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Groups Focusing On Ways And Means, Finance Members

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Hoping to build opposition to a possible markup of retirement legislation when Congress returns, a group opposed to private Social Security accounts today released polling in the districts of nine House Ways and Means Republicans. USAction Education Fund civic engagement director Alan Charney said the combined data show that over two-thirds of registered voters in those districts oppose President Bush's private accounts proposals and that those voters are less likely to support a candidate who backs privatization. "This will be another tool to carry out their education work," Charney said. "There is a lot of activity going on. This is recess, so it's the perfect time." Charney's group commissioned automated polling in the districts of Reps. Bob Beauprez, R-Colo., Nancy Johnson, R-Conn., Mark Foley and Clay Shaw, both R-Fla., Jim Nussle, R-Iowa, Gerald Weller, R-Ill., Chris Chocola, R-Ind., Jim Ramstad, R-Minn., and Phil English, R-Pa. Some of the group's state affiliates are working closely with Americans United to Protect Social Security. The latter group is planning to hold events targeting 60 to 70 members of Congress to urge them to oppose "privatization" plans.

A spokeswoman for the Business Roundtable, a leader in the business-backed Coalition for the Modernization and Protection of America's Social Security, said reform advocates are similarly directing their grassroots efforts at the constituents of House Ways and Means and Senate Finance committee members. House Ways and Means Chairman Thomas is expected to move on retirement legislation as soon as September, and reform advocates hope that helps break a deadlock Senate Finance Chairman Grassley faces on his panel. She said Congress' ability to pass major legislation before adjourning for the August recess will allow more time for members to focus on Social Security in September. "Congress has achieved a lot. The environment is ripe. Let's move this in September," the BRT spokeswoman said. In a recess memo distributed late last week, CoMPASS urged its members to contact key committee members "to help keep the pressure on Congress to take up legislation in September." It also recommends CoMPASS members highlight the increased costs of delaying action on a Social Security overhaul.

In addition to targeting members of tax-writing panels, CoMPASS, Americans United and other are planning to hold a series of events marking the 70th anniversary of Social Security on Aug. 14. The Alliance for Retired Americans, a group of retired union members who oppose private accounts, announced today it using the date as the focal point of a series of public forums in eight states beginning next week.