

IS MARK WARNER THE DESIGNATED SOCIAL SECURITY KILLER?

The propaganda the Administration has put out to spin the debt capitulation as a win—"victory!" "bipartisan!" "compromise!"—would be amusing if the deal weren't so dangerous. In addition to all the language claiming that cutting expenditures during a Depression—described here as "remov[ing] the cloud of uncertainty— will help the economy, there are these two bullets:

- Establishes a bipartisan process to seek a balanced approach to larger deficit reduction through entitlement and tax reform;
- Deploys an enforcement mechanism that gives all sides an incentive to reach bipartisan compromise on historic deficit reduction, while protecting Social Security, Medicare beneficiaries and low-income programs;

Bullet 3 says this deal establishes a process to bring about entitlement reform. Bullet 4 claims the deal protected Social Security and Medicare. Both of these bullets can't be true.

Which has set off a discussion about whether SuperCongress is only **possibly** going to cut Medicare and Social Security, or will **almost certainly** do so.

I wanted to look at how the membership of the predecessor committees to SuperCongress—the Catfood Commission and the Gang of Six—to

suggest which is more likely.

As you recall, the Catfood Commission members voted 11-7 in favor of passing the Commission's recommendations, which included raising the retirement age. The members of Congress on the Commission voted this way:

- Tom Coburn: Yes
- Judd Gregg: Yes*
- Mike Crapo: Yes
- Kent Conrad: Yes
- Dick Durbin: Yes
- Max Baucus: No
- Paul Ryan: No
- Jeb Hensarling: No
- Dave Camp: No
- Jan Schakowsky: No
- Xavier Becerra: No
- John Spratt: Yes*

Assuming for the sake of argument that the members who are still in Congress would be part of SuperCongress, that would make for a stalemate—though Republican opposition focused on Obama's healthcare reform, not on the package of entitlement cuts and tax breaks for the rich that the commission recommended.

Both Judd Gregg and John Spratt are gone. Rather than replace Judd Gregg, the former Ranking Member of the Budget Committee with his functional equivalent, Jeff Sessions, Mitch McConnell will likely put Saxby Chambliss on SuperCongress, as Chambliss has been involved in the Gang of Six discussing a deficit reduction plan. John Spratt's functional equivalent would be Chris Van Hollen, a not horrible addition for liberals. (Update: Or maybe he's just like Durbin, a so-called liberal who will support this crap.)

But it's not safe to assume Harry Reid will just pick the Senators who served on the Catfood Commission for SuperCongress. After Max Baucus

voted no on the Catfood Commission, saying, "we cannot cut the deficit at the expense of veterans, seniors, ranchers, farmers and hard-working families," he was replaced on the Gang of Six. Joe Biden and Harry Reid replaced him with Mark Warner, a man worth more than \$200 million who has spent much of the tenure of the Gang of Six insisting that working Americans with whom he shares little in common won't mind so much if they have to work another two years before they can retire.

In other words, one change we've already seen happen between the Catfood Commission and the Gang of Six is the replacement of Max Baucus, who proved unwilling to push through the \$4 trillion deficit plan Obama has been chasing, with Mark Warner, who is all too willing to champion entitlement cuts for poor people.

If his newly central role in these discussions stands, we can be pretty sure we'll see cuts to Social Security. And heck, if he won't do the deed, then alleged liberal, Dick Durbin, and Kent Conrad seem prepared to do the work themselves.