

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3905

January 24, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
S-221 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
S-230 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Reid and Senator McConnell:

As you continue work on economic stimulus legislation, I urge you not to overlook elderly Americans in designing a package.

As I've traveled across Rhode Island, I've heard from countless seniors who are struggling to make ends meet. Troubles in the housing market, high home energy prices in a bitterly cold winter, and the rising cost of badly-needed prescription drugs force seniors in my state, and across America, to stretch already severely limited incomes even farther. As the cost of living has gone up, Social Security benefits have not kept pace, and many seniors are facing difficult decisions.

Distributing additional funds to senior citizens would also be an excellent stimulant to the economy. As compared with other populations who may save a portion of their tax rebate, elderly Americans, often living on fixed incomes, are more likely to consume amounts allocated to them under a stimulus package.

Because the primary sources of income for most senior citizens are Social Security benefits and savings, a tax rebate will benefit few of them. I encourage you to include in the stimulus package an alternative mechanism to channel funds to senior citizens. One possible mechanism for covering the elderly would be a temporary increase in Social Security benefits. This could be accomplished with either a one-time supplemental payment or an enhanced benefit for a period of several months. Because the system is already in place to distribute Social Security benefits, the administrative cost of using the system to distribute stimulus funds would be minimal.

Making older Americans a top priority in Congress's stimulus package will help senior citizens at a time when they desperately need it. I look forward to working with you to ensure that our seniors are not forgotten.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sheldon Whitehouse', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator