

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
“Examining the Root Causes of America’s Unsustainable Fiscal Path”

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GARY C. PETERS

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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our panel of expert witnesses for joining us today.

Our nation’s growing debts are unsustainable and Congress has a responsibility to work together across party lines to reduce the national debt and close our spending deficits.

Providing our country with a strong fiscal foundation is critical to ensuring our economy can continue to grow and families in Michigan and across the country can prosper.

I am proud of my record of fighting to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used responsibly. I have been privileged to work with members of both parties on this committee to find commonsense ways to cut wasteful spending and set our country on a sounder fiscal path.

Eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse builds public trust and frees up funds for our nation’s core priorities, including Social Security and Medicare.

These programs were created to ensure that every American can retire with dignity and the certainty that their essential health care needs will be met.

Medicare and Social Security are benefits that Americans have paid into through decades of hard work. I am deeply committed to protecting Social Security and Medicare and ensuring they are solvent for future generations.

At a time when the Government Accountability Office estimates that 48% of working Americans approaching retirement age have no retirement savings and 29% of Americans over the age of 55 have no retirement or benefits plan offered by their employer, hardworking families in Michigan and across the country are counting on these programs to be there for them in the years ahead.

Congress must protect Social Security and Medicare by meeting our commitments, not by changing the rules of eligibility or slashing benefits.

There are serious challenges facing these federal trusts but our primary focus must be on increasing solvency without cutting benefits or changing the rules on American workers who have spent their lives contributing to these programs.

We know, for example, that one of the most significant challenges facing Medicare is the rising cost of prescription drugs. Allowing Medicare to negotiate lower prescription drug prices would save tens of billions of dollars every year according to the Congressional Budget Office.

We must also aggressively root out fraud, waste, and abuse.

Finally, we must address workers’ limited economic mobility and stagnant wages which have both made it harder for families to save for the future and for the trust funds to meet their commitments.

Solving this challenge will take bipartisan cooperation and a comprehensive approach: cutting costs, reforming the tax code, and investing in economic growth.

These efforts can make our government more efficient, protect Americans' hard earned benefits, and honor our commitment to keep these programs strong for our children and grandchildren.

I look forward to today's discussion and to our ongoing efforts to identify the commonsense, bipartisan solutions that will preserve Medicare and Social Security for all Americans for generations to come.