

November 16, 2016
Media Contacts:
For Immediate Release
Shannon Benton: 1-800-333-TSCL (8725)
sbenton@tsclhq.org

Mary Johnson: (540) 832-5513
mary.johnson.nld@gmail.com



70% of Older Voters Think Recent Social Security Changes Were “Unnecessary Benefit Cuts,” Says New Poll By The Senior Citizens League

(Washington, DC) Seventy percent of older voters say two recent Social Security changes were “unnecessary benefit cuts,” rather than a “closure of unintended loopholes,” according to a new poll by The Senior Citizens League. “The findings show that Congress was out of step with its constituents, who oppose cutting benefits as a means to strengthen Social Security’s financing,” says TSCL Chairman, Art Cooper.

A year ago Congress passed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 — legislation that made two surprise changes to Social Security claiming strategies, known as “file and suspend” and “restricted application.” Calling the changes “a closure of unintended loopholes,” the legislation limited two claiming strategies used by married couples to maximize their Social Security benefits.

The changes restricted a strategy that was an especially important protection for women who tend to have lower retirement benefits than men. Prior to the change, the higher earner of a couple, usually the husband, would file for Social Security benefits at full retirement age, which allowed his wife to file for Social Security spousal benefits on his account. The husband would then immediately suspend his own benefit while he continued to work, allowing his benefit to grow 8% per year until age 70. The wife could then file a restricted claim for spousal benefits when she turned 66 and collect half of the full benefit amount that her husband would receive, while waiting for her own retirement benefit to grow to the maximum at age 70.

The new rules take effect for anyone who turns age 66 after April 29, 2016. Under the new rules people can still file and suspend benefits, but no one can collect other family benefits like those for a spouse or disabled child. The change did not affect the divorced spouse, who may still collect a spousal benefit.

The changes were controversial with older voters because they affected people who were already *at* entitlement age, and went rapidly into effect almost immediately. “There was little time for the public to learn what was happening to their benefits or to plan alternative action,” Cooper notes. The changes reduced the overall benefit income that married couples could receive from Social Security.

“Social Security is the nation’s most important program for keeping older Americans out of poverty,” Cooper notes. “With people living longer and spending 30 years and more in retirement, there’s growing consensus that Congress should be boosting benefits instead of cutting them,” Cooper says.

To do this while strengthening program finances, a recent survey by The Senior Citizens League found widespread support for increasing program revenues. Seventy-nine percent of those surveyed support raising the amount of wages that are taxable by completely lifting the maximum taxable earnings cap and applying the payroll tax to all earnings above \$118,500. Another two - out - of - three of those surveyed support very gradually raising the payroll tax rate for workers and employers.

TSCL is urging older voters to contact Members of Congress to let them know that benefit cuts affecting today’s retirees won’t be tolerated. To learn more, visit www.SeniorsLeague.org.

###

With 1.2 million supporters, The Senior Citizens League is one of the nation’s largest nonpartisan seniors groups. Its mission is to promote and assist members and supporters, to educate and alert senior citizens about their rights and freedoms as U.S. Citizens, and to protect and defend the benefits senior citizens have earned and paid for. The Senior Citizens League is a proud affiliate of The Retired Enlisted Association. Visit www.SeniorsLeague.org for more information.