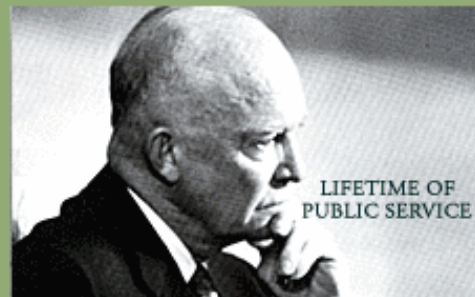


DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER MEMORIAL COMMISSION

It's time to build a national memorial to Dwight D. Eisenhower.



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Eisenhower and Social Security

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Dwight Eisenhower was the principal force behind the greatest single expansion of Social Security beneficiaries in the history of the program. He led the legislative drive to add over ten million Americans to the system. Here's how it developed.

When the Social Security Act became law in 1935 its purposes were primarily aimed at factory workers and other employees of business organizations. The legislative process leading to passage of the law was both lengthy and contentious. Large numbers of working American's were left out of the original Old Age and Survivors Insurance coverage. No major changes in the Social Security law had been made since its initial passage.

During the presidential campaign of 1952, candidate Eisenhower made it clear that he believed the federal government played a rightful role in establishing the Social Security system, but he made no promises concerning its future. However, after the election it became clear that the Republicans would have control, by slim margins, of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This changed the political and legislative landscape considerably.

Previously, expansion of the Social Security system or increasing the level of payments to retired Americans had been given no chance to succeed in the Congress because there were enough conservative Democrats (and the majority of Republicans) who would vote against such bills. With a Republican President it now appeared likely that the majority of congressional Republicans would honor their President and support his initiatives. Among the new legislative possibilities, action on Social Security now seemed possible.

Thirteen days after taking his oath of office, President Eisenhower delivered his first State of the Union message to Congress and, when discussing the need for greater effectiveness of government programs, he said, "The provisions of the old-age and survivors insurance law should promptly be extended to cover millions of citizens who have been left out of the social security system."

The following week, during a White House meeting of the House and Senate Republican leadership, Eisenhower brought up the Social Security expansion proposal and asked America's most famous living conservative, Senator Robert A. Taft, if he would support the initiative. When he received a positive reply he knew that the possible had just become the probable. Before the end of the month, Eisenhower appointed a presidential commission to study the Social Security system's deficiencies and submit a detailed report on specific reform measures. In his public statement creating the commission, the President said, "It is a proper function of government to help build a sturdy floor over the pit of personal disaster, and to this objective we are all committed."

Those opposed to the initiative stressed their belief that retirement income was the responsibility of every individual and the federal government should not be involved. One citizen should not have to pay for the old age necessities of another. President Eisenhower responded to this notion during his press conference on June 17, 1953 with these remarks: "A strict application, let us say, of economic theory, at least as taught by Adam Smith, would be, 'Let these people take care of themselves; during their active life they



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are supposed to save enough to take care of themselves.' In this modern industry, dependent as we are on mass production, and so on, we create conditions where that is no longer possible for everybody. So the active part of the population has to take care of all the population, and if they haven't been able during the course of their active life to save up enough money, we have these systems."



Oveta Culp Hobby, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare helped President Eisenhower achieve passage of his bill to admit an additional 10 million Americans to the Social Security system in 1954.

By early August the commission report was on his desk, and he sent a special message to the Congress transmitting the proposed changes in Social Security. Not only did the commission propose adding 10.5 million citizens to the Social Security rolls, but it recommended substantial increases in basic monthly benefit payments as well as increased support of disabled Americans. In his message President Eisenhower said that the changes, "...would add immeasurably to the peace of mind and security of the individual citizen who would be covered for the first time..." and "...they would add greatly to the national sense of domestic security."

By January, 1954 the bills were still in the relevant Senate and House committees even though hearings had been held and concluded. Eisenhower sent another special message to Congress urging action. In his message he stressed everyone's need for economic security in their old age by saying, "To help individuals provide for that security – to reduce both the fear and the incidence of destitution to the minimum – to promote the confidence of every individual in the future – these are proper aims of all levels of government, including the federal government."

On August 28, 1954 Eisenhower signed the Agricultural Act which brought 3.6 million farm operators and 2.1 million farm workers Social Security coverage. Four days later he signed the Social Security Amendments Act which brought almost another 5 million people (doctors, lawyers, dentists, architects, accountants and other

professionals as well as clergymen, and state and local retirement systems) into Social Security coverage.

Insight from the Presidential Papers:

<http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/presidential-papers/first-term/documents/1147.cfm>



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