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‘Nose above the water’: Cuts to Social Security workforce will affect recipients

Updated: Mar. 13, 2025, 6:04 a.m. | Published: Mar. 13, 2025, 6:00 a.m.



A Social Security Administration office building is seen March 6 in Nashville, Tenn. (George Walker IV / Associated Press) AP



By **Namu Sampath | nsampath@repub.com**

SPRINGFIELD — Carmen Oyola, a retired case manager for the New North Citizens' Council, is worried that recent changes to the Social Security Administration soon will affect her quality of life.

“How will us elderly people pay our bills?” she told a reporter while eating her lunch at the Raymond A. Jordan Senior Center in Springfield.

Earlier this week, the U.S. Department of Government Efficiency, the newly formed federal entity that monitors government spending, announced it would shutter nearly 50 SSA offices nationwide.

This comes on the heels of a decision in late February to eliminate 7,000 jobs and close down six regional SSA offices.



Carmen Oyola shares her thoughts about the Social Security program while having lunch at the Raymond Jordan Senior Center in Springfield. (Don Treeger / Special to The Republican) The Republican

James Winston, a Northampton attorney with a focus on Social Security disability appeals, said the recent cuts will not only affect his clients, but also the severed employees themselves.

“Everybody is nervous, and there is confusion because we’re not sure what is going to happen next,” he said. “Things are changing rapidly, and we’re bracing ourselves as things progress.”

During his run on the campaign trail, President Donald J. Trump vowed that he would not lay hands on the agency overseeing Social Security. His administration is still promising that it will protect social insurance programs, like Social Security and Medicare.

Winston disagrees. “Trump promised he wouldn’t touch the Social Security Administration, and now it’s clear he has,” he said.

Some of Winston’s clients have asked him if they are going to lose their Social Security benefits because of the workforce shortages, he said.

“This is a scary time for a lot of people, but especially those on Social Security,” he said. “People will see longer wait times, interruptions of service and increased chances of mistakes due to a lack of personnel.”

More than 160,000 people in Massachusetts rely on Social Security payments, according to January data from the agency. That’s about 2.3% of the state’s population.

So far, none of the office closures have been in Massachusetts.

Willie Grant, a resident of Springfield who receives Social Security disability insurance on a monthly basis, said Wednesday that he is concerned about what the Trump administration is doing. He’s worried about losing his benefits.

“Disability is my main income,” the 73-year-old said, while sitting at a table in the Senior Center. “They already cut the amount I get on my insurance.”

Grant said he can’t afford to pay for all of his expenses, for which he uses Medicare and fuel assistance.

“I just have to suffer,” he said. “I wish the Trump administration would add insurance back to my pay. That was a big deduction.”



Willie Grant shares his thoughts about the Social Security program while having lunch at the Raymond Jordan Senior Center in Springfield. (Don Treeger / Special to The Republican) The Republican

Meanwhile, sitting just one table over from Grant, John Albano, 81, said he isn't worried at all about recent changes to the SSA.

"Why should I be concerned?" he said.

Albano receives retirement checks through the Social Security system.

"There's too many people making a lot of money from their checks, and a lot of them are 100, 150, 200 years old," he said, referring to Trump's claims to Congress that there are allegedly "shocking levels of incompetence and probable fraud" within the federal income program.

A reporter's recent visit to the SSA's office in Springfield saw lines out the door. More than 50 people were waiting in the lobby for an appointment, and only six booths with employees were available.

“They have security at the door and only let 10 people in at a time nowadays,” said Oyola, who said the scene wasn’t like this last year.



John Albano shares his thoughts about the Social Security program at the Raymond Jordan Senior Center in Springfield. (Don Treeger / Special to The Republican) The Republican

Winston added that Martin O'Malley, the former commissioner of the SSA, who resigned when Trump was reelected, was an effective leader.

O'Malley, who is the former mayor of Baltimore, Maryland, and the former governor of the Free State, has been active on Elon Musk's X, vehemently disagreeing with what has been coming down the pipeline over the last 60 days.

He claimed that the Trump administration's gutting of the Social Security Administration's workforce and plan to drive employees out of an already understaffed agency "will break Social Security as we have known it for 90 years. Benefit check interruptions coming soon," he posted in February.

Earlier this month, he claimed on X that Trump was "laying the groundwork to dismantle Social Security in America," after the president's speech to Congress.



Ludlow Price shares his thoughts about the Social Security program while having lunch at the Raymond Jordan Senior Center in Springfield. (Don Treeger / Special to The Republican) The Republican

Ludlow Price, a 70-year-old former Springfield city employee who was sitting next to his wife at the senior center, said, "Losing Social Security is inevitable."

The system is in place for "us Baby Boomers," but he is praying for the people in the younger generations, he said.

"DOGE is enriching the wealthy while the majority of people suffer," he said.

Price said he and his wife have been planning for the last 20 years for their retirement and won't immediately feel the squeeze that others might.

"The cost of living is going up, and it's impossible to keep your nose above the water," he said.

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