

Opposing Groups To Target Key Lawmakers During Recess

By Mark Wegner
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Opposing groups in the fight over Social Security say the emergence of legislative proposals will help them focus their efforts over the July 4 recess on a smaller number of congressional targets.

Americans United to Protect Social Security, which opposes Social Security "privatization," plans to train its focus on slightly more than a dozen GOP members of the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance committees, according to the group's spokesman Brad Woodhouse.

Bill Pierce, a spokesman for the opposing Coalition for the Modernization of America's Social Security, said the Social Security debate has narrowed from a battle over public opinion to bill-writing. He said CoMPASS efforts over the recess will similarly target Republicans and Democrats on key committees.

"We're certainly ready to focus on leaders and key members to let them know there is great support out there for reform," Pierce said.

As an example, the spokesman cited efforts to place CoMPASS members at a July Fourth parade in Butte, Mont., that Senate Finance ranking member Max Baucus, D-Mont., is expected to attend.

He said Social Security deputy administrator James Lockhart is also slated to be in Montana for interviews and meetings to promote reform proposals.

Woodhouse said Americans United would be active in 33 states and would target between 70 and 80 House members this recess. He said the group would continue its "earned media" efforts with letters, press releases, office visits and editorial board meetings.

In a letter to be sent out to GOP members in the coming days, the group plans to challenge them to state a position on a proposal by Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee Chairman Jim McCrery, R-La., and a companion version by Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., that would set up private accounts using Social Security surpluses.

"Now that there is legislation to privatize Social Security ... it is critical that you give your constituents the answers that they deserve and reveal your position on this bill," the letter states.

Woodhouse said the group has generated negative local media for GOP Ways and Means members Jim Nussle of Iowa and Bob Beauprez of Colorado, who are both running for governor.

According to a list circulated among Americans United affiliates, other Ways and Means targets include Reps. Nancy Johnson, R-Conn., Chris Chocola, R-Ind., Jim Ramstad, R-Minn., and Mark Foley and Clay Shaw, both R-Fla.

Senate targets include on Finance Chairman Grassley, and Finance members Jon Kyl, R-

Ariz., Rick Santorum, R-Pa., Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, Gordon Smith, R-Ore., and Craig Thomas, R-Wyo.

In a memo circulated Wednesday at a CoMPASS meeting, coalition leaders highlighted statements by House Ways and Means Chairman Thomas and Grassley that indicate legislative momentum. The memo suggests that CoMPASS would encourage Republicans to move the process forward while also challenging Democrats.

"[W]e should bear in mind the broader objective of our coalition: to keep the legislative process on Social Security moving forward and to support those efforts," the memo stated. "And in working to move the debate forward, we also want to keep the pressure on those who oppose any action to engage in the debate."