



Barney Frank for Congress
PO Box 260
Newton, MA 02460

October 7, 2010

Representative Frank,

Thank you for the thoughtful letter. I'm always delighted to answer questions about my positions on the issues.

However, with all the economic problems our country is facing, what struck me first about the letter were all the questions that were not in it. I noticed you did not ask me how I would have voted on corporate bailouts or increasing the national debt. There were no questions about job-killing tax increases or out-of-control spending – all of which are on the minds of the people you represent in the Fourth District.

I can certainly understand your reluctance to highlight these differences between us. You voted for bailouts and tax hikes, and I oppose them. You voted to increase the national debt – 41 times.

Above all, you didn't ask me how I would have voted in 2005 on reigning in Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the companies at the center of the sub-prime mortgage crisis that collapsed our economy. That's probably because I would have voted with an overwhelmingly bipartisan majority in the House to pass reform, while you chose to join just 90 members to oppose it.

But your question was about Social Security and I take seriously my obligation to respond.

I am pleased to open a debate on retirement benefits, because the one thing that will guarantee its final insolvency is to continue on the path you advocate, which is “no debate, ever.” I propose a series of reforms which may not be good politics but are good policy.

To be specific:

1. Absolutely no changes to benefits for current retirees – we made a promise to them and we should keep it.
2. Raise the cap on income subject to Social Security withholding without raising rates.
3. “Means test” my generation when we retire – Bill Gates does not need a Social Security check.
4. Individuals should have the option to designate a portion of their Social Security taxes to private accounts.

Although I appreciate why you choose to demagogue on the issue, gradually raising the retirement age, for instance 1 month per year for people of my generation, isn't exactly a radical idea. Regarding

private accounts, right now most people under 40 have little expectation of receiving their full Social Security benefits. If your concern is that people aren't "smart" enough to make their own decisions, a concern that I don't share, then a reasonable approach is to have the individual component of Social Security default in to a "risk free" investment such as government bonds.

You have had three decades in Congress to help ensure the long-term viability of Social Security, but repeatedly we see reform fail based on highly partisan approaches on both sides of the aisle. It is better for career politicians to use scare tactics rather than talk about real but potentially unpopular approaches to reform. That is why we need real leadership in Washington.

With that settled, perhaps you can send me additional letters asking for my positions on your driving role in the housing market crash, foreclosures, double-digit unemployment, the failed trillion dollar stimulus, a bank bailout that does nothing for regular workers and families while bankers collect bonus billions, the skyrocketing cost of health insurance, funneling over \$12 million of taxpayers' money to a friend's bank, and many, many other issues on which my opinion might interest you and voters.

I will be happy to provide you a detailed letter on each one, and not with my opinion only. As a bonus, I'll include the opinions of the thousands of 4th District voters I have carefully listened to over the past several months -- something you wouldn't have heard since you refused to hold any town meetings last August.

In any case, it will be great to chat about these topics next week. Thanks once again for reaching out.

Sincerely,
Sean Bielat