

Trump policies designed to block seniors from getting Social Security benefits

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While denying plans to directly slash Social Security checks, the Trump administration is imposing job cuts, office closures and “identity-proofing” requirements designed to wreck the Social Security Administration and block seniors from applying for and receiving benefits.

Under the cynical pretext of fighting “waste, fraud and abuse,” Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is sowing chaos and paving the way for the privatization of the retirement benefit system established in 1935 at the height of the Depression and amid great class battles.

Some 73 million people, 21.5 percent of the US population, receive monthly checks from the Social Security Administration (SSA) worth a total of \$1.5 trillion annually. Social Security accounts for 22 percent of the US federal budget. The average monthly Social Security benefit for 65.8 million retired workers is about \$1,980. For 4.5 million disabled workers who receive federal benefits, the average monthly benefit is around \$1,580.

Workers pay into the system, which has net assets estimated at \$2.7 trillion, their entire working lives. Now they are facing website crashes, interminable waits on phone calls and long lines at SSA offices as Trump, Musk and DOGE take a wrecking ball to the system. This is under conditions where, due to cuts imposed under previous administrations, Democratic as well as Republican, the SSA was already at a 50-year low in staffing while the number of beneficiaries grows by 10,000 people daily.

On February 28, the SSA, under Trump’s hand-picked acting commissioner Leland Dudek, announced the elimination of 7,000 jobs, more than 12 percent of the agency’s staff. The announcement cited the agency’s “bloated workforce and organizational

structure.”

On the same day, the multi-billionaire fascist Musk claimed, falsely, on Joe Rogan’s podcast that a search of the Social Security database showed there were 20 million dead people marked as alive. He said, “Social Security is the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time.”

During his address to a joint session of Congress in February, Trump promoted the lie that millions of people over the age 100 were receiving benefit checks, based on a misrepresentation of SSA databases.

On April 3, Vice President JD Vance said on “Fox & Friends” that 40 percent of the people who call the Social Security Administration “are actually committing fraud.” The *Washington Post*, based on figures released in March by Acting SSA Commissioner Dudek, calculated the actual percentage to be 0.0025 percent.

The SSA has also announced the closure of six of 10 regional offices and the shutdown or consolidation of 47 field offices across the country. For some people, this will mean traveling 100 miles or more to the closest SSA location. Twenty-six field offices are scheduled to close in 2025.

Acting Deputy SSA Commissioner Doris Diaz issued a memo on March 18 stating that the agency going forward would require “internet identity proofing” for “benefit claims... made over the phone.” When an SSA customer is “unable to utilize the internet ID proofing, customers will be required to visit a field office to provide in-person identity documentation.”

The Diaz memo estimates it would require 75,000 to 85,000 in-person visitors per week to the SSA’s offices to implement the policy. This is a 14 percent increase in daily visits. The wait time for an appointment, even before these changes, averaged over a month.

Earlier this month, the SSA announced a two-week

delay in implementing this change, saying that “in-person identity proofing” would be effective April 14.

This places an immense burden on Social Security claimants and beneficiaries. A quarter of elderly people in the US do not use the internet and many of those who do have difficulty working with it. It is a cynical and cruel attempt to discourage people who rely on Social Security to survive from trying to navigate the system.

Speaking of the cuts and policy changes, Independent Senator Angus King of Maine told the *Washington Post*, “What’s going on is the destruction of the agency from the inside out...”

A report by *Popular Information* on March 17 said the changes to the claims process would “debilitate the agency, cause significant processing delays, and prevent many Americans from applying for or receiving benefits.”

On March 28, Bill Sweeney, the government affairs senior vice president of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), was interviewed on C-SPAN’s Washington Journal program.

He said:

I’m hearing reports of waiting two-and-a-half hours when they need help... Social Security has the lowest staffing levels in 20 years and a record high number of Americans who are claiming Social Security every day as a result of the generational changes in this country. You have more customers and less staff handling the customers and it’s a recipe for disaster...

You have got to go to a field office to get basic stuff you have been able to do over the phone... In parts of Alaska you can’t drive to a field office, you have to fly on a plane.

On March 30, Sweeney told the National Public Radio station in Boston, WBUR, “In this country, 10,000 Americans die every year waiting for Social Security to process their disability claims.”

Dudek is expected to serve as acting commissioner until the Trump nominee for SSA commissioner, Frank Bisignano, the chief executive of the financial service technology company Fiserv, is confirmed by the

Senate. Bisignano’s net worth is estimated to be between \$697.7 million and \$942 million as of 2025.

The criminal US financial oligarchy, wielding power in the form of the Trump administration and personified by Musk, the world’s richest individual, is determined to get its hands on the SSA trust fund. DOGE’s original stated goal of cutting the federal budget by at least \$2 trillion requires the gutting of Social Security, as well as Medicare and Medicaid.

Republicans in Congress are discussing legislation to slash Social Security directly. *USA Today* reported on April 8:

Maybe such a plan would include raising the full retirement age from 67 now for those born in 1960 and after. Some GOP proposals have suggested increasing the age for full retirement benefits from 67 to 69 over an eight-year period beginning in 2026.

The Democratic Party’s response is silence, punctuated by impotent calls to telephone Republican lawmakers. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, known as the senator from Wall Street, recently declared, “We need every person who is a recipient... to call their Republican congressmen and senators and give them one sentence: Hands off my Social Security.”

In fact, the Democrats agree with plans for massive cuts in basic social programs, including Social Security, in the face of an unsustainable national debt of \$36 trillion and rising, and the prospect of state bankruptcy of American capitalism.



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