

# **REPUBLICANS GOT AN EARFUL**

## *America Revolts against Republican Plans to Privatize Social Security*

---

*Republicans “said that what lawmakers hear during the Presidents’ Day recess could determine whether leaders pursue passage of the centerpiece of Bush’s second-term domestic agenda or conclude that voters don’t have the appetite for rewriting the Social Security Act.” [Washington Post, 2/22/05] What Republicans heard was a resounding “no,” as Americans around the country revolted against privatization and bombarded Republicans with criticism and skepticism. Democrats held nearly 100 Town Halls around the country, where the message was the same – don’t let Republicans undermine Social Security.*

“Instead of building support for Bush’s proposal to allow younger workers to divert payroll taxes into private retirement accounts, some [Republican Social Security] events turned into fractious gripe sessions, and others did not go nearly as well as their hosts had hoped.” [New York Times, 2/27/05]

“Republicans have returned from a weeklong recess telling stories of meetings on the issue with voters who ranged from suspicious to downright hostile.” [TIME, 3/7/05]

### **Could Republican Push to Privatize Social Security Hurt Marginal Republicans?**

#### **Rep. Michael Fitzpatrick (R-PA)**

• “Rep. Michael Fitzpatrick, a Bucks County Republican, said the idea of personal accounts ‘deserves full and fair debate’ and that he has received close to 1,000 calls and letters. ‘A clear majority seem to be opposed to giving younger workers the right to invest in personal accounts,’ Fitzpatrick said. [Philadelphia Inquirer, 2/24/05]

#### **Rep. Rick Renzi (R-AZ)**

• “Rick Renzi, the Republican congressman from northern Arizona, is torn. President Bush has urged Republicans to convince voters that his plan for personal retirement accounts will help save Social Security, but Renzi is not so sure. So rather than proselytize, Renzi has come to the Rim Country Chamber of Commerce offering coffee, cookies and a willing ear. ‘I really want to understand your heart on this issue,’ he tells about 40 people crammed into the lobby on a weekday morning. ‘It’s an issue I’m open to—I’m not set on.’... ‘I think you can see that I’m torn here,’ he tells a voter who asks his position on borrowing money to pay for the president’s proposal. ‘It’s kind of like I’m looking for permission.’” [Chicago Tribune, 2/26/05]

#### **Rep. Heather Wilson (R-NM)**

• “A meeting and rally was scheduled for this morning outside the state Capitol. Speakers were to include Sen. Jeff Bingaman of Silver City and Rep. Tom Udall of Santa Fe, both Democrats, and state House Speaker Ben Lujan, a Nambe Democrat who introduced a joint memorial in the Legislature opposing benefit cuts and privatization plans for Social Security. Organizers said 26 groups plan to attend the event. [Wilson’s spokesman] said Wilson had planned no such meetings this week on any subject.” [Albuquerque Tribune, 2/25/05]

### **Rep. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV)**

- “[Constituents] wanted to know if Capito, a Republican in a traditionally Democratic state that has twice voted for Bush, supports the president’s approach. ‘Not at this moment,’ she said.” [CQ, 2/28/05]

## **Republican Plans Get A Chilly Reception At Town Hall Meetings**

### **Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI)**

- “But at every stop, [Rep. Paul Ryan] faced skeptics. Nancy McDonald, 66, who sells securities and insurance, complained in Darien that health care for the uninsured needs to be addressed before Social Security. ‘Slow down! Slow down!’ she scolded the lawmaker at one point.” [Washington Post, 2/22/05]

### **Rep. Kevin Brady (R-TX)**

- “But as [Rep. Kevin Brady] and others are finding out, seniors are feeling uncertain nonetheless... ‘I wouldn’t want to invest my retirement in the stock market. It’s too risky,’ said Margaret Pellerin, 75, after attending the session in Bridge City, about 100 miles east of Houston in an area dotted with oil refineries.” [Los Angeles Times, 2/24/05]

- “Last week’s congressional recess was intended to be a big chance for GOP lawmakers to push the president’s plan in their home districts. Instead, it found [Rep. Kevin Brady] and his compatriots here and across the country often encountering chilly skepticism to President Bush’s ideas on remodeling the strained benefit program for elders. They found that the opposition was often surprisingly organized and hoped-for support did not always materialize.” [Houston Chronicle, 2/27/05]

- “[Rep. Kevin Brady], a Republican from The Woodlands who sits on the House Social Security subcommittee, expected a friendly crowd at Copperwood, a stop he chose because the 90-year-old mother of one of his aides lives there. But between riled seniors and a couple of Democratic activists, Brady did not get a free pass. Instead, he faced the concerns of people like Social Security beneficiary Mary Kosmitis. ‘Everything (the Bush administration) has done is just not exactly what they said they were doing,’ she said after the gathering.” [Houston Chronicle, 2/27/05]

### **Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-GA)**

- “In Smyrna, Ga., C.W. Driskell, 74, declared himself ‘not completely sold’ on private accounts after a town hall meeting with his congressman, Republican Phil Gingrey. ‘Bush is basing the amount of money they’ll earn on what investors made in the ‘90s,’ Driskell said. ‘Those were the good years. I’ve made nothing in stocks in the last five years.’” [Los Angeles Times, 2/24/05]

### **Rep. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV)**

- “[At a Town Hall meeting held by Rep. Shelley Moore Capito] Thomas Wamsley, 68, a retiree who voted for Bush based on his views on ‘family values,’ equated the [private] investment accounts with gambling. He said they were not worth the risk, even for a potentially fatter retirement nest egg.” [Los Angeles Times, 2/24/05]
- “If President Bush is counting on Republicans like Rep. Shelley Moore Capito to sell his concept of Social Security reform to a skeptical public this year and to deliver a majority vote on Capitol Hill, he could be in trouble...A town hall meeting on the subject at a senior center in this eastern mountain community drew about 100 residents, some retirees, some younger workers and some ex-miners disabled by black lung disease...But of those who rose to speak, more were skeptical or outright opposed.” [Knoxville News Sentinel, 2/27/05]

### **Rep. Sue Myrick (R-NC)**

- “Preston Taylor and other seniors shared their stories with [Rep. Sue Myrick] and said they are concerned about the future of the Social Security program -- their primary source of income.” [News 14 Carolina, 2/24/05]

### **Rep. Chris Chocola (R-IN)**

- “As for Bush’s main proposal -- allowing younger workers to divert some of their Social Security taxes into personal investment accounts -- the applause came when Camden resident Pete Wagoner told [Rep. Chris Chocola]: ‘It’s the entirely wrong way to go.’ [Indianapolis Star, 2/27/05]

### **Rep. Mike Pence (R-IN)**

- “At a Muncie meeting Thursday, when Rep. Mike Pence tried to talk about other governments -- such as Chile -- that have adopted private accounts, a constituent shouted out: ‘Oh, Chile! There’s a good model!’ The reaction has been much the same in other meetings he’s held throughout his east-central Indiana district. Constituents don’t believe there’s a crisis, or that the system will be that tough to fix, or that personal retirement accounts are a good idea. ‘I’m just running into a great deal of skepticism about every aspect of this proposal,’ Pence said. [Indianapolis Star, 2/27/05]

### **Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK)**

- “Oklahomans are not ready to get behind President Bush’s historic push to overhaul Social Security. That appears to be the reaction several members of the state’s congressional delegation received on the volatile issue at recent town hall meetings... Rep. Frank Lucas, R-Okla., said Social Security was the most discussed topic by far during his ‘pretty lively’ town hall meetings... Lucas’ constituents may be open to the idea that something needs to be done with Social Security but remain hesitant, he said.” [Tulsa World, 2/27/05]

### **Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA)**

- “At Armstrong Atlantic State University, the subject [of Social Security] caused a crowd of 200 to become rowdy. Questions were shouted out. The congressman was interrupted. And one of Kingston’s assistants was booed when she announced an end to the hour long discussion.” [Savannah Morning News, 2/22/05]

### **Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA)**

- “At two stops, morning at Drexel University, afternoon at Widener University, the Pennsylvania Republican [Sen. Rick Santorum] encountered skepticism and hostility as he voiced his support for the White House plan to allow creation of personal accounts using payroll taxes. He was heckled by protesters, called a liar, and told that his views were unconscionable. Those sentiments ranged across the age spectrum.” [Philadelphia Inquirer, 2/23/05]
- “At Widener University in Chester on Tuesday afternoon, people over 50 occupied perhaps half the seats at a forum held by Mr. Santorum and asked many of the questions - most of them negative.” [New York Times, 2/23/05]
- “But minutes into Santorum’s first presentation at Duquesne University, jeers and skeptical questioning arose from a considerable segment of the crowd. Some of the most pointed questions came from older workers whose benefit payouts would not be altered under the president’s plan.” [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 2/22/05]

## Many Republicans Too Scared to Hold Social Security Town Halls

“House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Sugar Land, said only about a third of House Republicans nationwide conducted meetings on Social Security. ‘I am very disappointed about that,’ said DeLay.” [[Houston Chronicle](#), 2/27/05]

### Rep. Walter B. Jones (R-NC)

• “Rep. Walter B. Jones Jr. (R-N.C.) is home with constituents this week but is not holding meetings on Social Security ‘because we’ve been getting a steady inflow of opinions’ -- mostly opposing the president’s plan -- said his spokeswoman, Kristen Quigley.” [[Washington Post](#), 2/24/05]

### Rep. Kenny Hulshof (R-MO)

• “When Rep. Kenny Hulshof, R-Columbia, spoke Friday to the Washington (Mo.) Area Chamber of Commerce, he talked about health care, methamphetamine and Amtrak but he barely mentioned Social Security. He said nothing at all about personal accounts, the centerpiece of Bush’s plan, even though Bush has proclaimed this his top domestic priority and even though Hulshof serves on the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Security.” [[St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#), 2/26/05]

### Florida Republicans

• “Democrats are hosting more than 250 meetings over a month. Many Republicans also are holding meetings, but others decided to wait or are having ‘listening sessions’ with residents to test the political waters first. In the Tampa Bay area, no member of Congress had a town hall meeting about Social Security last week.” [[St. Petersburg Times](#), 2/28/05]

### Minnesota Republicans

• “[O]nly three public forums on Social Security took place in Minnesota last week during Congress’ recess, all of them featuring Democrats opposed to the proposed private accounts. Republicans, who have been busy in other states trying to sell the president’s plan, are biding their time in Minnesota. None of the state’s five congressional Republicans held meetings to promote the president’s plan, although a few said they plan to in the coming month.” [[Star Tribune](#), 2/28/05]

### Michigan Republicans

• “Michigan congressional Democrats are in their districts this week using President George W. Bush’s proposals to overhaul the nation’s Social Security system as a punching bag in town hall meetings. And Michigan’s congressional Republicans are nowhere in sight. They are sitting this one out for now, even though they got marching orders from the administration and GOP leadership to talk up the president’s plan while they are home with Congress in recess this week.” [[Detroit Free Press](#), 2/24/05]

## Democrats Hear Common Message: Strengthen Social Security, Don’t Privatize

### Democratic Leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)

• House Min. Leader Nancy Pelosi held a town hall meeting in San Francisco on 2/23, where “nobody spoke out in support” of Bush’s plans [[Oakland Tribune](#), 2/24/05]

### **Rep. George Miller (D-CA)**

- “Social Security needs a boost, not the boot, East Bay residents told Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, in three packed town hall meetings he held Saturday... Bush does not yet have the votes in Congress for his plan, and if the testimony Saturday is any indication, the president has failed to persuade most folks in the East Bay.” [[Contra Costa Times](#), 2/20/05]

### **Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA)**

- “‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’ Adjust it. That was the overwhelming sentiment among local residents, young and old, who turned out Thursday for a town hall discussion of President Bush’s proposal to privatize Social Security. About 80 people attended the talk hosted by Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, at Seaside’s Oldemeyer Center... What’s more, Farr said, while Social Security needs some adjusting, it certainly isn’t in a crisis stage as some in the Republican Party have characterized. Many in the audience nodded in agreement.” [[Monterey Herald](#), 2/25/05]

### **Rep. Lane Evans (D-IL)**

- “Terry Hoben of Galesburg opposes privatization, as did every other constituent who spoke out at [Rep. Lane Evans’s] Monday’s meeting.” [[Peoria Journal Star](#), 2/22/05]

### **Rep. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)**

- “‘What I have a problem with is people who want to change the system,’ [Rep. Tammy Baldwin] told about 30 people Monday in Beloit. ‘At present, it is a challenge. They’re proposing solutions that will only make the problem worse’... Most of the Beloit audience was sympathetic to Baldwin’s position.” [[Janesville Gazette](#), 2/23/05]

### **Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR)**

- “After [Rep. Peter DeFazio’s] speech, others still expressed cynicism about the Bush administration’s policy. ‘I just see Social Security as something they’re trying to sell off to Wall Street,’ said Steve Santoro, 37, of Bandon.” [[Coos Bay World](#), 2/25/05]

### **Rep. Julia Carson (D-IN)**

- “While Pence and Chocla were defending their positions to constituents, Rep. Julia Carson, a Democrat, got immediate applause by opening her Indianapolis town hall meeting Thursday with the declaration: ‘I don’t believe in privatization of Social Security.’” [[Indianapolis Star](#), 2/27/05]

### **Rep. Thomas Allen and Rep. Michael Michaud (D-ME)**

- “Maine’s two Democratic congressmen returned home with a dire warning about President Bush’s plan to reform Social Security by allowing workers to invest some of their payroll taxes in private accounts... Recent public opinion surveys suggest a tough political road for the Bush plan. A Maine poll conducted just before Bush’s State of the Union address found only 25 percent of Mainers supported the reforms, compared to 68 percent opposed. Eleanor Pellerin of Hampden counted herself a member of the opposition, worrying about its effects on her five children and 16 grandchildren.” [[Bangor Daily News](#), 2/23/05]

### **Rep. Russ Carnahan (D-MO)**

- “More than 150 people spilled out of the meeting room at the Weber Road Branch of the St. Louis County Public Library, a majority of them older people, but a sprinkling of 20-somethings too, and virtually unanimous in opposition to any kind of Social Security privatization... Only two attendees [at Rep. Russ Carnahan’s Social Security town hall meeting] raised their hands to indicate they supported the

idea of personal accounts...In a meeting that had the feel of a pep rally, and one against an especially reviled rival, Carnahan got strong encouragement even from the young workers often cited as prime beneficiaries of Bush's proposed personal accounts." [St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 2/26/05]

- "Leonard Thomas, 63, of Oakville, said that he had put aside money all his working life, as a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, but that the stock market crash in 2000 had hit him hard. 'I lost \$100,000, a third of my 401(k) retirement account, he said. 'Who's going to make that up if I'm a baby boomer and the stock market goes south again?'" [St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 2/26/05]
- "Rich Brown, 51, of Lemay, noted Social Security's role in serving the disabled and survivors. 'My father was 50 when I was born, and he died when I was in high school. The survivor benefits kept us out of poverty and got me at least a couple of years of higher ed. 'I'm forever grateful for it,' he said. 'I don't want to see any change.'" [St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 2/26/05]

#### **Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY)**

- "Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington) drew a chorus of amens on Thursday when he told a crowd of about 200 at the Wyandanch Senior Center that Bush's plan was too debt-ridden and risky. One attendee, Mary Barba, rose to agree, saying, 'You can't trust the stock market. It can fall, and then you're out.' Barba, 72, a widow from West Babylon, said later she had been following the Social Security debate closely. 'They say that it won't affect me, but I'm thinking about my daughter and my sons who have worked so hard their whole lives,' she said. 'What are they going to do?' [Newsday, 2/28/05]

#### **Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL)**

- "In South Florida, another Democrat opposed to Bush's plan, Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, asked a crowd of about 200 constituents how many would be comfortable investing in the stock market. Only two raised their hands." [Newsday, 2/28/05]

### **The Harder Republicans Try to Sell Privatization, the Faster Support Falls**

"A Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll found that the share of people who supported private accounts had dropped from 46% to 40% in the weeks after Bush started barnstorming the country to promote the idea." [Los Angeles Times, 2/17/05]

"Only one in three Americans approve of President Bush's handling of Social Security, his lowest rating on the issue since he took office. A USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll conducted Friday-Sunday found that 35% approved of Bush's Social Security record, 56% disapproved and 9% had no opinion. That was down from three weeks ago, when 43% approved. In March 2001, just after he took office, 49% approved." [USA Today, 2/28/05]

"More than half of Americans, 55 percent, say they oppose the president's plan to create private accounts, while 39 percent say they support it, according to the poll conducted for AP by Ipsos-Public Affairs." [Associated Press, 3/1/05]