



tonight's State of the Union address. They note that Bush can be highly persuasive when he pushes hard on a priority, as he did with tax cuts in his first term.

Despite Reid's comments, "there are a lot of Democrats who are open to talking" about private accounts, said Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.). Freshman Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) said "we got a little behind the eight-ball communicating that message" of Social Security's long-term problems, "but that's about to change."

Rep. Rob Portman (Ohio), a GOP leader with close White House ties, said public support for personal accounts will grow "if it's properly explained."

"I think it's salable," he said. "I don't think the Democrats' do-nothing solution helps them politically as much as they think."

Bush will explain tonight why he thinks personal accounts will bolster Social Security's long-term financial health, a White House official said. The president "will flesh out new details and how he views the personal retirement accounts will work," the official said.

Tomorrow and Friday, Bush will visit five politically competitive states that are home to seven Democratic senators, four of whom face reelection next year. Of those, only Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) has talked of perhaps being open to private accounts for Social Security.

Nelson told home state reporters on a conference call that he will look at Bush's plan "very cautiously, carefully and conservatively."

Meanwhile yesterday, Treasury Secretary John W. Snow visited Sens. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Kent Conrad (D-N. D.) -- two other targets of Bush's tour -- to discuss Social Security. Baucus told reporters he would listen to Snow's pitch, but thus far, "I don't see the will" on the White House's part to compromise with Democrats.

Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D) of Arkansas, another state Bush will visit, said the president is "going to have to radically change his approach" to enlist any Democrats. She said she would favor personal accounts if they encouraged saving by young people, but "diverting their payroll taxes will not encourage savings, and I think it would devastate current beneficiaries."

Democrats yesterday trumpeted a Congressional Research Service analysis that concluded that a proposed change in Social Security's benefit structure would have thrown millions of senior citizens into poverty had it been implemented at the system's inception. The White House has floated the idea of setting initial Social Security benefits according to the rise in inflation over a worker's career, instead of the rise in wages, as the system now does. Because prices tend to rise slower than wages, the proposal would eliminate the projected \$3.7 trillion gap between benefits promised future retirees and taxes expected to be collected. But it would also impose significant cuts in scheduled benefits.

Had Social Security implemented such "price indexing" in 1940, the CRS concluded, the number of poor American retirees would have nearly tripled from the 3.6 million currently beneath the poverty threshold to 10.5 million.

*Staff writers Dan Balz and Jonathan Weisman contributed to this report.*

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**Calvin Coolidge**

**Herbert Hoover**

**Harry S. Truman**

## The Bush Administration

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