Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 28, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush
President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr President:

We were appalled to hear Ways & Means Chairman Bill Thomas propose Sunday on "Meet the Press" that Social Security benefits should be based on race and gender. Chairman Thomas said that Congress "needs to consider how many years of retirement you get based on your race" and that women should receive fewer benefits each year because they tend to live longer than men. Asked if Congress would accept such an idea, Chairman Thomas didn't seem to know the answer.

The answer is "No," Mr. President. We, the undersigned members of Congress, will not accept a Social Security formula that is based on race or gender. This idea is unfair, it is unjust, it is profoundly anti-American. We call on you to repudiate it. We request a meeting with you to give you our views in person and receive your response.

Cutting benefits to those who need them most is counter to the core principles on which Social Security was founded. That great program is the financial safety net for all working Americans in their old age. All workers have earned their benefits and are entitled to them regardless of gender or race. Social Security's formulas are race and gender neutral and must remain so. To propose that women should receive fewer benefits because they tend to live longer denies benefits to retired women workers who depend on them to survive and is fundamentally wrong. To advocate that minorities should receive different benefits on the basis of their race is repugnant in a society that has renounced racial discrimination and where all persons are equal before the law.

Chairman Thomas' proposal attacks the most vulnerable among us. Retired women workers are twice as likely as men to live below the poverty line and to depend on Social Security as their sole means of support. For African-Americans, Social Security cuts the poverty rate from 59 percent to 21 percent.

Sunday was not the first time Chairman Thomas has proposed basing Social Security on race and gender, but it was the first time he made clear on national TV that he will advance this outrageous agenda in the Congress. It is time to make clear that Congress will not accept it. Nor should you or your Administration. Chairman Thomas' proposal goes against everything for which this great nation stands, and it is counter to our deepest moral values. We call on you to renounce clearly and unambiguously any change to Social Security benefits premised on race or gender.

Sincerely,

Carolyn B. Maloney

CAROLYN MALONEY
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.

FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Member of Congress

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

NANCY PELOSI
Member of Congress

DIANE WATSON
Member of Congress

TAMMY BALDWIN
Member of Congress

MICHAEL MICHAUD
Member of Congress

WILLIAM JEFFERSON
Member of Congress

GENE GREEN
Member of Congress

ALCEE HASTINGS
Member of Congress

STEVE ISRAEL
Member of Congress

DALE KILDEE
Member of Congress

MAXINE WATERS
Member of Congress

LYNN WOOLSEY
Member of Congress

GARY ACKERMAN
Member of Congress

JOE BACA
Member of Congress

RAUL GRIJALVA
Member of Congress

SHEILA JACKSON-LEE
Member of Congress

BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
Member of Congress

GWEN MOORE
Member of Congress

JERROLD NADLER
Member of Congress

LUIS GUTIERREZ
Member of Congress

SAM FARR
Member of Congress

ED MARKEY
Member of Congress

BOBBY RUSH
Member of Congress

TIM BISHOP
Member of Congress

MARTY MEEHAN
Member of Congress

ROBERT MENENDEZ
Member of Congress

MIKE HONDA
Member of Congress

DONALD M. PAYNE
Member of Congress

TOM LANTOS
Member of Congress

HENRY WAXMAN
Member of Congress

EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON
Member of Congress

JULIA CARSON
Member of Congress

AL GREEN
Member of Congress

MAURICE HINCHEY
Member of Congress

LORETTA SANCHEZ
Member of Congress

ELIJAH CUMMINGS
Member of Congress

LINDA SANCHEZ
Member of Congress

MAJOR R. OWENS
Member of Congress

ARTUR DAVIS
Member of Congress