

WOB HEADINGG TO COME

COMMENT

By Mel Stride
WORK AND PENSIONS
SECRETARY



RETIREMENT for many people is about having more quality time to do the things they love with the people they love.

It's a time when grandchildren can benefit from the wisdom of a lifetime of experience. A time when local communities can gain from skills built up over a whole career.

And, of course, an opportunity for a bit of 'me time', too.

And after decades of hard work we want pensioners to feel secure in having a strong financial foundation for retirement however they choose to spend it. That's an important social contract we've always upheld, and we know how important this is to many Sunday Express readers.

That's why tomorrow, we are putting more cash in pensioners' pockets and increasing state pensions by 8.5% as part of our Triple Lock guarantee.

The full yearly basic state pension will now be £3,700 higher than 2010 in cash terms, while the full rate of

'The Triple Lock offers security'

the new state pension will exceed £11,500 a year.

This follows last year's highest ever cash increase to state pension of 10.1%. It means more financial security for pensioners – and a fair reward for those who have worked hard and paid into the system their whole lives.

This winter, we sent out 11.9 million Winter Fuel Payments, whilst Pension Credit is being uprated, with the average award worth over £3,900. All of this has made a massive difference – I am proud that since taking office over 200,000 pensioners have been lifted out of poverty after housing costs are taken into account.

The introduction of the Triple Lock by a Conservative government has been instrumental in turning the tide on pensioner poverty.

This government will always back our pensioners. Labour has no plan to grow the economy, to create opportunities and support our public services – they would take us back to square one.

What do you think – QUESTION 1 IN HERE IN CAPS THANK YOU?

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Tory MPs worried as Rishi pledges to back older voters



RISHI Sunak is attempting to head off a revolt by older voters with a pledge that his Government will always back pensioners.

He has been stung by claims he is alienating the over-65s with tax hikes.

An above-inflation 8.5 percent increase in the state pension came into force yesterday, boosting payments by £902.20 a year up to £11,502. Work and Pensions Secretary Mel Stride said: "My message to Sunday Express readers is simple: as the 8.5 percent increase to state pension and our track-record clearly show, this government will always back our pensioners."

But Conservative MPs fear the giveaway has been undermined by a series of blunders. A former Cabinet Minister said last night: "We have got this wrong."

Tory MPs are worried about the freeze in income tax thresholds which means 1.6 million more pensioners are becoming liable for income tax.

Critics also point to Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's failure to explain how he will pay for his Budget announcement that he hopes to abolish National Insurance, paid by working people. This allowed Labour to stoke fears that the Chancellor will hike up income tax, which is paid by pensioners as well as workers.

Adding to Tory woes, Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves last night launched an audacious bid for pensioner votes by urging those who "may never have voted for the Labour Party before in your life" to back her party in the forthcoming General Election.

A former Cabinet Minister said: "Some of our recent decisions do seem to be designed to disadvantage pensioners and that seems to be a mistake."

"I think fellow MPs are concerned that

By **Jonathan Walker**
DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR

the leadership of the party is not very political, and it just doesn't think about what effect decisions have on people who might vote Conservative."

Last month's Budget statement included a 2p cut to National Insurance which came into force yesterday, saving a worker on £35,000 more than £900 a year when added to a 2p cut introduced in January.

But there was alarm when Mr Hunt told the House of Commons his "long-term ambition" is to axe National Insurance entirely, without explaining how the ambitious plan would be funded.

'Quotey x 16pt FGH on 17pt thank you kindly'

Labour last night published an analysis which showed replacing employee National Insurance contributions with higher income tax would cost a retired pensioner with an income of £25,000 an extra £808 more every year.

Writing in today's Sunday Express, Rachel Reeves said: "The biggest risk to pensioners now comes from another five years of the Conservatives, with their reckless and irresponsible £46 billion pledge to abolish National Insurance all together."

Tory MPs fear the surprise Budget announcement handed ammunition to Sir Keir Starmer's party. A former Minister said: "It just goes to show that throwaway lines need to be thought about before you throw them away".

An MP on the right of the party said: "The way the Chancellor made the announcement wasn't helpful even if there are good reasons for having a more streamlined tax system."

Analysis by the House of Commons Library has confirmed that pensioners are already facing higher tax bills, with an additional 1.6 million older people liable for income tax by 2028 because the Government has frozen the threshold at which they start to pay.

Polls show the over 65s are the only age-group currently backing the Tories, with 36 percent saying they would vote Conservative if an election was held tomorrow while 21 percent would support Labour according to a recent YouGov survey.

Sally Tsoukaris, General Secretary of the Civil Service Pensioners Alliance, a member of pensioners' campaign group Later Life Ambitions, said: "Our members are increasingly concerned about talk of doing away with National Insurance, a policy that would essentially punish those that have worked and paid in all their lives but now face being caught by the dragnet of income tax."

"Nearly 10 million pensioners are predicted to be paying income tax within the next few years. That's not what income tax was designed for and it's going to hurt the very people in later life who society should look to shield from money worries."

Mr Stride highlighted winter fuel payments as well as increases to Pension Credit paid to older people on low incomes.

He said: "All of this has made a massive difference – I am proud that since taking office over 200,000 pensioners have been lifted out of poverty after housing costs are taken into account. The introduction of the Triple Lock by a Conservative government