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## Bush Plans a Media Blitz on Social Security

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By David Morgan

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Bush will spearhead an election-style public relations campaign early next year to try to convince Americans that Social Security is in urgent need of change but will keep dollar and cent details deliberately vague, analysts and officials say.

With Bush's political capital riding on a successful overhaul of the popular retirement program, the White House and its allies plan to bombard the public with presidential speeches, television and radio ads, newspaper op-ed articles and grass-roots rallies between now and early 2005.

"It's going to be a battle royal, very much like an election campaign but over an issue rather than a candidate," said Stephen Moore, executive director of Club for Growth, a Republican group that hopes to spend \$15 million on a media campaign backing the White House.

"This is about winning, and Bush can't afford to lose."

Meanwhile, opponents accuse the White House of exaggerating the issue's urgency, saying it used a similar ploy to justify the war in Iraq by citing an urgent threat from Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that have never been found.

"The administration's blitz on Social Security is eerily reminiscent of the way they made their case for war," said David Wade, spokesman for Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, the former Democratic presidential nominee who sits on the Senate Finance Committee.

Some analysts and congressional aides expect Bush to lay out details of his plan for changing Social Security in his State of the Union address to Congress, where the president faces major hurdles even among Republicans.

But others involved in White House discussions say the State of the Union speech will likely offer few new insights. The administration, long known for its secrecy, will likely keep details away from opponents, until a bill emerges possibly as late as April.

"The initial focus of the campaign is that we have to do reform. But they don't want a lot of details out there," said Mike Tanner of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank that is preparing to distribute 25,000 Social Security guides to help community leaders shape public opinion for Bush.

The White House declined to comment on strategy or the State of the Union speech. On Monday, Bush deflected a question on Social Security, saying: "I'll propose a solution at the appropriate time."

By focusing on principles rather than details, analysts said the White House would have an easier time rallying popular support necessary to win a majority of votes in Congress.

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