

Remarks of Henry J. Aaron
Nominee to the Social Security Advisory Board
November 17, 2011

Chairman Baucus, Ranking Member Hatch, and Members of the Committee, I thank you for considering my nomination to serve on the Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB). I realize this is a particularly hectic period for the Senate Finance Committee.

I was honored and pleased when President Obama nominated me for this position. I have worked on Social Security as a researcher and in government for fifty years. My doctoral dissertation, begun in 1961, dealt with Social Security. During the administration of President Johnson, I staffed an income maintenance tax force that dealt largely with Social Security. During the administration of President Carter, I headed the Office for Planning and Evaluation at the former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, when Social Security was still part of that Department. I chaired the Advisory Council on Social Security that reported in 1979. Alone and with colleagues, I have written extensively on the subject.

I mention this background for two reasons. First, I am devoted to the program as one of the landmark achievements of U.S. social policy. Second, I find the issues raised in debates about Social Security policy genuinely fascinating.

The opportunity to serve on the SSAB just now is particularly attractive. Major issues of program design and administration will have to be addressed in the next few years. The most obvious is the projected imbalance between revenues and expenditures. While there is no crisis, early action to close that anticipated funding gap would be desirable. It will contribute modestly to closing overall budget deficits. Finally, it will help to restore public confidence in the nation's largest program of retirement pensions, life insurance, and disability protection. Perhaps the SSAB can help improve the quality of debate on that important topic.

The disability insurance program is also an area of concern. The objective should be, in my view, to make sure that persons with disabilities receive authorized benefits quickly, that those without such disabilities are kept off the rolls, and those now on the rolls are helped, wherever possible, to be restored to gainful activity. There is a widespread sense, which I share, that we are not doing a very good job in any of these three dimensions. Once again, I would hope that the SSAB can help provide information to Congress and to the public that will help us to improve on past performance.

Once again, I want to thank you for considering my nomination. I would be pleased to answer to the best of my ability any questions that you may have.