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## **Opposing Sides Sending Lobbyists Into Battle On Capitol Hill**

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Even without consensus on Capitol Hill regarding what changes might be politically feasible, lobbyists taking part in the business blitz on Social Security this week are encouraging senators to marshal their concerns about the retirement program into legislative action.

Larry Burton, the Business Roundtable's executive director, is one of at least two dozen business lobbyists who are engaged in reaching out this week to all 100 senators.

"We had lots of questions by Democrats and Republicans, since there is no specific plan out there," Burton said. "We were trying to get a sense of where people are."

The lobbying is being coordinated by the Alliance for Worker Retirement Security and its partner, the Coalition for the Modernization and Protection of America's Social Security. Business leaders say they have distributed materials to all 100 offices and plan to follow up this week in meetings with individual senators or staff.

Until last week, business groups had largely focused their energies on CoMPASS efforts to build public support for private accounts outside of Washington. They have now shifted emphasis to AWRS, which is leading the lobbying efforts.

The lobbying is being done by members of AWRS and CoMPASS. Leaders say the latter group has increased its membership to about 150.

"There is interest in the next step. Everybody recognizes something needs to be done," Burton said of the Senate.

Both groups say they are united behind four principles but will leave it to Congress to draft legislative language. The four principles are support for personal accounts, no increase in payroll taxes, no benefit cuts for people at or near retirement age, and long-term solutions for Social Security.

Senate Finance Chairman Grassley said he intends to mark up Social Security legislation, even if it is unclear whether the Senate has the votes to move a bill. Grassley's panel Tuesday held its first hearing on the issue, a session that some GOP senators used to air their reservations about private accounts.

Derrick Max, who serves as executive director of both AWRS and CoPASS, said senators of both parties have been willing to hear their views on Social Security.

"I was encouraged by the uniform agreement that something needs to be done and the willingness of Democrats to engage with us on the issue," Max said.

While the coalition is trying to reach all senators, he said the lobbying will inevitably focus on those it believes it can persuade.

"We're trying the Democrats we think are gettable, and the Republican members who need more support," Max said, adding that grassroots efforts in key states are an important tool.

Opponents of personal accounts, who have been actively lobbying the issue since January, said they are confident about holding their numbers and pointed to a well-attended opposition rally Tuesday on Capitol Hill.

"I think Chairman Grassley is going to have a very hard time moving a bill through his committee," said Chuck Loveless, legislative director of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

He pointed to opposition to President Bush's proposals from Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, and the reservations of Sen. Craig Thomas, R-Wyo., who said he is worried about increasing the debt.

But Loveless said the opponents of private accounts cannot rest and that proponents still have the money and legislative power to continue the debate.

"They're obviously going to continue. They have a huge war chest to spend," Loveless said. "We're under no illusions. We're in this for the long term."

CoPASS and AWRS are not the only backers of private accounts on the Hill this week. A spokesman for Freedom Works, a free-market grassroots organization, said his group had 40 activists from North Carolina in town to promote personal accounts.

He said Freedom Works, which has chapters in 10 states and is also a CoPASS member, regularly brings members to Washington to meet with legislators.

While much of the activity on Social Security is happening on Capitol Hill or at the grassroots, Protect-YourCheck.org announced Wednesday it is launching two new 15-second ads on cable television to oppose private accounts.

One spot compares personal accounts to the stock market, while the other likens the idea to a slot machine. "Social Security. It's a guarantee you earned," the announcer said. "Don't let them make it a gamble."

The group is a 501(c) 4 group that has worked closely with Americans United to Protect Social Security.