

# Obama may cut Social Security

Sen. Sanders

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One-year payroll tax holiday key to toppling seniors' safety net, Sanders warns

Social Security may be on the White House chopping block, a US Senator recently told Raw Story, expressing deep uneasiness about President Barack Obama's noncommittal attitude toward staving off cuts to the cherished program.

"I have to tell you, I have been on the phone to the very, very, very highest levels of the Obama administration, and the responses that I am getting are not assuring," Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) said in an exclusive interview. "What I'm told is that no definitive decisions have been made on the issue of Social Security – I expect that is probably true."

Progressive activists, fearing that the holy grail of American liberalism could fall prey to a bipartisan deal on Capitol Hill, have launched a campaign to pressure the White House and Congress to oppose cuts. And Sanders has stepped up as their champion in the Senate, confirming their concerns based on knowledge drawn from his relative proximity to the president.

"What I'm hearing does not reassure me – that we have a president who is not prepared to defend the heart and soul of what the Democratic Party has been about since Franklin Delano Roosevelt," said Sanders, a self-described democratic socialist.

The independent from Vermont on Friday wrote to President Obama urging him stick by his campaign promise and oppose cuts in Social Security benefits, as Washington debates ways to cut the national debt.

Sanders cited as one cause for concern the president's decision to appoint two longtime "foes" of Social Security, Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles, to co-chair his deficit commission, which proposed trimming the program's payouts by increasing the retirement age.

Obama "could have said that's not on the table," Sanders said. "He didn't say that."

But much more disconcerting, the senator added, was the tax deal the president struck with Senate Republicans last month, which included a one-year cut in the payroll tax – the source of Social Security's funding – from 6.2 to 4.2 percent. Obama previously argued the compromise was necessary to prevent a tax hike on middle class Americans.

"I believe very strongly that it will be very, very difficult to undo this one-year program," Sanders said. "Republicans will say it is a tax increase on workers, and they control the

House.” Indeed, GOP lawmakers have since admitted they have no intention of letting the payroll tax return to its original, higher level in a year:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/11/public-opposes-cutting-so\\_n\\_678374.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/11/public-opposes-cutting-so_n_678374.html)

“So what the president has done is walked us in an unprecedented direction in terms of diverting huge amounts of money from Social Security,” Sanders said. “A very, very, very dangerous precedent. And when aides of his such as [Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers] Austan Goolsbee were asked to reflect on this, he chose not to do so.”

Polls have shown strong public opposition to proposals that would reduce the scope of Social Security:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/11/public-opposes-cutting-so\\_n\\_678374.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/11/public-opposes-cutting-so_n_678374.html)

<http://newoldage.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/25/social-security-and-younger-americans/>

While the program’s payouts did exceed revenues for the first time last year, the Social Security Trust Fund has a surplus of \$2.6 trillion and is expected to remain solvent in its current form until 2037, according to its trustees report:

[http://www.ncpssm.org/news/archive/2010\\_ss\\_trustees\\_report/](http://www.ncpssm.org/news/archive/2010_ss_trustees_report/)

“It’s inexplicable to me that anybody in the White House would give two seconds of thought to cutting Social Security,” Sanders concluded.

The White House did not return requests for comment.

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