue since 2010

multifaceted issues of gay rights has shifted significantly. For example, a Washington Post–ABC News poll conducted last month found that a record 58 percent of Americans now support same-sex marriage, a finding the paper called “a remarkable – and remarkably fast – turnaround in American public opinion” on the issue since 2010.

The poll’s findings were underscored by the two cases involving same-sex marriage the Supreme Court took up last month: One concerns California’s 2008 voter-enacted Proposition 8, which bars

rather than later.

The fact that this marked shift in public opinion about same-sex marriage became apparent at the moment of another calendar-driven commemoration of King’s prophetic mission helps illuminate the similarities between the Black freedom struggle and the gay rights movement.

It’s perfectly clear now that the gay rights movement is this era’s “gateway” tolerance issue – that it is the movement whose successes are most critical at this moment to advancing tolerance and equal opportunity in American society.