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## **Groups That Clashed in the Campaign Are Facing Off Again**

By GLEN JUSTICE

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POLITICIANS are touring the country, voters are assembling at town hall meetings and interest groups are raising money to flood the airwaves with commercials.

What feels like an election is actually the increasing momentum of the Social Security battle, a campaign-style clash that is spreading nationwide as Republicans and Democrats argue how or whether to overhaul the system.

Collectively these organizations will spend tens of millions of dollars to influence public opinion and shape the debate. As the battle continues, here is a guide to some of the groups at work.

### Supporting Bush's Plan

PROGRESS FOR AMERICA -- Born several years ago to promote the president's agenda, the group raised almost \$45 million to support his re-election last year.

Much of the money was spent on television advertisements -- some carrying incendiary images of terrorism that drew wide attention.

Starting this year with more than \$9 million in the bank, Progress for America was one of the first groups to begin broadcasting TV commercials on Social Security.

Early advertisements were heavy on statistics with a focus on the need to fix the system. In March, the group spent almost \$5 million on a campaign that included television, radio and phone banks, and the advertisements got tougher.

One television commercial begins with an image of an iceberg, as an announcer intones, "Some people say Social Security is not in trouble, just like some thought the Titanic was unsinkable."

Another asks, "Can you think of any ideas that national Democrats have offered?" on Social Security, leaving an image of a ticking stopwatch on screen for 10 seconds.

COMPASS -- If Progress for America is behind the air war, then the Coalition to Modernize and Protect America's Social Security -- known as Compass -- is handling ground troops.

The coalition, led by the Business Roundtable and financed by major business lobbies, has networks in dozens of states. In a campaign called "Generations Together," its activists stage rallies, lobby local lawmakers, attend town hall meetings and otherwise drum up support for the Bush initiative.

The group has as much as \$20 million to spend.

An affiliated group, the Alliance for Worker Retirement Security, is focused on lobbying Congress and has a budget of about \$500,000. Derrick A. Max, a Republican who has worked on Social Security issues for years, serves as executive director for both organizations.

Recently, Compass has been financing polls to help counter Democratic opposition to the president's plan from groups like AARP and the A.F.L.-C.I.O. Using data collected by a Republican pollster, Compass has argued that a majority of the members in both groups support individual retirement accounts. In a letter to AARP, Mr. Max asked the group to "craft a policy position that better reflects the views of its membership."

USA NEXT -- While Progress for America, Compass and the Alliance represent a coordinated -- and relatively measured -- effort, several groups working independently are more combative.

USA Next, for example, has been aggressively attacking AARP to discredit the organization on Social Security and encourage Republicans to abandon it.

USA Next hired several consultants who worked for Swift Vets and P.O.W.'s for Truth, the group that attacked Senator John Kerry's military record in last year's election.

The organization's leaders have relentlessly attacked AARP on cable talk shows and on the Internet, and plan to run television commercials. In fact, it was an online advertisement that brought the group notoriety -- and a lawsuit -- earlier this year.

The advertisement, which ran briefly on The American Spectator Web site, tried to link AARP with support for same-sex marriage. AARP officials say their organization has no position on the issue.

USA Next's advertisement carried two pictures: one of an American soldier that was crossed out and the other showing two men in tuxedos kissing and carrying a check mark. The headline "The real AARP agenda" was also included.

The group has been sued by the two men in the photo, who say it was used without permission.

**CLUB FOR GROWTH** -- This independent group has made a reputation in recent years as an aggressive advocate of conservative ideals. In the past, the membership group has focused its energies on Democrats and occasionally on Republicans who do not adhere to its principles. Its first commercials on Social Security, which ran in February, took aim at three Republican lawmakers.

In March, the group ran commercials criticizing Senator Lindsey Graham, a Republican from South Carolina. The group contends he supports a payroll tax increase for Social Security. Mr. Graham has discussed raising the amount of wages that workers pay tax on to support the Social Security system.

"Hey Lindsey," the ad says, "you can't help someone save for retirement by raising their taxes."

### Opposing Bush's Plan

**AARP** -- Perhaps the most powerful force opposing Mr. Bush's proposals is this lobby for retirees, which has more than 35 million members nationwide and an annual budget of hundreds of millions of dollars.

The group's primary strength is communicating with its huge membership base through its magazine and newsletter. AARP also spent roughly \$10 million on print advertisements nationwide, carrying messages like "If we feel like gambling, we'll play the slots."

The group's television commercial, a \$5 million effort called "Kitchen Sink," featured a plumber who brings in a wrecking crew to fix a homeowner's clogged drain. Bulldozers and other heavy machinery tear the house apart as an announcer criticizes the private accounts at the center of Mr. Bush's plan.

"If you had a problem with the sink, you wouldn't tear down the entire house," an announcer says.

Because of its size and wealth, AARP has become a target for groups supporting Mr. Bush's plan, but its officials have so far done little to respond.

"We have our own message," said Kevin J. Donnellan, managing director for integrated communications at AARP. "We have our members' support on this and we are going to stay on that message."

**AMERICANS UNITED TO PROTECT SOCIAL SECURITY** -- A collection of labor unions and Democratic organizations have joined together under an umbrella group to oppose the Bush plan. Seeded with money from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the group includes the A.F.L.-C.I.O., USAction, Campaign for America's Future and dozens more. It plans to raise roughly \$20 million to

influence members of Congress to oppose Mr. Bush's plan and is already working directly or through affiliates in 35 states.

In some cases, the group and its affiliates have helped hold town hall meetings in Republican districts. In others, they held "empty chair" meetings, inviting Republican lawmakers to attend, though they often did not show. "They go ahead with the town hall meeting, with an empty chair to represent the congressman who turned them down," said Brad Woodhouse, the group's spokesman.

PROTECTYOURCHECK.ORG -- A group of veteran Democratic operatives formed this group to start a television blitz. Among them are Jim Jordan, Mr. Kerry's first campaign manager in last year's presidential race, and Harold Ickes, who ran the Media Fund, which spent tens of millions of dollars on commercials supporting Mr. Kerry.

Like Progress for America, the organization's first advertisement also featured an iceberg, calling Mr. Bush's plan "the tip of the iceberg that threatens your retirement."

MOVEON.ORG, This Democratic-leaning membership organization with a heavy Internet presence was one of the first groups to run television advertisements -- some biting -- that oppose Mr. Bush's plan.

The group ran a print advertisement the day of Mr. Bush's State of the Union speech that used Social Security cards to spell out the letters "W.M.D." "Make sure you are not misled again," it said.

"First, someone thought up the working lunch," another ad says, followed by "the working vacation."

The ad then showed older Americans doing manual labor and concluded: "It won't be long before America introduces the world to the working retirement."

A.F.L.-C.I.O. -- This group, which represents more than 13 million unionized workers, has concentrated on attacking companies and business groups supporting Mr. Bush's plan.

By staging protests, writing letters and applying other pressure, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. hopes to get companies to withdraw from coalitions like Compass and the Alliance for Worker Retirement Security, depriving these organizations of money.

So far, two companies and a trade association have left the coalitions supporting Mr. Bush's plan.

Photo: Progress for America's advertisement, above, pushing President Bush's agenda; AARP's counterpoint, right. (Photo by Progress for America)