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White House makes Social Security appeal

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House appealed Sunday for bipartisan cooperation to overhaul Social Security, while Democrats are vowing to fight unless the president is willing to change his plan to cut guaranteed benefits.



President Bush was in New Jersey talking about Social Security last Friday, and plans to continue his travels this week.

By Pablo Martinez Monsivais, AP

President Bush plans to travel across the country this week as part of his 60-day push to persuade a skeptical public to support personal retirement accounts. The president's plan would allow workers under age 55 to divert up to 4 percentage points of their Social Security taxes into private stock and bond investment accounts in exchange for lower guaranteed future benefits.

White House counselor Dan Bartlett said that while polls show most Americans don't like the idea, most of the opposition is coming from people over 55 who won't be affected by it. He said Bush will try to reassure those older Americans that their benefits won't change.

"We're still in the early phase of educating the public about why there needs to be change," Bartlett said on *Fox News Sunday*. "Once that is cemented, then members of Congress will feel the pressure that they need to do something."

Bartlett said the White House wants to work with Democrats, but House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi expressed frustration that the president has not given details of his plan to Congress.

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"We're still waiting for the president's plan," she said on Fox. "But that which we have seen of it so far is not acceptable."

Pelosi added, "Our approach to this is that we will not begin by slashing benefits, we will not increase the deficit, and we must be fair to the American people."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., appearing on ABC's *This Week*, reinforced the Democrats' resistance to personal retirement accounts. Bush "has to give up privatization," Kennedy said. "At that point, everything is on the table, and we'll be able to get a solution."

Bartlett indicated the president may consider raising the amount of income that is taxed to fund Social Security above the current \$90,000 per person. "He says the only thing that's off the table is raising the rate" at which income is taxed, Bartlett said on CNN's *Late Edition*.

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