

# Paul Nannis: Ron Johnson is wrong, Social Security should be kept out of partisan politics

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Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson [suggested](#) on August 2 that Social Security should be stripped of its mandatory spending status, a move that would subject this essential program to yearly political wrangling and jeopardize the benefits on which over a million people in the Badger State rely. And especially right now, just as Wisconsinites are struggling to cope with record high inflation, we cannot afford to let Social Security become a pawn in Washington's partisan games. Having just passed the program's 87th anniversary on August 14, now is the time to strengthen the benefits guaranteed to our most vulnerable citizens.

Social Security is currently designated as a mandatory spending program, and it's funded by taxpayers who automatically receive their benefits once they turn 65. According to congressional [statistics](#), as of December 2021 there were more than 1.2 million Wisconsin residents benefiting from Social Security. Johnson's suggestion would recategorize Social Security funding as discretionary spending, a contentious designation that would mean Wisconsinites' Social Security benefits would have to be approved every year by Congress.

Unfortunately, Congress is hopelessly gridlocked on most issues, and that gridlock is at its ugliest every time Congress debates whether or not to authorize discretionary funds. It isn't hard to imagine what would happen if Wisconsinites' hard-earned benefits were put in the hands of a legislative body that can barely agree to fund the government each year. And even if one impasse in Congress were resolved, there's no guarantee that a future congressional majority wouldn't try to strip Social Security from the people who need it the most.

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Older Wisconsinites can't afford to have their benefits jeopardized after working hard for decades and expecting a comfortable retirement. It would be a slap in the face to those in our state living on fixed incomes, especially when those same residents have been hit hardest by inflation. While some can afford to retire without worrying about being crushed by high inflation, many Wisconsinites aren't so lucky. Wisconsin's inflation rate in July was [6.8%](#), meaning normal basic expenses like groceries are still higher than usual. Moreover, older Wisconsinites have to contend with routine medical expenses like prescription drugs. When you add all those costs up, Social Security is probably the only way some Badger State residents can pay their bills without draining their savings.

Eighty-seven years ago, Social Security was established to ensure no Americans would be left behind if they were retired or disabled. In both times of prosperity and of crisis, Wisconsin's older residents have counted on Social Security as a safety net. The least we can do to honor that legacy is to strengthen those benefits and ensure they don't fall victim to partisan politics.

*- Paul Nannis is a public health professional and former City of Milwaukee Health Commissioner. He resides in Southeast Wisconsin.*