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October 26, 2010

Mrs. Ellen A. Bruce  
86 Westbourne Terrace  
Brookline, MA 02446

Dear Mrs. Bruce:

Thank you for contacting my office regarding Social Security and Medicare. I appreciate your views and having the benefit of your opinion.

Social Security and Medicare are two of the most successful domestic programs in our nation's history. For seventy years, Social Security has provided basic economic security that families could rely on in times of need and has meant independence for generations of Americans. As a former member of the board of a Massachusetts-based community health plan, I also understand how important it is to ensure that Medicare continues to guarantee health care coverage for millions of Americans and people with long term disabilities.

I am absolutely committed to strengthening Social Security so that our national contract with America's workers endures for generations to come. I am a proud cosponsor of H.R. 235, the Social Security Fairness Act, which would ensure that dedicated firefighters, police officers, teachers, and other public servants are no longer deprived of a portion of their Social Security benefits each year as a result of the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision. This important legislation enables affected public servants to receive, in full, the Social Security benefits that they have rightfully earned throughout the course of their careers.

I recognize that Social Security checks are the primary source of income for millions of Americans. While prices overall have not risen sufficiently to trigger a cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) increase, seniors' expenses have continued to grow with the cost of medical care. Many seniors saw a lifetime of savings drastically reduced following the Wall Street collapse and have had to rely on Social Security to a greater extent than they had planned. That is why I joined my colleagues in sending a letter to President Obama urging him to include a one-time \$500 payment to seniors in his FY 2012 budget in lieu of no COLA for 2010 and 2011. Providing a payment for each of the last two years where there has not been a COLA increase will lessen the burden that our seniors are now facing.

Additionally, I am a proud cosponsor two pieces of legislation—H.R. 3536, the Social Security COLA Fix for 2010 Act, and H.R. 5987, the Seniors Protection Act of 2010—which seek to compensate seniors for the lack of a cost-of-living-adjustment in the past two years. H.R. 3536 authorizes a one-time payment of \$150 in Social Security benefits for 2010, and H.R. 5987

authorizes a one-time payment of \$250 for 2011. These payments, though modest, will help to alleviate some of the burden of no COLA for seniors who depended on it during the past two years. I have urged my colleagues to take up both pieces of legislation when Congress comes back into session in November.

Privatization of Social Security in any form, or cutting benefits beyond the already scheduled increase in the retirement age from 65 to 67 would create even more hardship for millions of Americans. With that in mind, I joined my colleagues in sending a letter to President Obama expressing my strong support for Social Security and my opposition to any cuts in Social Security benefits, including privatization and raising the retirement age. I am also a cosponsor of a resolution in the House of Representatives recognizing that raising the retirement age above 67 for future retirees would likely reduce benefits by 6 to 7 percent, and pledging that the retirement age for Social Security should not be raised.

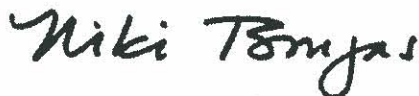
In 2008, I voted for the Medicare Improvements for Patients & Providers Act, which prevented scheduled cuts in payments to physicians under Medicare. This legislation helps to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries have access to physicians' care. I also voted last year to eliminate all premium increases for people who use Medicare Part B, which pays for doctor visits, given that seniors would not be getting a Social Security COLA in 2010. Most seniors have their Medicare premiums deducted from their Social Security payments.

I will continue to support initiatives designed to preserve the vital coverage Medicare provides for seniors so that this program can continue to provide accessible and affordable health care to millions.

Be assured that I am working to safeguard our commitment to current and future generations by protecting the promise of Social Security and Medicare.

Thank you again for taking the time to be in touch. Please do not hesitate to contact my office in the future with questions or concerns. If you would like to see what I've been doing on behalf of the Fifth District, or to get my views on a certain issue, please visit my website at <http://tsongas.house.gov>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Niki Tsongas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Niki Tsongas