

With our country's finances stretched thin, our credit limit fast approaching, and our currency inflated to the breaking point, there is no indication yet of any urgency on the part of Congress to rein in spending. The predictable answer to the government's voracious spending habits is this week's proposal by some Democratic Congressional leaders for tax increases to pay for operations in Iraq. Here at home, however, there are promises our seniors heavily rely upon. We must keep these promises. An analysis of the Social Security "Trust Fund" shows we are not doing a credible job of keeping these promises. Official reports show the trust fund having assets of \$2.1 trillion. In reality, those dollars are just IOUs the government is writing to itself when it borrows from the fund to spend on unrelated programs. There are no real assets in the Social Security Trust Fund. This is similar to taking money out of your savings account, spending it, then replacing it with an IOU to yourself, and calling that IOU an asset. In addition, this money we owe to our seniors is not even included in official budget deficit figures. In fiscal year 2006 alone, \$185 billion was borrowed from Social Security. The official deficit was reported to be \$248 billion. The actual deficit for 2006 would be \$433 billion when combining the two. This sort of accounting would land private sector executives in prison for fraud. Yet this is done every year by the federal government. The truth is that while politicians in Washington differ about what programs to spend Social Security money on, they are united in wanting to spend it on something other than benefits for seniors. This approach can continue only until Social Security stops running "surpluses" the government can raid. Trustees of Social Security estimate this will happen in 2017. At that time, the amount owed to the Trust Fund will be between \$4 trillion and \$5.2 trillion, depending on the economy. When that day of reckoning comes, there will no longer be "excess" payroll tax receipts available to prop up government spending, and the risk of financial crisis will be significant. Instead of forward thinking solutions, politicians are discussing alarming proposals, such as an agreement with Mexico to let their citizens collect social security money intended for our seniors. This would break the bank even sooner. But, current Members of Congress will no longer be in office to face the wrath of seniors and their families when the trust fund goes bankrupt. Instead, they will be retired and enjoying their own plush Congressional pensions. I have been working to reverse this trend. My Social Security Preservation Act, HR 219 would make sure this Trust Fund has real assets such as certificates of deposit in FDIC-insured institutions so that in 2017 and beyond, Social Security payments would continue for those who are depending on them. Congress must take action now, so we can keep the promises we made to our seniors.