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New Poll of Rank-and-File Members Raises Questions about Labor Bosses' Opposition to Social Security Reform

President of CoMPASS, Business Roundtable Urges AFL-CIO President to Listen to His Members and Reconsider His Opposition on the Issue

Washington, DC – In stark contrast to the protests against Social Security reform being planned by national labor leaders, a new national survey shows that rank-and-file union members overwhelmingly support action now by Congress to fix Social Security, and they back creation of personal retirement accounts by a 2-1 margin, as long as there are no changes to benefits for seniors and those nearing retirement.

In fact, nearly 60 percent of union members showed interest in creating a personal retirement account if given the option, according to the survey of 600 non-retired union members.

“This survey clearly shows that union members have significantly different views on Social Security reform and on personal retirement accounts than do the leaders of their unions,” said Dr. Q. Whitfield Ayres, president of Ayres, McHenry & Associates, which conducted the survey. “Union members believe Congress should act now to fix Social Security and a majority of union members want to start personal retirement accounts.”

“We’re not surprised to learn that union members want to fix Social Security. We meet rank-and-file union members every day who are outraged that their union is obstructing reform,” said Derrick Max, Executive Director of the Coalition for the Modernization and Protection of America’s Social Security, which commissioned the poll. “Why are big labor bosses doing everything in their power to deny their members the option of personal retirement accounts when rank-and-file members clearly want to make this choice on their own?”

“This poll shows that union members are like most Americans: the more they learn about Social Security reform, the more they like it,” wrote John J. Castellani, President of the Business Roundtable and President of CoMPASS, in a letter to John Sweeney, President of AFL-CIO. “These results make it very difficult to understand why you are directing your members to mount protests of policies that are supported by a majority of their union colleagues. I urge you to reconsider your opposition to fixing Social Security and to advocate what is in the best interests

of your members, their children and their grandchildren. Let's work together to fix it for the workers of today and tomorrow."

The AFL-CIO national leadership has announced plans for nationwide protests on March 31 against the establishment of voluntary personal retirement accounts for younger workers.

But the survey of union members shows a far different attitude towards these accounts. When asked whether offering personal retirement accounts to workers under age 55 is a good idea so long as nothing changes for workers 55 and older, 62 percent said offering personal retirement accounts was a good idea compared to 30 percent who believed it was a bad idea.

Union members also believe – by a nearly four-to-one margin – that Social Security needs to be fixed and that it would be irresponsible for Congress to put off action. They also agree by a three-to-one margin that it would cost more if Social Security changes are made later.

The poll also revealed that 79 percent of union members have a retirement plan other than Social Security that is invested in bonds or stocks. In fact, more than seven out of ten union members trust themselves rather than their union or the federal government to manage their retirement savings.

The new poll is just the latest evidence that interest group leaders in Washington are out of touch with the people they purport to represent. Last week, a separate survey showed that most AARP members believe Social Security needs to be fixed and that 61 percent of AARP members believe voluntary personal retirement accounts are a good idea.

About the Survey

The national survey of 600 union members who are still in the workforce was conducted March 6-10 by Ayres, McHenry & Associates, and has a margin of error of ± 4.0 percent. The full questionnaire and a summary of findings are available at www.generationstogether.net.

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Generations Together (www.generationstogether.net) is a project of the Coalition for the Modernization and Protection of America's Social Security (CoMPASS). CoMPASS is a 501 (c)(4) with the mission of educating the public on, and advocating for, fundamental Social Security reform.