

Opinion

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Minorities Courted in Social Security Debate

BY LEIGHSTROPE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Bush administration and its allies are focusing on women and minorities as they try to build support for overhauling Social Security by creating personal investment accounts.

The support of those two groups is essential, and the administration—as well as proponents of private accounts—is laying the groundwork in speeches, policy papers, interviews, memos and reports.

"If they don't make a case that Social Security reform is better for women and minorities than the current system, the battle is really lost," said David John, Social Security policy analyst for the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank that favors individual accounts.

Opponents of such accounts say Social Security has provided a safety net for women and minorities, who are disproportionately dependent on the benefits.

Social Security is an insurance program that "has been spectacularly successful in reducing poverty among the elderly and the disabled, and in ensuring that people who have worked hard all their lives have a minimally decent standard of living in retirement,"

said Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Calif.

Both sides agree that Social Security, which reached its 66th anniversary last month, will face funding problems when the large baby boom generation starts retiring in the coming decade and fewer workers pay into the system.

To help shore up funding, President Bush has proposed letting younger workers invest some of their payroll taxes in the stock market. He has created a commission to devise a plan, recommend how to pay for it and report to him in the fall.

Women and minorities are most at risk, the commission said in its initial report in July. It asked the Social Security Administration for more information on women and minority beneficiaries.

The administration also has been pitching private accounts as a way to build larger retirement nest eggs, which officials say would benefit women more because they tend to live longer than men.

"They should be able to put the magic of compound interest to work for them, generating greater financial security and peace of mind," Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill told the Bond Market Association last month.

For minority men, who have shorter average life spans, the accounts create wealth that can

with higher-income workers. That benefits women and minorities. Social Security also provides guaranteed benefits that increase with inflation, they note.

"Private accounts are not a guaranteed, lifetime benefit—when your money runs out, it's gone," said Marilyn Leist of the American Association of University Women, which opposes privatization. "Private accounts do not assure cost-of-living adjustments, which keep older women on the other side of the poverty line."

Another argument in favor of the current system is that it provides automatic benefits for spouses with little or no work history and for surviving spouses, though they must have been married at least 10 years. Both those benefits favor women, who live longer and who are more likely to take time off work to care for children.

On the other side, the Alliance for Worker Retirement Security, created by the National Association of Manufacturers in 1998 to push for personal accounts, argues that the current structure hurts divorced women who must have remained married 10 years to get spousal or survivor's benefits.

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—David John, Social Security policy analyst for the Heritage Foundation

be passed on to survivors, he said.

House Majority Leader Dick Army, in a memo to Republicans last month, said blacks and Hispanics are hurt in the current system. "Happily, these problems can be remedied by letting workers invest their own payroll tax dollars in personal retirement accounts," Army, R-Texas, wrote.

Opponents say those arguments fail to acknowledge that Social Security is a progressive system—structured so lower-wage earners get more in benefits for what they paid in comparison

UN Action Sought on US Drug Policies

War on drugs is war on people of color

BY YOJICOLE
DIVERSITYINC.COM

About 200 celebrities, civil-rights activists and legislators recently descended on the United Nations demanding that it challenge U.S. drug laws at the world conference on racism in Durban, South Africa.

In a petition to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, the group, which among others included activist/actor Danny Glover, former

Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders, and Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., charged that the U.S. war on drugs is a war on people of color.

"The war on drugs is rooted in racial bias," the petition said.

Among those incarcerated in state prisons for drug felonies, African Americans comprise 57 percent and Latinos account for 22 percent, according to U.S. Department of Justice statistics. In New York state, 94 percent of people in prison on drug charges are African American or Latino and in that state, as in California, more African-American men are sent to prison each year than graduate from state colleges and

universities, the petition said.

To counter the popular argument that a person should "do the time if he does the crime," the petition's signatories said white youth are just as likely to use and sell drugs as youths of color, yet they are incarcerated less frequently.

"People who live in poor communities, which are usually minority communities, have less to lose (monetarily) and they're willing to take more risk to make money," said Kevin Zeese, president of Common Sense for Drug Policy, a non-profit think-tank.

Government reports show that white males are selling drugs and

are more likely to use drugs than men of color.

According to the Centers for Disease Control: A white male is four times more likely than an African-American male to be a regular cocaine user.

The chance of a white person ever inhaling an illicit drug in his or her lifetime is 42 percent.

The chance of an African-American person inhaling an illegal substance in his or her lifetime is 37.7 percent.

A great amount of drug selling in poor neighborhoods occurs on the street, while in more affluent neighborhoods that behavior is kept behind closed doors.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Community Loses

I am writing to express regret over the decision to make the darkroom facilities at Portland Community College, Sylvania, available to credit students only and do away with the Community Education Darkroom course taught by Jim Irwin.

As a member of the community, I help support PCC and its facilities through my tax dollars by voting for bond measures that benefit PCC and through my course fees. The middle "C" in PCC stands for "community" and eliminating this course goes against what the college claims as the heart of its mission.

Jim Irwin is a wonderful, supportive instructor who does his best to educate and encourage all of the students in his class, regardless of their level of expertise. He provides an open, relaxed atmosphere that allows young and old, to work together to benefit artistic endeavors.

While I'm sure there are problems that have prompted this change, there are less drastic and costly solutions that should be tried first.

The darkroom course is extremely popular and if the contention for facilities is the issue, PCC should attempt to expand them rather than restrict access. If the costs involved are not being borne evenly between credit and non-credit students, then course fees should be adjusted.

I hope PCC will consider alternative solutions to whatever issues have been raised and will give them a try before doing away with the course completely.

J.J. FISHRUCK



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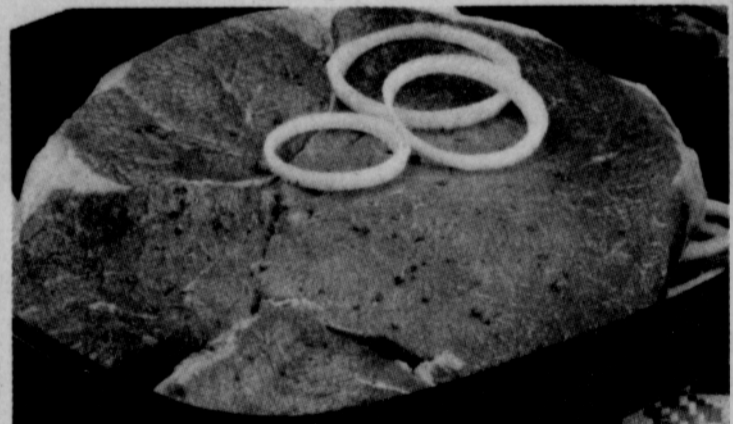
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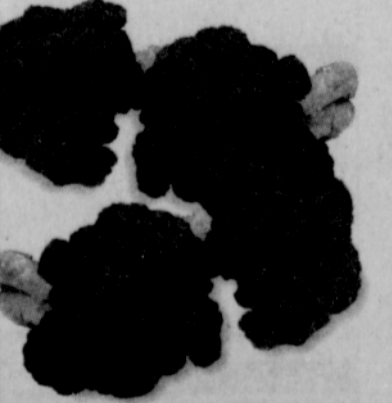


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