

# The Social Security Act

ANNCR: The Social Security Act – On today's Congressional Moment

Today's Social Security program has its roots in the Great Depression of the 1930s. With 22 million unemployed, many Americans lived in poverty, and many elderly workers lost all their pension funds when their companies went bankrupt.

As part of the government's response, known as the "New Deal," President Franklin Roosevelt created an advisory panel to make recommendations to Congress for a program to protect workers from losing their pensions or retirement savings.

In January of 1935, Congress began its consideration of the Social Security Act.

Not everyone thought it was a good idea. There was a lot of opposition expressed during the congressional debates and in the opinion pages of the nation's newspapers.

Supporters praised it as a form of social responsibility, while others found it "dangerous and unconstitutional," imposing too much government in the private economic sector.

Yet proponents carried the day, and the House and Senate passed the Social Security Act. Expanded by Congress over the years, Social Security has had a major impact on the lives of older Americans. Without it, almost half of all Americans over 65 would be living in poverty.

Often considered one of government's greatest achievements, it is also the single most costly federal program; and the system's continued financial viability is currently a major issue of national concern.

CLOSING: This is Lee Hamilton. Congressional decisions impact all our lives. To find out more about how Congress works or to get involved in your government, visit the Center on Congress website at [congress.indiana.edu](http://congress.indiana.edu).