

JOTTINGS

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Charity begins at home

How many babies were born in the United States between January 1st, 1917, and December 31st, 1921? And how many lived to grow up, get jobs, marry, and work for a living? And how many died before reaching the age of 65?

Somebody, somewhere, must know the answers. Given them, we could answer another question: How many people, entitled to receive Social Security benefits, are collecting, or are about to collect, approximately \$100 a month less than eligible recipients born earlier than 1917 or later than 1921?

The last answer is the most important. Only if enough people are adversely affected will legislation pass to correct a serious inequity. An Act of Congress is required to make the change.

The problem arises from an obscure clause in legislation adopted some years ago. The clause pertains only to those born in 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, and 1921, and reduces Social Security benefits to them.

The law affects both men and women. It also affects women whose husbands were born during those years because a wife's benefits, when she collects retirement on her spouse's work record, is based on the amount to which he is entitled.

Some women, those with earnings records of their own, may collect payments on their own accounts, but since most wives earn lower wages than their male counterparts, their benefits are often higher if based on their husbands' records.

Last year a bill (HR-5469) to remove the unfair penalty died in committee at the end of the 1982 congressional session.

If our congressmen feel enough pressure from constituents, a duplicate bill will be filed and will pass. If enough of us write of our concern, representatives will push for such a bill. If we do nothing, our congressmen will do nothing.

For those standing to lose thousands in retirement income,

the time and effort to write, and the postage, are worthwhile investments. For the unaffected, making the effort could seem a waste. Why should they care?

That raises an even greater, an even more important question: Are not all of us under moral obligation to assure that every American is treated fairly? Is that not every American's responsibility?

While the group may not be large compared with the total number of Social Security recipients, to each of them this issue is economically significant.

Most of the men involved, and some of the women, are veterans of World War II. All of them, surely, deserve support from fellow-Americans. Those who survived that war devoted up to five years of their lives between 1940 and 1945 for their country.

To get a rough estimate of the number of people who may be affected, we turn to World War II statistics: nearly fifteen million Americans wore a uniform during WWII. Of those, over a million died during the war. We can assume, since all able-bodied men aged 18 to 45 years were being drafted during those years, that only about one-fifth were born between 1917 and 1921. Presumably, fatal accidents and illnesses have further reduced their numbers. An equal number of women were born. Perhaps we can estimate roughly five million retirees are, or will be, affected.

A relatively small percentage of retiring Americans...not enough to change a federal law...but someday it might be YOUR turn to ask for help in protecting YOUR rights to fair and equal treatment! A post card to your congressman will tell him that you believe action is required. Democracy is everyone's business.

— Andrea Leonard