

will only be able to do this if the path to legalization encourages family reunification. For this reason, I would support legislation that temporarily extends the recently expired April 30, 2001, filing deadline, while maintaining the requirement that the applicant was physically present in the United States on December 21, 2000.

I look forward to working with you on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Richard A. Gephardt, House minority leader; Trent Lott, Senate majority leader; and Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader.

Remarks on Establishing the President's Commission To Strengthen Social Security May 2, 2001

The President. Please be seated. Mr. Secretary, thank you for coming. Members of the newly formed Social Security Commission, I want to thank you all for being here. And I want to thank your family members who are here, as well.

Social Security is one of the greatest achievements of the American Government and one of the deepest commitments to the American people. For more than six decades, it has protected our elderly against poverty and assured young people of a more secure future. It must continue to do this important work for decades to come.

Yet, it has been apparent for many years that Social Security, itself, is becoming insecure. Social Security was designed for an era when few Americans lived much past the age of 65 and when families of three or four children were more than the exception. When Social Security was created, there was about 40 workers paying Social Security taxes for every one retiree receiving benefits. Today, there are three workers for every retiree; soon, there will be two. Long life is a blessing. Smaller families are an individual choice. But the consequence of this blessing and this choice is that the Social Security payroll tax, which was once 2 percent, has now passed 12 percent.

Economists calculate that it will have to rise past 18 percent if the baby boomers are to receive the same benefits that Social Security has promised, unless we take steps soon to reform the way Social Security is financed.

The threat to the stability of Social Security has been apparent for decades. For years, political leaders have agreed that something must be done, but nothing has been done. We can postpone action no longer. Social Security is a challenge now. If we fail to act, it will become a crisis. We must save Social Security, and we now have the opportunity to do so. Our Government will run large budget surpluses over the next 10 years. These surpluses provide an opportunity to move to a stronger Social Security system.

Two months ago, in my address to Congress, I described the principles that must guide any reform of Social Security. First, Social Security reform must preserve the benefits of all current retirees and those nearing retirement. Second, Social Security reform must return the Social Security system to sound financial footing. Third, Social Security reform must offer personal savings accounts to younger workers who want them. Today, young workers who pay into Social Security might as well be saving their

money in their mattresses. That's how low the return is on their contributions. And the return will only decline further—maybe even below zero—if we do not proceed with reform.

Personal savings accounts will transform Social Security from a Government IOU into personal property and real assets, property that workers will own in their own names and that they can pass along to their children. Ownership, independence, access to wealth should not be the privilege of a few; they're the hope of every American, and we must make them the foundation of Social Security.

Today I am naming a Presidential Commission to turn these principles into concrete reforms. This task is not easy, but the mandate is clear: Strengthen Social Security and make its promise more certain and valuable for generations to come. I have asked the Commission to deliver its report later this fall.

Social Security does not belong to any one political party, so the Commission is drawn from both parties. Social Security does not belong to the Government or to the politicians, and so my Commission has members from many different walks of life. It will be chaired by two outstanding Americans: Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Richard Parsons of AOL/Time Warner.

Senator Moynihan has been aptly described as the Nation's best thinker among politicians since Lincoln and its best politician among thinkers since Jefferson. A profound mind, a compassionate heart, and a farseeing imagination have distinguished him throughout his career.

Our task today is to preserve what is the best in Social Security while updating it, and for a new time. And nobody will do that job better than this great student of Social Security's history and stalwart champion of Social Security's principles.

As cochief operating officer of AOL/Time Warner, Richard Parsons is one of the leaders of this Nation's information age economy. Few people have served more tours

of duty in the American Government and business—a senior aide in the Ford administration, managing partner of a distinguished law firm, CEO of a major savings bank, before becoming president of Time Warner.

Mr. Parsons serves his community as ably as he's served his country. He chairs the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation, where he mobilized the creativity of the private sector to bring jobs and opportunity to people in need. And he sits on the boards of Howard University and the Lincoln Center. Richard Parsons represents in our time the spirit of business statesmanship at its highest.

Fourteen other fine Americans have joined the Moynihan-Parsons commission; seven of them are Republicans, and seven are Democrats. They include a former aide to Robert Kennedy and a former aide to Ronald Reagan, political leaders, entrepreneurs, eminent experts on the Social Security system. Every one of these fine men and women is passionately committed to the safety, success, and long-term security of Social Security.

I'm giving this Commission a great task, and its members have my full faith. When it makes its report, the Congress and I will face some serious decisions, but we must be inspired by the example of the founder of Social Security, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In his Fireside Chat of September 1934, shortly before Congress enacted Social Security, he warned that there will always be those "frightened by boldness and cowed by the necessity for making decisions." They will complain, he said, "that all we have done is unnecessary and subject to great risks."

But now, as then, bold action and serious decisions are necessary, and we in our time must rededicate ourselves to the great ideal Roosevelt defined 67 years ago: greater freedom and greater security for the average man than he has ever known before in the history of America. That's our charge, and we must keep it.

And now, one of the Cochairmen of this Commission, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

[At this point, former Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Richard D. Parsons made brief remarks.]

The President. I now have the honor of signing the Commission into being.

[*The President signed the Executive order.*]

The President. Thank you all very much. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:27 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. The Executive order of May 2 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on the President's Commission To Strengthen Social Security

May 2, 2001

Dear Senator Daschle and Congressman Gephardt:

Thank you for your letter of April 12, providing your recommendations concerning the creation of a Social Security commission.

I have pledged that I will work to develop a bipartisan consensus to strengthen Social Security, preserving the program for senior Americans and building wealth for younger Americans. I believe that a bipartisan commission will provide the renewed energy and focus that can help us transform our common commitment to strengthening Social Security into legislative action on behalf of Americans of all ages.

In your letter, you expressed support for some of the principles that I have outlined as cornerstones for any reform of Social Security. Like you, I believe that we must honor our commitment to pay full promised benefits to those who have made a lifetime of contributions to the Social Security program. I also believe that Social Security surpluses must be dedicated to Social Security only.

I was pleased to see that you do not oppose personal accounts, even while acknowledging legitimate differences regarding their appropriate structure and financing. Please be assured that the commission will consider a full and fair analysis of all

methods of designing and financing such accounts.

I share your desire that the commission be truly bipartisan. It is my intention that the commission be composed of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, and that the commission make use of the nonpartisan and independent projections embodied in the Social Security Trustees' reports.

As you note, it has been nearly two decades since the last significant legislation to shore up Social Security's finances. Too frequently in recent years, commissions and advisory councils have been constructed in a way that reproduced legislative gridlock. Such structures frustrated needed action to strengthen the programs on which Americans depend. It is not a coincidence that the last commission to have contributed significant legislation, the Greenspan Commission of 1981–83, was not handicapped by restrictive voting and approval procedures.

The best way to ensure that the commission receives the necessary internal and external approval is for both the President and the Congressional leadership to provide our support for the development of its recommendations. Those Americans who depend on Social Security today, as well as those who will depend on it in the future, deserve no less from us.