

January 7, 2009

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman
Committee on Finance
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on Finance
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus and Ranking Member Grassley:

As you continue work on badly-needed economic stimulus legislation, I urge you not to overlook elderly and disabled Americans. While I was pleased that senior and disabled Social Security recipients were eligible to receive stimulus rebates last year, the economic climate has significantly worsened since then and further assistance is needed.

Senior and disabled Americans are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns due, in part, to their fixed incomes and dependence on costly prescription drugs. I've heard from countless seniors and disabled Rhode Islanders about their struggles to make ends meet during a time of record housing and high energy costs. For these hard-hit Americans, every dollar counts and some extra help from the federal government could make the difference between housing and homelessness, and between health and sickness.

While the rebates distributed last year assisted millions of Americans, many elderly and disabled Social Security recipients who needed to file special paperwork because they do not usually file taxes failed to receive their rebate checks. To ensure that every eligible elderly and disabled American receives assistance, I suggest exploring an enhanced Social Security benefit for a limited period of time. By supplementing regular Social Security checks, we could deliver assistance without designing a new delivery mechanism or requiring any paperwork from the recipients.

In addition to the humanitarian impact of this relief, distributing additional funds to senior and disabled Americans would also be an excellent stimulant to the economy. As compared with other populations who may save a portion of extra income, Social Security recipients, often living on fixed incomes, are more likely to consume amounts allocated to them under a stimulus package.

Making older and disabled Americans a top priority in the stimulus package will help people at a time when they desperately need it. I look forward to working with you to ensure that seniors and the disabled 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

Cc: Majority Leader Harry Reid
Republican Leader Mitch McConnell