

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON AGING

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April 30, 2010
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HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:
JESSICA S. LAPPIN
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Council Member Maria Del Carmen
Arroyo
Council Member Gale A. Brewer
Council Member Margaret S. Chin
Council Member Vincent J. Gentile
Council Member David G. Greenfield
Council Member Peter A. Koo
Council Member Karen Koslowitz
Council Member Melissa Mark-
Viverito
Council Member Deborah L. Rose
Council Member James Vacca

A P P E A R A N C E S [CONTINUED]

Jessica S. Lappin
Opening Statement
Chairperson
Committee on Aging

Charles B. Rangel
Congressman
15th District
New York City
United States Congress

Karen Resnick
Deputy Commissioner
External Affairs
Department for the Aging

Beth Finkel
Manages programs and services
New York State AARP

Karen Tinny
Policy Analyst
United Neighborhood Houses

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2 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Good afternoon
3 everyone. I'm Jessica Lappin, Chair of the City
4 Council's Aging Committee, joined today by Council
5 Member Melissa Mark-Viverito, Council Member Peter
6 Koo, and I know Council Member Arroyo is floating
7 around. And the topic of our hearing today is a
8 Resolution, Resolution number 7 which deals with
9 Social Security. And I wanted to welcome
10 everybody who's here today and thank you for
11 joining us.

12 The need for the Social Security
13 program is quite clear. Poverty among Americans
14 aged 65 and older significantly declined
15 throughout the 20th Century mostly due to the
16 implementation of programs like Social Security
17 and Medicare. However in New York City one-fifth
18 of older New Yorkers live in poverty compared to
19 10% nationwide. Additionally about 20% of all
20 elderly headed households earned an annual income
21 of below \$10,000.

22 Social Security is the major factor
23 in ensuring a modest standard of living for most
24 seniors and in preventing even more from falling
25 into poverty. As my mother always says it's not

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2 just a matter of the senior but it's a reason it's
3 called Social Security, it provides for the
4 society as a whole, security for all of us.

5 Since 1975 those who receive Social
6 Security benefits have received a modest yearly
7 increase due to a cost of living adjustment or
8 COLA that was tied to the inflation rate. This
9 past year however there we no COLA increase due to
10 the lack of an inflation rate increase as a result
11 of the recession. While the COLA was intended to
12 ensure that benefits maintain their value by
13 keeping up with inflation, this lack of COLA will
14 still create hardship for many of our seniors.

15 Though the inflation rate may be
16 zero for this year, seniors consistently face
17 rising costs on other fronts such as healthcare,
18 food, energy and housing costs. A COLA increase
19 would not eliminate those burdens but would
20 provide an additional cushion especially when many
21 seniors have factored in the likelihood of this
22 increase to their budgets already. The Federal
23 government in large part has recognized this issue
24 in their efforts to try to provide some sort of
25 payment in lieu of the COLA.

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2 President Obama has called on
3 Congress to authorize a second \$250 stimulus check
4 for Social Security recipients. And as of now
5 there are numerous bills pending in Congress to do
6 just that or something similar. That's why I've
7 introduced Resolution number 7 which we'll
8 consider today.

9 In short the resolution will call
10 upon the Federal government to enact legislation
11 to authorize this one-time \$250 stimulus payment.
12 And I think it's important that we have such a
13 leader in Congress, Congressman Rangel who's here
14 today, fighting for all of us. And I'm very much
15 looking forward to hearing from you on this issue.
16 And really the reason we introduced this
17 Resolution and are having this hearing is to help
18 you, to help you and your colleagues in your
19 efforts to take care of our City's seniors. And
20 so with that I would like to open it up and hear
21 from our esteemed Congressman.

22 CONGRESSMAN CHARLES B. RANGEL:

23 Thank you for such a very kind introduction and
24 tell you that it's a great honor for me to be
25 here. I didn't expect that we would be able to

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2 leave the Congress late last night but I was able
3 to do so. So I would hope and I ask unanimous
4 consent that the written statement that I
5 submitted would be put into the record and that I
6 be allowed to speak off of that record.

7 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: That would--
8 absolutely, we're very happy to do that.

9 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: Thank you so
10 much and thank you for the invitation. Councilman
11 Koo it's good to see you behind the desk rather
12 than just on television. And of course I see a
13 lot of my City Councilwoman Viverito as well as
14 Inez Dickens who I know that they're working so
15 hard for the people. But most importantly to me
16 that I cannot do well in the Congress unless my
17 City and State representatives are doing well.
18 And we, I think, more than most Congressional
19 District, we work as a team so that if an elderly
20 person has a problem, we don't look at it as a
21 Federal or State or City problem. We look to try
22 to do it.

23 This idea of having resolutions is
24 so very important especially in view of the fact
25 that the State of New York has a delegation that

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2 has to respond to a major city where so many of
3 our population and members come from. And when
4 other cities see the leadership that has been
5 provided by the New York City Council, whether
6 we're talking about immigration or health care or
7 Social Security, it does make a difference because
8 elected officials in the City and State are the
9 biggest lobbyists that we can have because they
10 come from our communities. They're there every
11 day. And they help us collectively to make a
12 decision.

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So what you're doing is so very,
very important. Not only to the New York
delegation but to every urban community that is
suffering these problems. Now my Committee has the
jurisdiction over Social Security, Medicare as
well as taxes and trade. And this act that has
been created has done more to get a larger number
of people who are elderly out of poverty than any
concept that any country has come up with.

You all are too young to remember.
My wife was a Social Worker. Young adults had the
responsibility, fiscally, to pay for the health
care or any care of their parents. And she worked

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2 for the New York City Welfare Department and had
3 to go to collect the money from children of the
4 elderly that owed money. Now everyone loves their
5 mother and mother-in-law but when you have to pay
6 money for them and deprive your children of a
7 college education, what a painful decision that
8 you have to make.

9 By removing that from the burden of
10 children, it allowed parents to have a little more
11 independence. But what has happened is that we
12 determine whether or not a person should be
13 entitled to an increase in their payment based on
14 a basket of wage earners as to whether or not it's
15 gone up or gone down to determine whether old
16 folks deserve an increase in their Social Security
17 check.

18 Well old folks' needs are not the
19 same as those people who are the wage earners. So
20 for the first time in years, they said there was
21 no inflation involved. And so therefore,
22 statistically and legally, they would not be
23 entitled to a raise. But that doesn't mean that
24 their life has not been made more uncomfortable.
25 Why? Because people are living longer, retiring

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earlier and unfortunately the Social Security check for so many millions of Americans is the only source of income that they have to call their own. This is theirs. They don't have to be dependent on children, on family, on anybody, but it's their check. And they have to live off of it.

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Fortunately there are other people sometimes in the family that are able to supplement it. They don't put it on income tax. They don't put it--a press release out but parents should expect that their children would be helping and children are glad to do it and grandchildren are glad to do it when what? When they have the resources to do it. Is that in the index? Is that a determination of the comfort of old people? No it's not there. And it's so totally unfair and we have to review how we do that.

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As you pointed out Madam Chairperson, the President said that even though health care is going to provide some relief for them in the future as it relates to access and costs, right now prescription drugs and other things have gone up. So he suggested that we

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2 contribute \$250 to try to compensate for that loss
3 of the automatic increase.

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5 My Committee reported it out. The
6 House supported it. And anybody that knows any
7 Senator has to ask why can't they move on the
8 issues that the House has that affects millions of
9 Americans. And I'm hopeful that this will be
10 done.

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12 But what I'm recommending that we
13 think about doing is not to use indexes that may
14 work out for the convenience of those people that
15 are out there with different types of needs in
16 terms of wages, in terms of clerical, what the
17 goods and services they buy. Old folks have
18 different needs and they live in different
19 circumstances. And they're supported by the check
20 but other things involved in the economy. When
21 the economy fails and the check doesn't increase
22 old folks have a particular problem and they have
23 that today.

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25 I would suggest that we find out
26 what are the things that people who are retired,
27 people on fixed income, what are the things that
28 they're dependent on and are those things there

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2 for them so that we don't think about the general
3 population but we think of the needs of the aged.
4 And so I really appreciate the fact that the City
5 Council is advising their Congress as to what they
6 could do to make life more comfortable for the
7 most vulnerable population that we have with the
8 exception of children.

9 And I welcome the opportunity to
10 come here and to support your efforts and to
11 answer as many questions as my time will permit.
12 And Councilwoman, I'm glad that you're here, and
13 Councilman. And there are more people here than I
14 normally see. And I'm flattered by your
15 attendance.

16 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: We love having
17 you here. I have a--yes it's really an honor. I
18 have just two questions. One, as you mentioned,
19 that your Committee and the House passed
20 legislation in support of this and it hasn't moved
21 in the Senate. Is there one particular bill in
22 the Senate that we should focus on? Because I
23 understand that there are multiple ways that they
24 could do it and maybe multiple pieces of
25 legislation in that House that we could best

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2 direct our efforts in terms of lobbying.

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4 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: I would advise
5 the City lobbyist down there as to which members
6 would be the best. My best relationship is with
7 Senator Bacchus who's the Chairman of the Senate
8 Finance Committee. But the Senate really works,
9 to use an expression, loosely and in an entirely
10 different way. They don't have the hearings. And
11 they don't have the opportunity. They put
12 packages together. And Social Security was a part
13 of a package. Since they didn't pass the package
14 that was sent, we have to find a different package
15 for them to attach this to.

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So the best way to do this of
course is to get the Chairman of the Finance
Committee to support the House and the President
in making certain that he determines how we're
going to raise the money in order to pay for the
\$250 so that yes, you can write Senator Reid. You
can write or get in touch politically with the
Chairman of the Finance Committee.

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But take my word for it. Getting
in touch with your Congressman and tell them to
get in touch with the Senate. It's going to help.

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2 And the fact that the City Council would support a
3 resolution means that we should believe that you
4 represent the people of the great City of--Welcome
5 Council Member Rose. I have to get out to the
6 island soon for reasons with which you are
7 familiar. But [chuckling] we have to realize that
8 you represent the people in all of our
9 Congressional Districts. And your concerns cannot
10 be ignored by the New York Congressional
11 delegation.

12 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: And you
13 mentioned potentially looking at a different
14 formula or looking past the Consumer Price Index.
15 And do you think we should be as a country
16 changing the formula that we use?

17 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: It's clear
18 that this one didn't work. They do the best they
19 can. They're trying to find some way that you
20 don't have to have hearings but you know if the
21 cost of living has gone up and you're on a fixed
22 income, automatically you would get it. But when
23 you are seeing how much it costs for someone
24 that's young and working, the increase or lack of
25 increase in inflation, that doesn't mean that a

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retired older person doesn't have other kinds of problems. You get old. You have different kinds of problems. And those people are working.

So if they were to get an increase or lack of increase in their pay, based on it, that's accurate but if you're not working, if you're old. You're on Social Security. You have a disability. The relationship between increase or decrease in the cost of living for working people have nothing to do with the problems that old folks face. So we have to really find some other kind of formula and I'm suggesting to the Committee that we take a look at the basket of old folks' problems. The absence of people in their families that are working that they normally could be dependent on support.

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: It makes a lot of sense. I wanted to note we've been joined by Council Member Koslowitz and Council Member Greenfield and I believe Council Member Greenfield has a question.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Thank you Congressman. And thank you for spending your Friday afternoon with us. I imagine that there

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2 are more exciting ways to spend a Friday
3 afternoon.

4 I'm a little bit new here so just a
5 little bit of a curiosity, wondering what you
6 think. When you have a situation like this one
7 where seniors are struggling, do you think it's
8 only the obligation of Congress to act? Or
9 perhaps should we in the City consider trying to
10 provide some sort of stipend for seniors
11 considering that they really are struggling today
12 to make ends meet?

13 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: I think that's
14 a judgment that members of the City Council have
15 to make. You have restrictions on your budget and
16 you have to make the determination as to what's in
17 the best interests of the people in the City of
18 New York and especially your constituents. I wish
19 my Congress would pay more attention to senior
20 citizens than they do for war and other areas that
21 to me does not make this a stronger country.

22 I wish that everybody would be so
23 educated that we will be able to be competitive to
24 take care of our old folks, our parents and
25 whatnot, without doing this when the economy--when

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2 people are working, they're generous. When
3 they're not working, unfortunately, the helpless
4 are the ones that are there. So if you believe
5 rather than--with the limited monies that you've
6 got to work with, if you believe that instead of
7 education or health care, your other liabilities,
8 that you should give a direct payment, hey, that's
9 a political decision you have to make. And I have
10 enough problems in making my own without giving
11 you advice.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Well I
13 for one think it's worth considering. But let me
14 ask you this question. Are there any particular
15 Senators that are holding it up in the Senate that
16 are preventing it from--preventing this
17 legislation from moving that we should target our
18 wrath at?

19 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: I'm going to
20 give you a very general answer--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD:
22 [Interposing] [Chuckling]

23 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: --besides
24 trying to once again get my name in the
25 newspapers. And that is this. All of us went to

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2 school believing that the House and the Senate
3 would do business by getting one half of a
4 majority. Now you don't have to be a genius to
5 know that's 50/50. But somehow the Democrats have
6 accepted the threats of the Republican minority
7 that on every issue that comes, whether it's
8 finance reform, health reform, that you have to
9 get 60 votes because they would filibuster that.
10 You can't name a Post Office without getting 60
11 votes.

12 And I hope that you would tell the
13 Democratic leadership how proud you would be as I
14 am with the fact that they told the Republican
15 minority on fiscal responsibility, we're going to
16 stay here and have you vote no just as long as the
17 American people know we can't debate it. This can
18 happen on any issue. And as long as we need 60
19 votes to pass anything I think it's distorts the
20 meaning of our great Constitution.

21 So no I'm not picking out
22 individuals because they have a mandate to operate
23 as one. And they're good Republicans that are
24 caught in this commitment to their party, no
25 matter how wrong and immoral that is. But I tell

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you Senator Reid stuck to his guns and said pull out the cots we're going to sleep here until we get something. And guess what. They're now going to have debate on that bill.

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And I'm saying not just for this issue but for any issue that's important to you, check with your Congressman and ask him, that it's not one, I mean I know good Republicans that are putting--jeopardizing their political career, but more importantly, that morally they believe it's wrong what they're doing. But not one have stepped forward and said count me with you. Indeed one Democrat has joined them. And it's political. And everyone knows that it is. So as the Dean of the delegation, if we have a problem and you can call your member to help us out, it'll help.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: But to be clear, the Republicans in the Senate don't support seniors.

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: I'm not going to make a generic statement. I'm just saying that they don't support legislation that the President and the Democratic majority believe is very, very

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2 important to make American strong. And old folks
3 are living longer. They're not going to go away.
4 And it the fact that we don't give them something
5 to live on doesn't mean that it's not costly.

6 It's very costly to be in the
7 hospital and to be in the intensive care unit, to
8 be disabled, to have hospitals have to take care
9 of you rather than taking care of yourself at
10 home. So poor folks and old folks aren't going
11 away. And to me if you talk about national
12 security, it's having a strong population. And we
13 can't do that by ignoring their needs.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Thank
15 you for your leadership Congressman.

16 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: We've been
17 joined by Council Member Debbie Rose which I
18 neglected to mention earlier--

19 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: [Interposing]
20 Yes indeed.

21 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: --and Council
22 Member Koo has a question.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Congressman
24 Rangel, welcome to City Council. And we have to
25 thank you for your many years of service to repent

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2 New York in Congress. We thank you very much for
3 that. My question is since we are running out of
4 money to support Social Security; I mean can we
5 change the concept of Social Security a bit
6 because right now we have too many people
7 depending on Social Security as their only source
8 of income when they get old.

9 But when Social Security was first
10 introduced it was meant to be a supplement of
11 income. Not the only source of income when people
12 get old. So maybe we can--can you do something to
13 change the name of the Department, to the Social
14 Supplementation Department? And we receive social
15 supplement, not Social Security. Because security
16 is a misnomer for old people. They think oh, I
17 get old; I can depend on the government to give me
18 enough income.

19 I mean for future generations you
20 have to stretch this idea to say Social Security
21 is supplementation of income, not your only
22 income. I mean I support this \$250 one-time deal
23 to help the senior people. But as we all know, we
24 don't have enough money for future generations to
25 receive Social Security. So--

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CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: [Interposing]

Let me just say two things. It won't have any fiscal impact but I would give consideration of changing the name. But to say--

COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: [Interposing]

And these people will know this is supplementation not security--

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: [Interposing]

Well whether they know it or not, you can't pay rent and hospital bills knowing it's how much money are you going to get. And we're not running out of money as long--we have to make decisions as to how we're going to spend our resources that we have. We may be running out of money in Iran and Iraq and Afghanistan but your country is getting more and more in debt.

And we're borrowing more and more money and we're paying for a lot of things. Old folks are just one of the considerations. They're living longer. No one expected, you know, a guy 80 years old coming here talking to you youngsters but these things happen. And people live a lot longer and they have different kinds of problems. So you can call it anything you want.

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2 What you're trying to do with this
3 resolution is for us to protect these people.
4 I'll consider the name change and also the special
5 needs. But you can supplement it. You can add to
6 it. You can increase it. You can eliminate it
7 and provide another method. But so far the best
8 thing that we have going in terms of legislation
9 that I can think of is Social Security. Can it be
10 improved? You bet your life. And we have to do
11 it soon.

12 Madam Chairlady, I shared with you
13 earlier that I had to be able to leave. But I
14 promise you that any questions that the Council
15 people have, if you can get them to me in writing
16 I will be more than glad to answer the best that I
17 can--

18 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: [Interposing]
19 May I allow one thing which would be your
20 Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito had a very
21 brief question.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: And
23 it's actually not a question however--

24 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: [Interposing]
25 I would not--I would not want it any other way Ms.

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2 Chairlady.

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COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: But

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I could not, you know, leave or have you leave

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without my being able to say that I'm very proud

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that you are my Congressman obviously, but I

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believe that you're not just my Congressman,

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you're all of our Congress representatives because

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you really speak up on the issues that are

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critically important to our communities. You

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stand strong. You're not afraid to say what is

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real and it's always proud when I see you on TV

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really standing up, again, for the issues that we

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know are the right ones.

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When you speak out against the war

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and you've done that. You were saying about how

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you have better ways of allocating those monies to

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really invest in our communities and invest in our

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future, invest in our seniors. When you speak

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about poverty and the reality of this country and

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that we really need to address it. I'm very proud

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that you're here with us today sharing your

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thoughts.

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And thank you for your steadfast

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leadership in the Congress and again really

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2 putting priority and importance on the issue. So
3 thank you very much for your hard work in our
4 District and what you do for this nation, it means
5 a lot to all of us.

6 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: You're sweet,
7 it means--your friendship, your support and the
8 contributions you make personally mean a lot to me
9 beyond politics. And I'm deeply appreciative.
10 And the only reason I have taken the time out to
11 come to the City Council is basically thank you
12 for these types of resolutions.

13 Some may say, as reporters have,
14 what the heck are you doing, dealing with a
15 Federal issue with the member of the City Council
16 have no jurisdiction. Your constituents don't
17 care whether it's a City or a State or Federal
18 problem. If they have a problem, they want help.
19 If we can't help you to help us then this is not
20 the great nation that we want it to be. So thank
21 you so much--

22 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: [Interposing]
23 Thank you very much. Keep up the fight. We've
24 got your back.

25 CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: You can depend

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on it. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: And with that I want to thank DFTA for allowing the Congressman to testify first and welcome--

CONGRESSMAN RANGEL: [Interposing]
Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: --up our Deputy Commissioner, Karen Resnick.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: And note that we have been joined by Council Member Jimmy Vacca.

[Pause]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAREN RESNICK:
You should have warned me that I was going to be following Congressman Rangel.

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: [Chuckling] He does have a way with words.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RESNICK: I know. Good afternoon Chair Lappin and members of the Aging Committee. My name is Karen Resnick and I'm the Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs at the Department for the Aging. I'm happy to be here this afternoon to discuss the importance of Social Security as an antipoverty program for the

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elderly.

A brief history, the Social Security Act was originally signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935 as part of the New Deal. By dollars paid the US Social Security program is the largest government program in the world and the single greatest expenditure in the Federal budget with 20.8% for Social Security compared to 20.5% for discretionary defense and 20.1% for Medicare and Medicaid.

Social Security is currently the largest social insurance program in the US constituting 37% of government expenditures and 7% of gross domestic product. In 2004 the US Social Security system paid out almost \$500 billion in benefits.

Social Security benefits have a powerful poverty-preventing effect among the elderly. An analysis of census data shows that nationwide Social Security benefits lift nearly 13 million seniors aged 65 and older above the poverty line. These figures reflect a 3-year average for the period from 2000 through 2002. The data indicate that without Social Security

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2 income nearly 1 of every 2 elderly people, 46.8%
3 would have an income below the poverty line.

4 However once Social Security
5 benefits are taken into account, just 1 in 12 of
6 8.7% is poor. The remarkable degree to which
7 Social Security benefits reduce poverty is found
8 in every state in the nation. If Social Security
9 income was excluded then more than 40% of the
10 elderly in 45 states would have income below the
11 Federal poverty line.

12 With Social Security the elderly
13 poverty rate in large majority of state is less
14 than 10%. In fact in New York State alone Social
15 Security lifts 872,000--million (sic), elderly
16 people above the poverty line reducing the elderly
17 poverty rate from 50.2% to 8.7%.

18 As an antipoverty program Social
19 Security is particularly important to women.
20 Elderly unmarried women including widows get 51%
21 of their total income from Social Security.
22 Unmarried elderly men get 39% while elderly
23 married couples get 36% of their income from
24 Social Security. For 25% of unmarried women,
25 Social Security is their only source of income

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2 compared to 9% of married couples and 20% of
3 unmarried men. Without Social Security benefits
4 the elderly poverty rate among women would be
5 approximately 52% and among widows, 60.6%.

6 We know that the importance of
7 Social Security to older adults in New York City
8 cannot be understated. While Social Security
9 provides a modest income when considering the cost
10 of living in New York City, it also provides a
11 basic safety net for older adults that when used
12 in tandem with other assets and benefits can help
13 seniors achieve self-sufficiency.

14 We know that poverty is a serious
15 concern among seniors in New York City and while
16 poverty rates among older adults have declined
17 nationally by 9%; rates in New York City have
18 actually increased by 27%.

19 According to the Center for
20 Economic Opportunity, CEO, the poverty rate among
21 those age 65 and over is 32% as compared to the
22 Federal poverty rate of 18.1% a difference of 13.9
23 percentage points. Today 22% of elderly headed
24 households in New York City earn less than
25 \$10,000. Even more alarming are the poverty rates

1
2 in some minority communities with poverty among
3 Asian seniors at 36%, and Hispanic seniors at 41%.
4 We believe that much of this disparity is
5 attributed to the fact that more recent immigrants
6 often have not accrued enough time working to be
7 eligible for Social Security and Medicare.

8 In absence of these key safety nets
9 many seniors from minority communities are left
10 particularly vulnerable. Helping older adults
11 qualify for Social Security by remaining in the
12 formal workforce or reentering the workforce is an
13 important role for policy makers at all levels of
14 government. In order to qualify for Social
15 Security and Medicare, individuals must work in
16 the United States for a combined total of 40
17 quarter or 10 years.

18 In an analysis of 2008, American
19 Community Survey, CEO found that 21% of New
20 Yorkers aged 65 and older reported no Social
21 Security income and that among foreign born
22 residents this figure was 31%. At this point we
23 do not know how many of these residents are near
24 eligibility so as those with between 30 and 40
25 quarters as the Social Security Administration is

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required to protect personal information.

The City also does not have a formal role in outreach or enrollment in Social Security. This work is done through Federal Social Security offices throughout the City. That being said, DFTA is interested in educating our constituency on the benefits of Social Security and we're currently examining ways that we can help people who are near eligibility qualify for benefits.

Our logical place to look to is the City's existing employment programs such as DFTA's Senior Employment Services Program also known as Title 5. DFTA volunteers for our Health Insurance Information Counseling and Assistance Program or HICAP are also trained by the Social Security Administration each year.

It is important for these volunteers to have a background in Social Security due to the parallel eligibility criteria between Medicare and Social Security. Thank you again for allowing me to have this opportunity to discuss the importance of Social Security particularly in the context of combating poverty among the elderly

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2 in New York. And I'm happy to take your
3 questions.

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CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: My question is
5 really just, you know, as you mentioned obviously
6 you don't have a formal role in doing outreach for
7 Social Security. But it's in the benefit of all
8 of our seniors to help them qualify and then
9 ultimately obtain those benefits. So can you
10 elaborate just a little bit on what DFTA does do,
11 even though you're not required to do it?

12

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RESNICK: We do
13 have a very good solid working relationship with
14 our local colleagues in the Social Security
15 Administration. And as I mentioned they do help
16 train our HICAP workers because of the
17 relationship between Medicare and Social Security.
18 But by and large if we do get questions regarding
19 Social Security we do refer to local Social
20 Security offices.

21

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: And how do you
22 work with the City's existing workforce programs
23 to try and get people into the workforce to help
24 them qualify?

25

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RESNICK: We,

1
2 at the Department, do run a Title 5 older worker
3 program where those who are 55 and over and fall
4 below a certain income eligibility criterion, we
5 train and help get jobs in the workplace. So it's
6 a job employment program.

7 And if we were able to identify
8 those who are in those--where they're short a
9 certain number of quarters we see that there
10 potentially is an opportunity to help bring
11 additional people into the program and try and
12 help them earn those quarters so that they could
13 become eligible for the Social Security--

14 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: [Interposing]
15 Do you have that information if somebody is just a
16 little bit short?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RESNICK: We do
18 not currently have that information. It's a
19 potential collaboration.

20 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: With the
21 Federal government.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RESNICK: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: But they have
24 that information I would imagine, right?

25 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RESNICK: We

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think that they would have that information.

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: And then
would--because do they do anything with that?
Like if somebody is one quarter shy?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RESNICK: Don't
think so. I think there's a strict eligibility
that you have to have the 40 quarters. And if
you're short, you are just not eligible.

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Hum.
Interesting. Okay. Do any of my colleagues have
questions? Great. Thank you very much.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RESNICK: My
pleasure.

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: The next pane
will have Beth Finkel from AARP and Karen Tinny
from United Neighborhood Houses.

[Pause]

SERGEANT AT ARMS: I'll take it.
I'll take it ladies. Over here.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Beth why don't
you kick us off.

MS. BETH FINKEL: Sorry, I'm a
friendly person--

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[Laughter]

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CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: [Interposing]

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That's all right.

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MS. FINKEL: I'm Beth Finkel. And

5

I manage the programs and services for AARP for

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New York State. And we have offices here in 3rd

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Avenue and we also have offices in Albany and in

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Rochester and staff here in New York. AARP is a

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not-for-profit, nonpartisan membership

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organization that helps people 50+ have

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independence and choice and control in ways that

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are beneficial and affordable to them and society

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as a whole.

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I'm not going to go through the

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whole description of AARP because I hope you all

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are well aware of everything we do. I do want to

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just particularly highlight that we have close to

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40 million members in the country. Here in New

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York City, New York State we have 2.6 million

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members and in New York City proper, the 5

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Boroughs, we have over 800,000 members so thank

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you.

23

I'm really--I know everyone knows

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the regular AARP. You know our for-profit side

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1
2 and you know the regular AARP which I work for
3 which does advocacy and programs and services.
4 And then we also have our foundation side which I
5 know many of you are aware of a lot of the good
6 stuff that our foundation does. And it's kind of
7 pursuant to what you're doing today.

8 So I just want to briefly mention
9 we have a tax ed program where we help people fill
10 out their taxes at no cost and it's totally
11 volunteer run, no one gets any stipends or
12 anything. We also have a work search project
13 where we have an online tool that helps connect
14 older people to jobs and takes them through a
15 whole assessment process and then also connects
16 them to an aggregator to find jobs.

17 And we also do counseling, resume
18 preparedness, other job preparedness. And we also
19 help people with our money management program. We
20 help people who can't write their own checks any
21 more but can still remain independent.

22 And we send volunteers into their
23 homes to help them do that. And we also have a
24 benefits quick link site on our website where
25 people can scan and see if they are eligible for

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2 benefits. It's totally anonymous. You put in
3 your zip code and you put in--answer some
4 questions and they just tell you. So if you don't
5 want to share anything else like your Social
6 Security number or anything else you don't. So
7 it's a very good first grasp to see if someone
8 might be eligible. So. I wanted to mention that.

9 We would like to first of all thank
10 you so much for convening this hearing today.

11 It's so important. AARP has a very strong support
12 for providing this \$250 in economic relief to
13 America's seniors, veterans and persons with
14 disabilities AARP is very pleased to endorse what
15 you're doing today and we've already really spent
16 a lot of time lobbying on this at the Federal
17 level. And our CEO, Barry Rand has both testified
18 and written letters. And we've mounted quite a
19 grassroots campaign on this originally. So this
20 is wonderful to have you also in support of our
21 efforts on this.

22 Like many individuals throughout
23 the country, America's seniors are struggling to
24 make ends meet due to the impact of the worst
25 economic crisis since the Great Depression. Older

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2 Americans however are facing very unique financial
3 difficulties and are acutely impacted by the
4 nation's economic downturn. For instance although
5 the prices of many goods and services have
6 stagnated or declined, many older Americans do not
7 feel the effects of lower inflation on their
8 pocketbooks.

9 Seniors spend a disproportionate
10 share of their income, about 30% on the average,
11 on health care costs. We all know those have not
12 come down yet. We have high hopes now with the
13 new health care reform passing but that doesn't
14 help the immediate need and a senior's pocketbook
15 right now. So the combination of the higher
16 health costs including prescription drug prices
17 and a stagnant Social Security benefit in 2010 is
18 particularly troubling and has resulted in lower
19 net Social Security payments to millions of
20 America's seniors.

21 Moreover many senior citizens have
22 lost a significant portion of their retirement
23 savings due to the recent downturn. Unlike
24 younger Americans however these retirees have less
25 time to make up the substantial losses to their

1
2 retirement savings. The decline in housing prices
3 in many parts of the country may also cause severe
4 difficulties for those seniors who need to tap
5 into the equity of their homes in order to fund
6 their retirement.

7 Providing a \$250 in economic relief
8 to seniors is a simple, direct way for Congress to
9 help them afford food, medicine and other
10 necessities. \$250 in relief will inject money
11 directly into the economy, since seniors are more
12 likely to spend the money they receive like that,
13 than any other age group. I think an example is--
14 and many of you probably know this that like Food
15 Stamps, when seniors receive Food Stamps, for
16 every \$1 they receive, \$1.84 goes back for
17 economic stimulus.

18 So I think that shows you how
19 important providing support for seniors means not
20 just for them but also for the local economy. And
21 we're going to be looking a lot more at Food Stamp
22 enrollment issues going forward because we know
23 that's the first line of defense. If people are
24 hungry, it's really had to focus on anything else.
25 And there's a lot of opportunity around Food Stamp

1
2 and Food Stamp enrollment amongst seniors in New
3 York, in New York State.

4 So at this time when seniors who
5 normally count on an annual Social Security
6 increase did not receive a cost of living increase
7 for 2010, this is the first time since automatic
8 adjustments were originally provided in 1975 that
9 beneficiaries have not received the COLA. And I
10 know you're aware of that and that's why you're
11 convening us here today. Many of these Americans
12 have suffered significant economic harm over the
13 past year and a half and are depending on Congress
14 to provide relief.

15 So thank you again for giving us
16 this opportunity to testify here today. Many
17 individuals have suffered significant economic
18 harm and are depending on you and on Congress at
19 this time so thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Thank you Beth
21 for all of your grassroots activism across the
22 country in mobilizing people to call their
23 respective Congress people and tell them that this
24 is important. Karen would you?

25 MS. KAREN TINNY: Is this on?

1
2 Okay. I'm going to read 'cause I get nervous if I
3 just speak. Good afternoon. Thank you Chair
4 Lappin and members of the Aging Committee for
5 convening this hearing and for the opportunity to
6 testify. My name is Karen Tinny [phonetic] and
7 I'm here on behalf of the United Neighborhood
8 Houses, thank you, where I serve as a Policy
9 Analyst.

10 As you know United Neighborhood
11 Houses is a membership organization of New York
12 City Settlement Houses and Community Centers.
13 Rooted in the history of values of the Settlement
14 House movement, UNH promotes and strengthens the
15 neighborhood-based multi-service approach to
16 improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the
17 communities in which they live.

18 United Neighborhood Houses
19 membership comprises one of the largest human
20 service systems in New York City with 38 agencies
21 working at more than 400 sites to provide high
22 quality services and activities to half a million
23 New Yorkers each year. UNH supports its members
24 through policy development, advocacy and capacity
25 building activities.

1
2 UNH members have a strong
3 commitment to older New Yorkers and the providers
4 who serve them. Every year since 1975 Social
5 Security and Social Security income beneficiaries
6 have received a cost of living adjustment to
7 account for inflation. This year is different.
8 As you know there is no COLA. Moreover the
9 President's budget assumes that there will be no
10 COLA in 2011 and only a 1.4% COLA in 2012. In
11 2009 the COLA was 5.8% and that was because of the
12 higher gas prices.

13 To reconcile the current situation,
14 President Obama called for a \$250 economic
15 stimulus payment for these beneficiaries and
16 included a provision for such in the national jobs
17 bill. It was estimated to cost \$13 billion.
18 Unfortunately the provision didn't make it to the
19 final version of the jobs bill that was signed
20 into law on March 18th. We applaud the City
21 council for its resolution to urge Congress to
22 pass an economic stimulus payment to seniors and
23 people with disabilities. We are very dismayed to
24 hear that Federal lawmakers felt the provision
25 would not have made a difference in the lives of

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2 57 million Americans who could have benefited.

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Based on the cost of living in New York City it is estimated that 32% of seniors, 1 in 3, live in poverty. Undoubtedly for this population a one-time payment of \$250 is likely to have made a significant difference. I spoke with many of my seniors and I got some of the data from them, what \$250 would mean. \$250 could be the difference between a senior taking a cholesterol lowering pill 2 times a day as prescribed or saving pills and taking it once a day because of cost. It could have been the difference between eating or skipping dinner. And it could be the difference between paying a utility bill or not. On a fixed income every penny counts.

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I brought my Blackberry over here because I didn't include this in my testimony but I asked a gentleman who's very close and dear to my heart, you know, what this would mean to him and he wrote a nice little response.

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When you are a senior citizen living on a fixed income you appreciate anything you get. My monthly pension will be the same now as it will be in 20 years from now, no cost of

1
2 living increases. Now they freeze Social
3 Security. It doesn't make it any easier to live
4 with the prices going up all over the place for
5 everything you have to buy. Aside from the drop
6 in gas prices in the past couple of years what
7 else went down or stayed the same? I don't know
8 how they figured the Social Security freeze in
9 payments but it sure seems to seniors nothing else
10 is frozen in prices.

11 So United Neighborhood Houses on
12 behalf of its members and seniors they serve
13 support the City Council's resolution to the US
14 Congress to provide an economic stimulus payment
15 to seniors. Thank you very much.

16 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Thank you.
17 And thank you for providing some of the real life
18 face of this. And it is very meaningful to
19 people. And it's not an insignificant amount of
20 money. Do any of my colleagues have any questions
21 for this panel? Thank you very much. And I
22 wanted to note that Council Member Gale Brewer has
23 joined us. Is there anybody else who would like
24 to speak today? Seeing nobody else signed up to
25 testify, this hearing is now closed.

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[Gavel banging]

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CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Adjourned.

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[END 1002.MP3]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Laura L. Springate certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura L. Springate". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Signature _____Laura L. Springate_____

Date _____May 13, 2010_____