



"Given the lack of bipartisan support for carve-out personal accounts, the president should not insist on carve-out accounts if the Democrats support an overall legislative package for Social Security reform that is otherwise satisfactory to him," Richard Pozen, a Boston investment executive, said in a statement.

Bush has refused to say anything of the sort, and White House aides and outside allies believe that the best way to overcome Beltway resistance is for the president to keep up the pressure around the country.

"I think it helps," said Charles Black, a Republican strategist and lobbyist who advises the White House. "We know the 60-day tour he's done has elevated this issue and educated the public. The president, even though he's not campaigning on it every day anymore, does need to keep touching on the issue once or twice a week just to keep it on the agenda."

Stephen Moore, outgoing head of the Free Enterprise Fund, a group that advocates limited government and economic growth, said the primary audience for Bush's trip was actually in Washington. "The fundamental message of this road trip is that George Bush has not thrown in the towel," he said.

His opponents saw a different lesson in the president's peripatetic itinerary. "Evidently the 60-day tour didn't succeed in convincing anyone," said Linda Honold, chairwoman of the Wisconsin Democratic Party. "Every time he goes in, it seems more people decide this is not a good idea."

Recent polling provides ammunition for that thesis. Surveys by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press indicate that support for Bush's proposed private accounts fell from 58 percent last September to 44 percent in March before inching back up to 47 percent this month. "He hasn't recovered the ground he's lost [since] before he started campaigning on it," said Andrew Kohut, the center's director.



"I think the American people understand we've got a problem," said President Bush, shown with Milwaukee workers. (By Kevin Lamarque -- Reuters)

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Still, the half-empty press charter and filing center Thursday spoke to the dwindling news media interest. None of the networks sent its regular White House correspondent. USA Today, the Washington Times and other papers that usually cover presidential trips saw no reason to cover this one. Even some White House aides weary of the barnstorming privately roll their eyes and groan at the notion of yet another Social Security trip.

Bush, himself, seemed to recognize that this was not going to lead the nightly news. "Look at it this way," he told the local crowd proud of its museum. "It's a chance to show it off for the world -- to the extent the world is watching C-SPAN."

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