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**Claude Pepper's 125th Birthday -- Need His Courage Now
On Social Security, Health Care, the Vulnerable**



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As we celebrate Senator and Congressman Claude Peppers 125th birthday this month (September 8), it is an impactful reminder of all the work Pepper did not only for for his Floridian community, but the nation's elderly population and people lacking equal rights. We need Pepper's courage now on Social Security, health care, and the vulnerable. Some may remember him on the cover of Time Magazine on April 25th, 1983, as Americas "Spokesman for the Elderly. Earlier, he was on the cover of Time on May 2nd, 1938, as a powerful and strong-voiced young senator.

Even 36 years after his passing in 1989, through his tireless work Social Security remains solvent with a 2.7 trillion-dollar surplus because of his deal with President Reagan and Tip O'Neill. More than five million Floridians and 74 million Americans receive Social Security benefits -- the most successful social program in American history, protecting seniors from poverty.

During his Senate career, was a close ally of FDR in forging both domestic programs and bringing world allies together for the Lend-Lease World War II efforts. His early promotion and support of the Lend Lease Act of 1941 allowed the allied forces in World War II to fend off Axis forces until American involvement later in the war.

As a United States Senator and Congressman, he was the most prominent advocate for elderly rights, including elder abuse, banning mandatory retirement, protecting social security, and protection in nursing homes.

Pepper also undoubtedly showed his fairness to bipartisan issues as chairman on the Select Committees on Crime, the Aging Committee, and finally the Rules Committee which shepherded all bills to the House floor. He consistently collaborated with Republican colleagues in Congress to advance civil rights and government support for Americans. His effort for bipartisan cooperation should still be learned from by Democrats today. His bill to abolish mandatory retirement on age alone passed 359-2 in the House and 89-10 in the Senate.

His work as a public servant still; impacts millions of Americans today. His efforts for elderly rights, health institutes at NIH, and advancing civil rights are helping people today.

Claude Pepper famously said to Congress What have I done today to lighten the burden upon those who suffer?

Cong. Pepper pushed for an end to mandatory retirement, stricter legislation on elder abuse, passing Medicaid/Medicare to assist the elderly, expanding home healthcare and nursing home protections.

It wasn't just the elderly Claude Pepper worked throughout his career to advance. Claude Pepper was an early supporter of the equal rights amendment. He attempted in 1945 to establish the Fair Employment Practices Committee for equal rights for black Americans and women. The same year he tried to pass a bill in the Senate passing equal rights for women. He was a key and early supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment when it was initially passed in 1972 by Congress.

Senator/Cong. Pepper consistently supported bills in the House for equal rights, fair pay, and anti-discrimination. He continued this work throughout the 1970s and 1980s, introducing legislation that helped with equal opportunities, cancer, and health research.

As our country continues to face challenges posed by political extremism, cuts to federal funding, and general uncertainty, Claude Peppers memory should remain alive. It should also be time for new Democrats to step up to Peppers stature and courage to the American people.

As Social Security still hangs in the balance of severe funding cuts, we should look towards Peppers work. He told Presidents Reagan and Carter that he would fight it to our death to oppose privatization or benefits reductions and would support Social Security.

Here is a link to a short (13 minutes) video we created with the support of the Claude Pepper Foundation with some of the best clips of statements by Congressman/Senator

Pepper: [.youtube.com/watch?v=wGeQGa_8RYM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGeQGa_8RYM)

It's clear that we need Claude Pepper's courage now.

Robert Weiner was Chief of Staff of the House Aging Committee under Cong. Claude Pepper. He has also worked for Congressmen Ed Koch, Charles Rangel, John Conyers, Sen. Ted Kennedy, and 4-Star Gen. Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey in the White House under the Clinton and Bush administrations.

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