

A couple of things I have already picked up on. In the last few weeks, I have had the pleasure, I guess it was a pleasure, although it was a stark message, of hearing the Deputy Commissioner of the Social Security Administration testify in front of our Committee on Ways and Means, Mr. James Lockhart. Mr. Lockhart was the first one during this new Congress to actually look us right in the eye and say "Social Security, as it currently exists, is unsustainable."

Now, there are a whole lot of words thrown out around here: problem, crisis, bankrupt, insolvency, all that stuff. But when the Deputy Commissioner of the program says it is unsustainable, I get that word. I also understand that over time, as I pointed out earlier in this hour, it started out with a 2 percent tax on the first \$3,000, and it has been tweaked a little as we go.

Along the way, the tax that the employer pays was implemented. And many people think, well, that is great, it is not mine. I submit, though, that if you are the worker, that is coming out of the personnel costs that that company, your employer, is allocating because he thinks it is an expense for having you as a worker. It is now 12.4 percent of not \$3,000, but \$90,000. So it has grown.

Some are saying let us just tweak it again. We are not going to put it on a path of sustainability by another relatively subtle adjustment, subtle in some people's minds.

Now, more recently, in fact yesterday, David Walker, the Comptroller General of the United States of America, had this to say. Some picked up on but a few words of what he had to say, but I will give the first several sentences: "Although the Social Security System is not in crisis," and at least one of the major papers in this town had a headline that said "Walker Says Social Security System Is Not in Crisis," and stopped there. But here is what he said: "Although the Social Security system is not in crisis, it faces a serious solvency and sustainability challenge that is growing as time passes. If we do nothing until 2042," and that is suggested, "achieving actuarial balance would require a 30 percent reduction in benefits or a 43 percent increase in payroll taxes for just the period of 2042 to 2078." And then once again you are back in the soup. You have got a problem in front of you there. All we do is defer into the future if we do not fix it now.

"Furthermore," he says, "Social Security's problems are a subject of grave fiscal challenge facing our Nation. Absent changes in budget policy, the Nation will ultimately have to choose among escalating Federal deficits and debt, huge tax increases and/or dramatic budget cuts." Pretty stark words. "As the General Accounting Office's long-term budget simulation shows, substantive reform of Social Security and our major Federal health

programs is critical to saving our Nation's fiscal future. Taking action soon would serve to reduce the magnitude of the changes needed to ensure that Social Security is solvent, sustainable, and secure for current and future generations."

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that is the challenge in front of us: "Take action soon to reduce the magnitude of the changes needed to ensure that Social Security is solvent, sustainable, and secure for current and future generations."

Last week, and I will close with this, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan had this to say: "In my view, a retirement system with a significant personal accounts component would provide a more credible means of ensuring that the program actually adds to the overall saving and, in turn, boosts the Nation's capital stock."

We are beginning to develop consensus. This is a huge heavy lift, but it is a lift that is necessary, as Mr. Walker said yesterday, "to ensure that Social Security is solvent, sustainable, and secure for current and future generations of Americans."

SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DENT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, once again it is a pleasure to address the House. Also, I want to thank our Democratic leader, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), for allowing us to have this time.

Week after week, as you know, the 30-something Working Group comes to the floor on issues that are facing Americans, not only young Americans but all Americans, since we are a country that has very strong family values and that believes in making sure that the next generation has better opportunities than the generation before them.

We come to the floor to not only share information but to share good information, information that can be shared with others. We also let not only Members of this House, but Members of the other body know where we got the information from: real accounts, not just fiction. I know some Members come to the floor well intended to share good information, but it is questionable as to where it came from.

We are going to talk a lot about Social Security during this 30-something hour, and we are also going to address and commend some of the groups that are out there fighting the good fight, sharing with young Americans about many of the issues that are facing them. It is important that we do so, so that they will be able to make accurate decisions and will be able to speak to their Members of Congress about what they should do as it relates to Social Security.

This afternoon, Mr. Speaker, I am again honored to have my colleague, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ), who I have had the opportunity to serve with over the last 10 years in the Florida legislature and now here in Congress. Our colleague, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), is not here with us, and I will give him a hard time about that; but he had to leave, and so being from Florida, it is certainly appropriate for us to be here with so many Social Security recipients in our State. And even those individuals that are living in other parts of the country will no doubt eventually make it to Florida and become our constituents one day.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to yield to my colleague at this time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for yielding to me, and it is an honor to be here once again with him. It has been my distinct pleasure to serve with my colleague in various capacities over the last 10 years, and particularly because we represent a State that would be so impacted by whatever the vague outlines of the President's suggestion, for lack of a better term. Because what has been truly unfortunate about the President's concept is that that is all it has become. It has just been a concept.

We are trying to help people understand that the President, although he has been stumping the country promoting his concept, his concept has never amounted to legislation. He has not asked any Member of Congress to file legislation. We have not seen a bill; therefore, we have no specific details. And coming from the State that we do, which is one of the States whose residents would be the most significantly impacted by the devastating results of his proposal on Social Security, we have spent quite a bit of time trying to educate our constituents about the dire ramifications.

Given our generation and the impact ultimately that the President's outline would have on them, we need to continue to spend time doing what we have been doing, which is trying to spread the word and make people aware that, despite what they may have heard in the previous hour, we are on a fact-disseminating mission. We need to get the word out and make people understand that there is a lot of fiction and a lot of trumped-up reality that has been disseminated.

We need to help people understand that while there is a problem with Social Security, we need to be responsible and take the time that is required, that is our responsibility to take, to get it right. It is not a crisis.

The year 2042 is what has been clearly acknowledged as the earliest that we have to be concerned about there being a cut in benefits. And while we absolutely do not think we should reach that point, in 2042, since this is the 30-something Working Group, I will be 75 years old. In 2052, which is the more likely scenario, given the dim economic picture they have painted and

given our economic history, it is unlikely that in 2042 there would even be a problem yet. I will be 85 years old.

The reason that is important, as my colleague knows when he talks to his friends and when I talk to my friends, people who are listening out there, people our age think Social Security will not be there for them. They really do. And with the facts, they will understand that it will be there for them well beyond their retirement years. We need to be responsible and take some time to make the changes necessary and not yank the rug out from under our generation or our children's generation. We need to make sure we can preserve the Social Security safety net.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am glad to join my colleague this afternoon because we have a lot of educating to do.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I am so excited to be here and to be able to share information, not only with our charts but about what is happening.

This is about future generations, but it also is about the present Social Security recipients. Right now we have 48 million Americans receiving Social Security, and 48 percent of those individuals would be in poverty if they did not receive that Social Security benefit. This is serious business. This is not a numbers game. It is not an opportunity for this body or the majority side or the minority side or the President or what have you to give the American people the Potomac Two Step. We cannot allow that to happen. This is the very fiber of American values, as we value our older people and as we value our generations to come.

If I can, Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few moments to talk about the reason why we have to be credible here on this floor. Now, once again, like I did last week, I want to commend not only the Democratic leadership, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI); the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER); the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ), chairman of the House Democratic Caucus; and Vice Chair of the caucus, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CLYBURN), for being so stalwart and being out there and willing to be the hood ornaments of righteousness on this issue.

□ 1730

When you are a hood ornament, nine times out of ten, you are going to get some bugs in your teeth. I used to be a State trooper, so I know about hood ornaments.

But for us to do Social Security, it needs to be a true bipartisan effort. Where does the rub come in? I think where the rub comes in here is the majority side is saying we have to have these private accounts. Even the President had to admit that private accounts will not resolve the Social Security issue.

Social Security is not in the stage of crisis. Let me say that again, because we have folks who are flying around

and burning jet fuel at taxpayers' expense, on C-SPAN more than the House is on C-SPAN, and the other body, talking about a crisis.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, what could happen is our colleagues on the other side of the aisle just spent an hour talking about how there is a crisis, and we need to address it. It could appear as though we are engaging in a debate of, yes there is, no there is not. Let me just show the folks at home who is saying and agreeing there is not a crisis.

The other day, the Comptroller General, David Walker, testified in front of the Committee on Ways and Means, which is the committee with main jurisdiction over this issue. He said, while the program faces no immediate financial crisis, he did say that time is working against us, and the longer we wait, the further you put off solving this problem, the more difficult it is going to be. He did acknowledge in full public view, the Comptroller General of the United States, that the program faces no immediate financial crisis.

Now, I would not think that the Comptroller General would deliberately contradict the President unless he wanted to make sure that he stuck to what is factual versus hyperbole. We have been truly committed to disseminating facts and not just blowing this problem out of proportion to get to our political goal. That is what the other side has been doing.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, taking from the words of the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), we want to strengthen Social Security. We want to do it in a bipartisan way and without slashing benefits and making sure that we do not have private accounts that will make the Social Security challenge even worse. We will point that out as we move along.

Once the President stops insisting on privatization of Social Security, we can have a real dialogue and move forward and make sure we can deal with the long-term challenges.

I mentioned earlier about the 38 million Americans that are recipients, and the average benefit is \$955. That is a lot of money to many Americans. This is not money that they just showed up and said, I have not worked and I want Social Security benefits. These are individuals who have worked every day of their lives, invested in Social Security and want to make sure that is the guaranteed American benefit that they are going to receive at the end of their working years, and rightfully so.

What the private accounts are doing and what they should do is do what we did when President Reagan was president and Tip O'Neill was Speaker of this House. They got together on a bipartisan basis and came up with a solution for Social Security. That is what we are going to have to do. We cannot have an OK Corral with one at one end of the street and one at the other and then figure out who can say what the most, even if it is inaccurate, playing

the political game, because Americans will lose in the long run.

Let us talk a little bit, and I want to share a little bit about the credibility of inaccurate information. That is contradicting to say the credibility of inaccurate information, but it is important that Americans understand that if they are going to take something as fact, it is important that they have some sort of reference to go to because a lot of things have been said in this Chamber.

I mentioned last week, dealing with the whole Medicare prescription drug debate, and I commend some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who stood against the powers that be and said no, I will not vote for this give-away to some of the strongest lobbyists in this town, that we are going to give them a gift and not be able to give a gift to seniors that we should give them. That we will not, I will not continue to borrow money on a high interest credit card, and I have to get my credit card going again because I had a blown-up copy of the Federal debt, that we are not going to do it.

When we started dealing with the prescription drug issue, everyone was running around saying we needed to deal with prescription drugs. On the Democratic side we said, yes; finally, we can get together and do something on a bipartisan basis. During that debate, the administration said the prescription drug bill will cost \$350 billion. That is without giving the government negotiating power with the pharmaceutical companies to bring the cost down, that is just having the pharmaceutical companies set the price.

Then the administration shared with us that it would be \$400 billion. That is a lot of money; okay. We were able to not only pass the bill, and many of us voted against it because we knew the numbers were not correct and we could not get price negotiations in to bring the cost of prescription drugs down for everyday Americans. Sure enough, after the debate, we received information that it would be \$530 billion. That is a lot of money. I am talking about future generations and what they have to pay on the debt.

Then a couple of weeks ago, the cost went up to \$727 billion. I will tell Members that is very, very wrong as it relates to inaccurate information that we have received from not only the President but from the majority side.

Before I move to the next point of accurate versus inaccurate, Social Security, Democrats have literally given flesh and blood for Social Security. This is something that we have fought for because we believe in not only the American worker but making sure that when we tell Americans that we are going to do something, that we are going to stand up to that responsibility. Private accounts are private accounts. They are private. It is privatization of Social Security, and it is not just the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) saying

that there will be issues if we take this private account gamble, but there are others that have come out against what the President is talking, this philosophy which is not a plan which we will address later. The gentlewoman has a chart to explain further what we are talking about.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, it is important to continue along the vein that we have. These are not manufactured facts by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ).

If we look at this chart that shows how the debt would increase under the President's budget proposal if this plan goes forward, this is the portion of the debt from 2004 through 2015 that each American would be responsible for. It starts at \$4,395 in 2004 and goes up to \$10,500. This is gross income per family of four, and this is CBO numbers. This reflects the CBO's estimate of the President's budget that he has recently proposed. We are already in pretty dire straits when it comes to the deficit. The deficit, when divided amongst every American and each family, this is what it translates to over time. This is what it means to a family of four in real burden.

So if Members think about the real burden that a family of four takes on in adding to the debt because the proposal that the President has put forward grossly increases the deficit. I want to take this chart down and go to the next chart, in order to privatize Social Security and make the transition to private accounts, that would cost \$1.4 trillion in borrowing in the first 10 years of the plan.

That obviously will endanger the economy. It makes us further indebted to foreign nations and sends essentially the decision making about our economic future to China and Japan as opposed to remaining here in Washington, D.C., where we think most Americans would obviously prefer it to be. It raises taxes on our children and grandchildren over time because that number goes from \$4,300 in debt per family of four to more than \$10,000 per family of four.

Going past 10 years, it costs another \$3.5 trillion. The Republican Social Security privatization plan adds further to our debt. Here is the \$1.4 trillion in the next 10 years and an additional \$3.5 trillion over the 10 years after that. That adds additional debt in the first 10 years, and this shows the current debt that we have.

We have got to make sure that we become once and for all fiscally responsible. We have a goal to remain committed to the preservation and solvency of Social Security because we have been, as Democrats, supportive of creating, sustaining and improving Social Security since 1935. The proof is in the pudding. The proof is in where the votes have been, and the votes have been in terms of sustaining Social Security's future, on the Democratic side of the aisle.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the Congressional Budget Office has given us a lot of good information for us to be able to share with the American people about what is actually happening with this debate.

I also want to say that the President and some Members on the majority side bought into the philosophy to hit the road. I am glad they are joining us because over 80 percent of the Democratic Caucus has gone out and had town hall meetings not only in their districts but throughout the country.

A little later on, I would like to talk about a town hall meeting that I am having. I will be in the Capitol tomorrow, and at noon, I will be online. I will give that information later. I will talk about how you can become a part of a town hall meeting and send questions in. We have received 20 questions already, and we have not even gotten online yet.

The President said in Columbus, Ohio, today. This is a debt to the future generations of Americans, and unless we do something about it, we will not be able to pay for it without wrecking the economy. This is what he said in Ohio, and I am glad we have a savvy reporter from the Associated Press that understands the plan as we understand the plan here in Congress.

Under this plan, retirees and workers 55 and over will receive current benefits without changes. Younger workers would get a lower guaranteed government benefit at retirement than current retirees will receive right now on the assumption that their personal account earnings would make up at least a part of the difference. Under the administration's philosophy, younger workers who decide against the private accounts would also face cuts of their guaranteed government benefit.

Some Republicans have been skittish about the issue, fearing political backlash, and I will say congressional Democrats are virtually unanimous in opposition to this philosophy.

□ 1745

I just want to say that as we start talking about cutting back on benefits, what the majority side is doing, they are saying even if you do not want to be a part of the private accounts, because you hear all this thing about options and choices, that even if you do not want to be a part of it, your benefits are going to be cut anyway. I do not understand it.

Then some folks say, well, where is the Democratic plan? I would say, where is the majority side plan? There is no plan. There is not a piece of legislation. Nothing has been binding and sent to the Hill. Nothing at all.

I want to show this chart to the Members because we need to make sure that we remind some individuals here about what has been going on with this debate on Social Security and private accounts. We have been time after time, and I say "we," House Democrats and some good Republicans on the

other side of the aisle, I just want to say again, there are some in the majority caucus that have taken a stand against the administration and the majority side in saying no.

After the Medicare prescription drug issue, it is embarrassing. If you voted for the Medicare prescription drug plan, you are embarrassed. If you are a fiscal conservative, you have a bag over your head, because you are saying, I can't believe I voted for that. I can't believe that not only did I increase the debt, that we are knocking on the Bank of China to pay down on the debt, God forbid if they said, guess what, we don't want to buy any more of your bonds, we are in trouble.

This is a time of war. This is a time when we are trying to protect the homeland. And as I see the administration out there running around, saying, I guess if we burn enough jet fuel and go around and talk to people, maybe they will start believing that there is a crisis.

The crisis is the Federal debt. The crisis is the fact that 45 million Americans working, not those that are sitting at home cracking their toes saying the job situation looks sad, these individuals are going in every day to work, and they do not have health care. That is a crisis. A crisis is our men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan and in the horn of Africa that are fighting terrorism. That is a crisis. A crisis is these military families, especially for the Army, that have been deployed some 12, 15 months, and they are trying to make ends meet. That is a crisis.

I think maybe, just maybe, and I am not here with hypotheticals, but I am just saying maybe this whole thing about Social Security private accounts may just be, I will run that way when the issues are this way. And I think, or I know, that the American people are a lot smarter than some people may think they are as it relates to having a grasp on this issue of Social Security.

The reason why we do not have a bill and the reason why the President has not come up with a plan and the reason why the majority side has not proposed a plan, because the American people are not with privatization of Social Security.

I know the gentlewoman wants to say something, but I just have to make this point because this is about fact, not fiction. I think it is important. I think we have an obligation as the Democratic 30-something Working Group empowered by our leadership to come to this floor to have an hour on this floor every week is not only an honor for us but an honor for every young American that is out there and also for every parent and grandparent that is saying that I want my children to have a better opportunity than what they have had.

Let us talk about what the President is doing now. In 1978, he said he wanted to privatize Social Security, that he would like to see it happen.

In 2000, during the campaign, then Governor Bush said that he wanted to privatize Social Security.

Then when he became President Bush, he appointed a commission to develop a privatization plan for him. In December of 2001, that commission gave the President three options for privatization of Social Security.

From December 2001 to 2004, the President and the administration and the majority side were silent on Social Security. For this to be a perceived crisis that the majority side is talking about and that the President is talking about, to be silent over all of that time and say nothing.

In 2004, while running for reelection, the President again talked about private accounts and saying they are a solution for Social Security's long-term financial imbalance.

Days after the 2004 election, the President said that he had political capital and wanted to use it to push privatization of Social Security through the Congress right away.

In January of this year, press accounts claimed that the White House would have a privatization plan to Congress by late February. This is March now, or early March. I am going to tell the Members right now, I do not think that we are going to see one. In the budget that was submitted at the beginning of February, there was actually no reference to this crisis that the President speaks of in his budget. No reference. Meanwhile, we have the President flying all around the country, this is a crisis, they are using words like "bankrupt," and nothing in the budget. I cannot understand that. It goes against what you should do in a crisis. And now the press is saying that they are not clear if the President is going to offer a plan.

I know it took me a little while to say all of that, but I want to make sure when individuals in the majority side start to talk about, well, where is the Democratic plan, I will tell you, we have been waiting years for the Republican plan. Years. Our plan is already enshrined in Social Security. The reason why it is going to be solvent for another 47 years is not because the majority side, the Republican side, has said we love and we want Social Security for years and years to come. It is because Democrats demanded that Americans that did everything that we told them to do, work hard, support your country, raise your children and at the end of those years, you will receive your benefits, even if you pass away, 17 percent of the individuals that are receiving these benefits are young people that are receiving survivor benefits. And so this is not a gray and silver hair, this is not a silver hair-blue hair issue. This is an American issue.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. To add insult to injury, if we are going to spend time talking about private accounts and that really seems to be the way the President has shaped this debate, that is the issue around which the

President has shaped this debate, what is unbelievable is that private accounts by anyone's admission do not even solve the problem. Private accounts do not shore up Social Security, they do not improve its solvency, they do not solve the 2042 problem. They just create private accounts and privatize Social Security and pull the rug out from under people's future retirement security. That is all they do.

Just so that we can stick to the facts and not hyperbole, I will highlight the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL), our ranking member on Ways and Means. The other day, he spoke to Mr. Walker and asked him about private accounts and his opinion. Mr. Walker, the Comptroller, said that as a carve-out, and this was in front of the House Committee on Ways and Means, personal accounts financed with payroll taxes could worsen the program's financial stability. He said if it was designed as a supplement to traditional benefits, as an add-on, that personal accounts would not cause a problem. And, essentially, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) said, well, what the President proposed was a carve-out. That is clearly not acceptable under the Comptroller General's concept.

By the President's own experts' admission, Social Security is not in crisis, Social Security is solvent until at least 2042; and then what is unfortunate is the hyperbole, because our colleague from North Carolina, who was spending some time on the floor a little while ago talking about their view, his view, on Social Security referred to the solvency issue and said that out in 2042 that Social Security would be flat busted, I think was the term he used while I was listening to his debate. That is absolutely incorrect. Flat busted. My definition of flat busted means no money, gone, cannot provide any benefits at all. Then he, a few minutes later, said, well, it would provide 60 to 70 percent of benefits.

The reality is that the factual numbers from the Social Security Administration itself, from the trustees who manage the Social Security trust fund, they say that at the earliest in 2042, Social Security would pay 80 percent of benefits if we do nothing, which you and I and others continue and the leader and the whip and the chairman of the caucus continue to stress, we are not suggesting that we do nothing. We are suggesting that if we are going to focus on this problem, that we call it a problem and not a crisis, couch it the way it is, and let us come together in a bipartisan fashion and sit down and hash out solutions.

Our point is why spend time wringing our hands, gnashing our teeth, and stressing out our constituents who are really concerned about whether or not Social Security is going to be there for them talking about privatizing Social Security which is the vast majority of what we are spending our time talking about when it does not even solve the problem. That is the bottom line.

When I had my town hall meetings, Democrats have held more than 300 town hall meetings, like the gentleman said, more than 80 percent of our colleagues in the caucus have had town hall meetings, there have literally been more than 300 of those. At so many of those, senior citizens, our wonderful senior citizens who literally we all stand on their shoulders today, you and I especially, our generation has been able to achieve what we have been able to achieve by standing on their shoulders.

People ask, why do seniors care about this issue? The President has said, people 55 and over are not going to have to worry about it. They care because they care about their grandchildren. They also care because they have a healthy dose of skepticism. What they lived through in their lifetimes has taught them not to take everything at face value. And they understand that when you have such a gargantuan, mammoth change to a system as large as Social Security, there is no way that you can trust that people who are 55 and older will not have to worry.

They also understand that they need to be concerned about their children and their grandchildren. That same AP story that the gentleman quoted a little while ago focused on the President and what he has said about this issue. The President commented on people 55 and older. At the same time he was saying they would not need to be concerned about his plan, he also said grandmothers and grandfathers need to be worried about their grandchildren when it comes to Social Security. So at least the President acknowledges that people 55 and older have a legitimate reason to be concerned about this. We have got to make sure that we continue to disseminate the facts and not engage in the hyperbole that the Republicans have been.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I can tell the gentlewoman, I was here in the 108th Congress. I know some of the things that have been said not only on this floor but also some of the information we have received from the administration, I think the American people have witnessed this information, too, for it to not be accurate, especially when it comes down to numbers.

There are Members of the other body of this Congress, the other Chamber, they are concerned. They are not willing to take a gamble. They are not willing to throw the dice. It is not a crap game. This is Social Security. I want to be able to share not only with the Members but the people here in this Chamber that the rules that are set out by this House, Democrats, we are in the minority. We do not agenda the meetings, we cannot agenda the meetings, we cannot bring bills to the floor because we are not in control of the Rules Committee. The gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL), our ranking member on Ways and Means,

cannot call a Ways and Means Committee hearing to question the administration on the philosophy of privatization of Social Security since there is no plan.

So I want to make sure that people understand, because there is desperation on the other side of the aisle for those that are participating with the administration in this game of a crisis of Social Security. And when you are in crisis, you start saying things that will sensationalize the situation. And the inaccurate information that is out there, and I am not using the generalization of saying the Republican Caucus, because there are some good Republicans. They are standing there. They are standing by their constituents. They are saying, no, this is not clear, I don't see how this benefits my constituents, young or old. With all due respect to the President, I am not saying that he is giving us wrong information; I am saying he is giving us inaccurate information.

□ 1800

It is what you say. When you say words like "bankrupt," that means no money. That means it is done.

Listen, if the gentlewoman and I were the only Americans paying into the Social Security system, it would not be bankrupt. So I am just trying to break it down, because the President came in here and said, if you are over 55, you do not need to worry.

Now, I am going to tell you, we are one America, and I do not know of any parent, and I am so glad that my mother and my father, God bless his soul, he has passed on now, they did not say, "I am okay, son. You need to fend for yourself. I have mine, you get yours." That is not the American way.

We will come to this Floor until the microphones no longer work as not only Democrats but some Republicans that are willing to stand up against this crisis philosophy that is wrong; 47 years of benefits not being cut, and even after 47 years, 80 percent of the benefits will be honored. So I commend them.

I want to say to the gentlewoman that our leader, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), the Democratic Leader has been on the road. She is speaking to young people. She is speaking to students at the universities, talking about Social Security and why it is important and what we want to do and how we want to work with the majority side.

I will tell you, when we work together, good things happen. I have been here. I have witnessed good things happening when people sit at the table. But it is very rare, I must add. And if given the opportunity to lead this House in the majority, our leadership will provide the right formula or will write the right prescription, if I could say that, to make sure that we work in a bipartisan way.

We have some e-mails we have to read from last week. Also, I want to be

able to share, the 30-something online town hall meeting will be tomorrow at noon. You can go to the 30-something website to find out the details. Democratic.leader.house.gov/30something.

That is Democratic.leader.house.gov/30something. That is the site.

At our website, you can also check out the Social Security time line that I shared with you. I want to make sure the Members have this information, Democrat or Republican, I want them to have it, because I want to be able to make sure that the facts are out there. Everything that we share here, it is not fiction. It is not Star Trek. It is actually factual.

You will see the President's Social Security time line, of how long the majority side has been talking about private accounts, and this is one I guess of value or something, talking points on young people and Social Security. Also linked to the web page of the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) Social Security and young people are clips from the past 30-something hours.

We want to give people information, and we are so glad we are interactive, because we are hearing from people.

I also would say, again, that is tomorrow at noon, the 30-something town hall meeting. We will be online to answer your questions, and the site is Democratic.leader.house.gov/30something.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, I want to get to some of the e-mails we received since the last hour. I want to highlight an e-mail we got from a young woman, someone who just passed 30-something, she just turned 40, so she is just outside of our generational span here, but she said this about privatization and private accounts: "I am very uncomfortable with the idea of using private accounts for Social Security. My mutual fund lost half of its value and, at the rate it is earning, will take another 5 to 8 years to get to the rate of my deposit. My stocks, bonds and annuities lost, but not as big, but they haven't really earned in about 5 years. My IRAs earned at about 3 percent. Everyone else I know, from my retired father to my peers to my kids who have mutual funds in their names for college funds, have been burned by the private financial sector. In addition, I know people whose employers have defaulted on pension plans."

This is the type of risk that we would be subjecting people's retirement security to if we transition to private accounts. That is what people are afraid of.

There is not so much confidence in investing in the stock market. When I had my town hall meetings, and I had three of them, I asked people to raise their hands, and I had more than 200 at two of mine, and 500 or more at all three combined, and I asked people at each town hall meeting for a show of hands, how many of them would feel comfortable in their own ability to

make investment decisions or their children's or grandchildren's ability to make investment decisions to ensure that they would have as much money as Social Security would provide for them when they got to their retirement. And literally, at my first town hall meeting, three people raised their hand; at my second town hall meeting, two people raised their hand; and no one raised their hand at the third one.

People do not want to throw their retirement security to the wind. They do not want to subject it to the whims of the stock market. Social Security is not supposed to be a gamble, like investment in the stock market is. You go in with your eyes open when you invest in the stock market. You know you may lose your money.

That is not what Social Security was designed to do. Social Security was designed to provide you with security, not designed to stress you out for the rest of your life and have you pray on your knees every night that you made the right decision and your money is going to be there for you when you retire.

Twenty percent of women who are single and retired and collecting Social Security have Social Security as their only source of income. That number is only going to go up because, as we all know, given our age, our generation has not been the generation of savers. Our generation has not squirreled money away under the mattress or in savings accounts. They do not have a significant nest egg.

The President is trying to say that this could be their nest egg. The only trick is, if you move to private accounts, he does not really talk too much in his town hall meetings about how there is going to be a commensurate cut in Social Security benefits. You do not get both under his plan.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, under his philosophy.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. His outline.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Because there is no plan. I am sorry.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. That is okay. I thank the gentleman. He is right, I was giving him too much credit. You do not get both. You get at least a 46 percent cut in your benefits in the Social Security benefits that you would have gotten if you move to a private account.

I want to give some information to our younger peers about what it would mean. Risky private accounts do not make up for the 46 percent cut in benefits that President Bush has proposed. A 20-year-old who enters the workforce this year would lose about \$152,000 over their working lifetime in Social Security benefits under the Bush plan.

Social Security provides disability insurance, which we have not talked too much about yet. I had a man who suffers from MS come to one of my town hall meetings. He could barely speak because it has affected his voice.

He can no longer work. He collects Social Security. We need to remind people of people who are survivors, who are collecting survivors benefits, their families, people on disability.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Explain survivor benefits, if you will, to make sure everyone understands.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Absolutely. A third of Social Security goes to people who are survivors of Social Security recipients. The Social Security recipient in their family has passed on. That person's dependents who remain alive collect that person's Social Security benefits.

There are young children and widows who are sustained through their life, who are able to remain in their house, who are able to send their children to school and leave the legacy that their deceased parent would have wanted for them, because Social Security is in place.

If you shift to private accounts, the President's outline does not help people on disability or survivors or their families because they cannot work, because they do not have a way to invest in private accounts, because they do not collect a salary. So we are going to essentially leave them out in the cold.

For a worker in her mid-20s with a spouse and two children, and there are millions of families like that across this country, Social Security provides the equivalent of a \$350,000 disability insurance policy. Most people that I know cannot afford to go out and buy one of those on the private market. That is the type of thing that Social Security provides.

Suppose, God forbid, a young parent dies suddenly. Social Security provides for the children who are left behind. The survivors benefits will replace as much as 80 percent of the earnings for a 25-year-old average wage worker who dies leaving two young children and a spouse. For that parent, Social Security survivors benefits are the equivalent to a \$403,000 life insurance policy.

That is what Social Security means to real people who suffer through these unexpected tragedies every single day.

We need to fix Social Security. We acknowledge that there are problems. We do not think that we should get to 2042 and have there only be 80 percent benefits paid. We believe in shoring up Social Security, but we believe in doing it responsibly, and we are not going to come to the table and negotiate on a risky privatization plan which does not solve the problem, which adds to our national debt, makes us more reliant on foreign nations and their economic decisions and leaves the future of our generation twisting in the wind, hoping that they will have benefits that would probably go away if this is the direction we are going in.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentlewoman. The more we can talk about Social Security and what is being presently given to Americans, like survivor and disability benefits, I am glad that

the gentlewoman really talked about that, because a 20-year-old, it is a three out of ten chance they have of dying or becoming disabled before retirement age. That is important. That is why I say this is an American issue, Mr. Speaker, and not just a small issue.

I have an issue of dealing with one generation or another. We will not pit generations against each other, not on this Floor. The reason this bill has not come to the Floor yet or a plan has not been placed on the table yet or Members are not falling over each other on the majority side saying "let's do something, let's do something," is because if they bring a privatization account to this floor or to the other body, that I believe many of them will be making a career decision, because I believe the American people will say, I do not believe because the President and some Members of the majority side said we have to do this because the ball is rolling, because we started the ball rolling by saying that Social Security is going to come to an end tomorrow, we have to finish rolling the ball.

Well, let me tell you, Social Security is not prescription drugs. Social Security is not other plans that the administration has put out there. Social Security is in our communities, in our neighborhoods, a part of our values as a country, a part of family values, knowing that if a parent will pass on, knowing their children will not be left with nothing. They know this, because they have Social Security.

I want to just commend some of the groups, and I want the Members to know, that are in the fight of sharing good information out there with the American people. I want to thank the Center for American Progress. I want to also thank the NEA; A. Phillip Randolph Institute; the Alliance of Retired Americans; the American Association of University Women; also the African American Episcopal Church; also the American Baptist Churches of USA; the AFL-CIO; the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. We want to thank the Campaign for American's Future; also The Center For Budget and Policy Priorities; the Center For Economic Policy and Research; the Children's Defense Fund; the Coalition of Black Trade Unions; the Coalition of Human Needs; College Democrats of America; Congressional Black Caucus Foundation; Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities; the Economic Policy Institute; the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement; also the League of Rural Voters; The League of United Latin American Citizens; and The Links, Inc. Also, we would like to thank the NAACP and several other organizations.

We also need to point out the great job that Rock the Vote is doing. They are out there sharing good information.

□ 1815

They have a Web site, www.rockthevote.com; and I think it is

important that Americans spend time, and I want to commend those groups, those that were mentioned and those that were not mentioned, for the hard work that they are doing out there in holding up the flag and making sure that people understand exactly what is at stake here, making sure that they are out there. They may not be, I say to the gentlewoman, they may not be on the evening news; they may not be at the top of the hour on any of these cable networks that are out there, but they are out there. And they are making sure that we hold this Congress honest in saying that, no, you will not give us the one-two step, you will not fake right, go left, you will not do that.

So that is the reason why we do not have a bill. That is the reason why the President has not put forth a plan, because the American people are so educated on this issue and will continue to be educated on this issue.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I want to remain true to my gender, and I have done this every week since I have been participating in the 30-something group. I have an 18-month-old who I want to take to Mommy and Me in the morning, so I am going to go home in a minute and catch my flight so I can do that.

The reason that I am saying that is that I am one of three women younger than 40 in the Congress, out of 435 Members. There are a unique set of issues that women face when compared to men. The privatization outline that the President has suggested really puts women in a dire situation. For example, in 2003, the average monthly Social Security benefit for a woman was only \$798, which is \$241 less than the average man's monthly retirement. Women's earnings were 76 percent relative to men in 2003, which is down from 77 percent in 2002.

Women who reach retirement age live on average at least 3 years longer than men, so this is going to be their problem 3 years longer than men. Social Security is the only source of retirement income for one in three unmarried, retired women. Without Social Security, 52 percent of white women, 65 percent of African American women, and 61 percent of Hispanic women would live in poverty upon retirement. It provides more than half of the total income for widows and single women.

We have got to make sure that Social Security provides for all of us. We have got to make sure that we get the facts out as it relates to this problem. Not crisis, but problem. And we in the 30-something group, the members of our generation are going to continue to help educate, as we go around the country on the campus tours that we are planning, as we work with Rock the Vote and the myriad of organizations that the gentlewoman has detailed. The Older Women's League also is on that list in being in opposition to the President's outline.

It is our responsibility to ensure that when the baton is handed to our generation, that we commit to carrying it forth and run up those stairs like they do in the Olympics and light the torch so that we can make sure that we preserve the safety net that was created back in 1935.

It is always a pleasure to be here with the gentleman, and I look forward to continuing our fact-disseminating mission.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I know that we are wearing something similar here. Can the gentlewoman tell us a little bit about what we are promoting here?

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Absolutely. The Speaker is also wearing the tie. During this week, the Lifetime Network has promoted the issue of violence against women and highlighted the issue of violence against women on their Web site and on their network. We have all been wearing and have been asked to wear this tie and scarf to highlight domestic violence and the tragedy of domestic violence so that we can make sure that we can fight domestic violence in every corner of this country.

So I am pleased that the men and women of the Congress on both sides of the aisle have been committed to this and we are standing in solidarity with the women who have been victims of domestic violence.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, that is so very, very important; and I thank the gentlewoman for explaining what we are doing. Some Members that were sick this week might have thought we have a new uniform or something, that we all have to wear the same colors.

Mr. Speaker, I want to not only thank the Members for listening to our 30-something hour; but we also want to share in closing, especially here on the Democratic side, that we want to strengthen Social Security without slashing benefits that Americans have earned. Private accounts make the Social Security challenge worse. They force massive benefit cuts and increase the national debt. Once the President stops insisting on privatization accounts, we can work together on making sure that we keep the promise to Social Security recipients and future recipients.

I also want to add that Social Security is an American success story that safeguards Americans' independence and economic security when they get older. Also, Social Security faces a long-term challenge, but not a crisis. A challenge, but not a crisis. I want to make sure that I put emphasis on that. Americans have earned their Social Security benefits, and it would violate their trust and penalize Americans who have paid into Social Security all of their lives to go to private accounts. Here on this side of the aisle, Democrats will preserve the Social Security promise that we made long ago.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to once again, before I close, commend not

only my colleagues in Florida on the other side of the aisle who are not with the philosophy of some Members of the majority and the President as it relates to this Social Security scheme of privatization. I want to commend all of my Democratic colleagues for standing in solidarity in making sure that Social Security is promised for future generations and the present generation.

Mr. Speaker, it is always an honor to come to the floor and address the Members of this House.

OWNERSHIP INSPIRES A VITAL AMERICAN ECONOMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DENT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, one of the hallmarks of our vibrant and growing economy is our continuing quest to give Americans more opportunities to become part of our ownership society. I am going to respond to some of the things that have been said by my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, but I think it is important to note that opportunity and ownership is what we are about.

We are very proud of the fact that we have lowered barriers so that the rate of homeownership now stands at a record 69 percent; nearly 70 percent of the American people own their own homes. And as a percentage, it is continuing to grow dramatically in the minority community.

We have encouraged personal savings and investment through tax relief so families are better able to plan for their own future; and I will say that the comments of my colleagues who were just before us aside, we are working very hard to bring voluntary, and I underscore the word voluntary, Mr. Speaker, personal retirement accounts to younger workers so that they can better control their own financial destiny. Our past and future success depends on the ability of every person to realize the American Dream of being an owner.

Now, last summer the President had a great statement on this issue of ownership, Mr. Speaker. He said, if you own something, you have a vital stake in the future of our country. The more ownership there is in America, the more vitality there is in America, and the more people have a vital stake in the future of this country. I think the President was right on target with that.

Nowhere is that statement on the issue of ownership and vitality more true than in California's Silicon Valley, where broad-based employee stock options spurred the innovation and ingenuity that led the economic boon that we saw in that technology sector during the 1990s and is still in the process of coming back today. It was in the emerging technology industry that the

idea of using employee ownership to attract talented workers flourished.

Small laboratories of ideas with little capital could not afford to pay lucrative salaries to get highly skilled workers. So many of these ideas emerged from basements and garages and, obviously, high salaries were not an option for many of those who were creating new and innovative ideas that improve our quality of life. Instead of lucrative salaries, which they could not offer, instead they used the hope, the hope, not the guarantee, but the hope of success to incentivize smart workers to take risks on new ideas. And with that notion, the high-tech, knowledge-based economy took off.

It took off dramatically. It produced a thriving and innovative economy over the past decade and a half that has generated millions of jobs, dramatically raised our standard of living, and made the United States of America the global leader in technology and service-oriented industries that it is today.

This happened because, as we all know, when you have a stake in the future of an idea, a company, or a home, you are going to work more productively and more creatively to ensure its success.

Now, Mr. Speaker, a good analogy is the mindset of the homeowner. Most of us who own homes recognize the value of taking good care of that investment, our home. If we protect them from damage, maintain their upkeep and improve their appearance, we think we have a good chance of making a profit on that investment. But all of us can admit that when we were renters, when we did not have a stake in maintaining or increasing a property's value, the level of commitment to improve that property was obviously quite low. There was zero motivation for us to do that.

Like the homeowner, Mr. Speaker, the employee-owner wants to see as high a return as possible from his time and effort on the job. That motivates him to contribute more of his sweat equity to the company. That increases the value of the company to him personally, and it increases the value of the company for all shareholders. That tool for creating that risk-taking mentality and giving corporate ownership is the employee stock option.

Today's stock options have allowed 14 million American workers to become corporate owners through broad-based stock option plans. Companies with broad-based plans give stock options to over 50 percent of their employees, many giving an even higher percentage. These owners are not wealthy people. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this is an incredible figure, 79 percent of all U.S. workers who hold stock options earn less than \$75,000 a year. Again, I will say that, when we hear stock options as being criticized because they are something that has been abused, and high-paid, million-dollar executives get it, actually the numbers are 79 percent