

12 Myths About *Social Security*

How to use this card: When someone repeats one of these myths at a town hall, in a news column, or at the Thanksgiving table — flip to that number. You'll have the lie, the truth, and a primary source you can point to. Every claim on this card is sourced directly to SSA, the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, or U.S. Code.

1 **LIE** "Social Security is going bankrupt."
TRUTH Social Security cannot go bankrupt. It's funded by ongoing payroll taxes. Even if Congress does nothing, the 2025 Trustees Report projects the program pays roughly 77% of scheduled benefits indefinitely after the combined trust fund depletes.
SOURCE: SSA Board of Trustees, 2025 Annual Report (Table II.B1)

2 **LIE** "Congress raided the trust fund."
TRUTH The trust fund holds approximately \$2.7 trillion in special-issue U.S. Treasury bonds — the same class of debt held by pension funds and foreign governments. Redemption is a legal obligation of the U.S. government.
SOURCE: 42 U.S.C. § 401; SSA Trustees Report 2025

3 **LIE** "Those bonds are just worthless IOUs."
TRUTH They're backed by the full faith and credit of the United States. If those are worthless, so are the Treasury bonds in every 401(k), pension fund, and foreign central bank in the world.
SOURCE: Congressional Research Service, "Social Security Trust Funds" (R46437)

4 **LIE** "Illegal immigrants are draining Social Security."
TRUTH Undocumented workers pay billions into Social Security each year through payroll taxes and are legally barred from collecting retirement benefits. On net, they subsidize the program rather than drain it.
SOURCE: SSA Office of the Chief Actuary, Note 151 (2013, reaffirmed)

5 **LIE** "Young people will get nothing."
TRUTH Under current law — with zero changes — younger workers are projected to receive roughly 77% of scheduled benefits after trust fund depletion. "Nothing" would require Congress to repeal the program, which no serious proposal contemplates.
SOURCE: SSA Trustees Report 2025, Intermediate Projections

6 **LIE** "Social Security is driving the national debt."
TRUTH Social Security is funded by its own dedicated payroll tax and cannot legally borrow. It has contributed \$0 to the federal deficit in the general fund. By law, it can only spend what is in its trust fund plus incoming tax receipts.
SOURCE: 42 U.S.C. § 401(a); CBO Budget & Economic Outlook

7 **LIE** "Social Security is just welfare."

TRUTH Social Security is an earned insurance benefit. Workers pay in through FICA payroll taxes for a minimum of 40 quarters (10 years) to qualify. Benefits are calculated from your own lifetime earnings record, not means-tested need.

SOURCE: 42 U.S.C. §§ 414, 415; SSA Program Operations Manual

8 **LIE** "We just need to raise the retirement age."

TRUTH Raising the full retirement age is a benefit cut by another name — it reduces lifetime benefits for every future retiree. Manual laborers and lower-income workers, who have shorter life expectancies, absorb the largest losses.

SOURCE: Congressional Research Service, "Raising the Retirement Age" (R44846)

9 **LIE** "The only way to save it is to cut benefits."

TRUTH The 75-year shortfall can be closed through revenue changes alone — for example, lifting or eliminating the taxable maximum. SSA's own actuaries score dozens of solvency options, including revenue-only paths that require no benefit cuts.

SOURCE: SSA Office of the Chief Actuary, Solvency Provisions

10 **LIE** "The rich already pay their fair share."

TRUTH Social Security payroll taxes apply only up to a yearly wage cap (\$184,500 in 2026). Earnings above that cap pay \$0 into Social Security. A worker earning \$50,000 pays Social Security on 100% of wages; a CEO earning \$5 million pays on about 3.7%.

SOURCE: 26 U.S.C. § 3121(a)(1); SSA 2026 Contribution & Benefit Base

11 **LIE** "The COLA keeps up with inflation for seniors."

TRUTH The Social Security COLA is tied to CPI-W, which measures urban wage earners — not retirees. Retirees spend more on healthcare and housing. BLS tracks an experimental CPI-E (for the elderly) that historically runs higher than CPI-W.

SOURCE: 42 U.S.C. § 415(i); Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI-E

12 **LIE** "We can fix it by cutting waste, fraud, and abuse."

TRUTH SSA's own Inspector General puts improper payments at well under 1% of outlays. Eliminating 100% of improper payments would not close even a small fraction of the long-term shortfall. "Cutting waste" is not a solvency plan; it's a slogan.

SOURCE: SSA Office of Inspector General, Improper Payments Report (FY 2024)

Print it. Fold it. *Bring it with you.*

This card is meant to be used. Keep a copy in your glovebox, at your desk, and folded in the back of your wallet for the next town hall or family dinner. **Share it freely.** The more citizens who can answer these myths with facts, the harder it becomes to pass policy built on them.