



How Secure is Social Security?

PART III: Drawing the Battle Lines

Debriefing Activity:

There are many different perspectives on the issue of the Social Security program laced with political underpinnings. Some people feel the program is in need of serious, innovative overhaul to improve its service. Others feel that the "cures" proposed are worse than the "ailment" and promote a certain political agenda that would change 70 years of public service. Before beginning the debriefing activity, review some examples of the political posturing seen in "Drawing the Battle lines" in the Newshour's Social Security Reform website http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/social_security/reform/battle_lines.html.

Discussion Questions:

The following quotes best articulate the feelings and attitudes of many of those closely involved in the debate to address the Social Security issue. Review each and comment on:

- the statement's meaning on the issue of Social Security reform,
- the statement's position taken in relationship to the opposing side's view point
- whether the statement provides substance or political rhetoric

President George Bush "I like the idea of encouraging more people to say, I own my own home, I own my own business, I own and manage my health accounts, and now I own a significant part of my retirement account." "Trying to fix the system by raising taxes would only buy time, and then future generations would need to come back and raise taxes again and again."

Senator Edward Kennedy, (D-MASS) "We will not let any president turn the American dream into a nightmare for senior citizens and a bonanza for Wall Street. The biggest threat to Social Security today is not the retirement of the baby boomers. It's George Bush and the Republican Party."

Vice President Dick Cheney "We need to remember that raising taxes will not fix the current system as long as the costs continue to rise relative to the size of income that could be taxed. Trying to fix the system by raising taxes would only buy time, and then future generations would need to come back and raise taxes again and again."

Senator Olympia Snow (R-Maine) "I'm certainly not going to support diverting \$2 trillion from Social Security into creating personal savings accounts. The existing program, as it has been developed in the last 70 years, provides a stable monthly income that has prevented seniors, almost 50 percent from falling into poverty. I don't think we want to erode the principles of that system."

Marie Smith and Bill Novelli of AARP "Most of us would then have to pay twice to gamble on this [the personal accounts] new plan -- first to keep our commitments to current retirees and again to pay into these private accounts. Some critics of these personal accounts think that Wall Street, not retirees, would be the real beneficiaries."