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Hoffa Says Teamsters Want Dialogue On Social Security

By Mark Wegner
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Although the Teamsters union remains opposed to proposals for private Social Security accounts, Teamsters government affairs director Mike Mathis confirmed this afternoon that President James Hoffa is eager to open up the discussion about potential Social Security changes. Mathis said the push for increased union dialogue follows discussions during a recent meeting of 1,800 Teamsters leaders and from surveys of Teamsters members. "It's clear from these discussions and surveys, they don't support proposed private accounts. They do support this discussion about Social Security," Mathis said. Hoffa, in an interview reported today by the *Detroit News*, struck a much different tone from the AFL-CIO's vehement opposition to Bush's push to reform the program. "Social Security is a major problem in this country," Hoffa told the *Detroit News*. "We have to make sure that it's preserved for those that come after us. I think President Bush should be given credit for the fact that he has initiated a debate regarding what we should do."

Coalition for the Modernization and Protection of America's Social Security Executive Director Derrick Max today heralded Hoffa's comments as a "welcome sign" for a national debate over Social Security. "The leadership by President Hoffa and the Teamsters stands in marked contrast to the intensive efforts by other labor leaders to block Social Security reform," Max said in a statement. The business-backed CoMPASS in past months has engaged in a rhetorical, grassroots and legal fight with the AFL-CIO over private accounts and AFL-CIO efforts to influence the debate.

Mathis said Teamsters are uncomfortable with the fact that the AFL-CIO's opposition to private accounts has also excluded a larger debate about Social Security and that Teamsters have not played an active part in the rallies the federation has organized. "We have not participated in these activities," Mathis said. "We were a little concerned the AFL-CIO has taken a position that was adamantly opposed to this discussion." Mathis said the Teamsters have not coordinated with CoMPASS or other groups that support private accounts. He said Hoffa would make himself available to Congress or other forums that would amplify Teamster views on retirement security. "Hoffa is speaking on behalf of concerns expressed by his members," Mathis said. He said Hoffa has expressed interest in a proposal that would raise the \$90,000 cap of individual income that is subject to payroll taxes, and another that would dedicate revenue from a revamped estate tax to Social Security solvency.