

# Collapse of Social Programs in America: Three-Quarters of Progressive Caucus Not Taking a Stand Against Cuts in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid

By [Norman Solomon](#)

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For the social compact of the United States, most of the Congressional Progressive Caucus has gone missing. While still on the caucus roster, three-quarters of the 70-member caucus seem lost in political smog. Those 54 members of the Progressive Caucus haven't signed the current letter that makes a vital commitment: "we will vote against any and every cut to Medicare, Medicaid, or Social Security benefits — including raising the retirement age or cutting the cost of living adjustments that our constituents earned and need."

More than 10 days ago, Congressmen Alan Grayson and Mark Takano initiated the forthright letter, circulating it among House colleagues. Addressed to President Obama, the letter has enabled members of Congress to take a historic stand: joining together in a public pledge not to vote for any cuts in Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid.

The Grayson-Takano letter is a breath of fresh progressive air, blowing away the customary fog that hangs over such matters on Capitol Hill.

The Progressive Caucus co-chairs, Raul Grijalva and Keith Ellison, signed the letter. So did Barbara Lee, the caucus whip. But no signer can be found among the five vice chairs of the Progressive Caucus: Judy Chu, David Cicilline, Michael Honda, Sheila Jackson-Lee and Jan Schakowsky. The letter's current list of signers includes just 16 members of the Progressive Caucus (along with five other House signers who aren't part of the caucus).

What about the other 54 members of the Progressive Caucus? Their absence from the letter is a clear message to the Obama White House, which has repeatedly declared its desire to cut the Social Security cost of living adjustment as well as Medicare. In effect, those 54 non-signers are signaling: *Mr. President, we call ourselves "progressive" but we are unwilling to stick our necks out by challenging you in defense of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid; we want some wiggle room that you can exploit.*

In contrast, the House members on the short list of the letter's signers deserve our praise for taking a clear stand: Brown, Cartwright, Conyers, DeFazio, Ellison, Faleomavaega, Grayson, G. Green, Grijalva, Gutierrez, A. Hastings, Kaptur, Lee, McGovern, Nadler, Napolitano, Nolan, Serrano, Takano, Velazquez and Waters.

If you don't see the name of your representative in the above paragraph, you might want to have a few words. (For a list of the 54 Progressive Caucus members who haven't signed the letter, click [here](#).)

It's one thing — a fairly easy thing — to tell someone else what you hope they'll do, as 107 House Democrats did recently in a different letter to President Obama: "We write to affirm our vigorous opposition to cutting Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid benefits. . . . We urge you to reject any proposals to cut benefits."

It's much more difficult — and far more crucial — for members of Congress to publicly commit themselves not to vote for any cuts in those programs, which are matters of life and death for vast numbers of Americans.

Even a signed pledge to do or not do something, in terms of a floor vote, is no guarantee that a member of Congress will actually follow through. But in a situation like this, the pledge is significant — and even more significant is a refusal to make such a pledge.

As of now, 54 members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus have taken a historic dive. We should take note — and not forget who they are.

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