



**Killing Social Security softly**

The RS Blog Ending Social Security as we know it, a draft in the air and the president's 'Chainsaw Massacre' By TIM DICKINSON

## Social Security Quackery

George Bush's lame duck term got a whole lot lamer last week when the president finally revealed the darker details behind his plan to reform Social Security. It turns out that "reform," in the President's parlance, means to "slash"; it meant that with regard to taxes, and it means that now as the president tries to take an ax to your Social Security bennies.

The same president whose first term was full of big, bold ideas -- [Mission to Mars](#), anyone? -- has offered up an exceedingly complex, wildly technocratic (final) solution for America's most revered social program. Why? Because he's not man enough to come out and say that he's out to cut middle-class social security benefits by as much as 40 percent.

Forget the "sliding scale," "progressive indexing" doublespeak. All you need to know is that the younger you are, and the more you'll ever make over \$20,000 a year, the fewer guaranteed dollars you're going to see in your golden years under Bush's proposal. You cough up more payroll taxes with every raise you get, but see less of that money when you're 70.

Bush's plan, in essence, is a backdoor tax hike. He would never admit to it, of course. But consider this: Over time, the ratio of your Social Security tax burden (the money you pay into the system) to your Social Security benefits (the money you get back in retirement) is going to increase.

Which begs the question: If the president wants to promote a from-each-according-to-his-means system, why not solve this problem more equitably, by subjecting salary over \$90,000 a year to the payroll tax. Shouldn't every payroll dollar that's earned be subjected to the same tax? That's fair, isn't it?

From everything I [read](#), this would shore up the system for the foreseeable future with no need to slash benefits. And who could complain? The six-figure crowd already made out like gangbusters on the Bush income tax cuts, the Bush capital gains tax cuts, the Bush dividend tax cuts, the Bush ... (you get the idea). And the other retirement vehicles available to these high wage earners -- 401(k)'s and Roth IRA's; you know, the ones you've got to be making bank to take full advantage of -- are heavily subsidized by *all* tax payers.

Of course, the simplest solution of all would be to just repeal the Bush tax cuts for people making seven figures or more and plow the money into Social Security. According to House Democrats, making millionaires pay Clinton-level taxes would keep Social Security in the black. Surely we can ask a little more of those who have benefited so much from American society? So that the working poor don't retire into poverty and so that middle-class seniors don't become a yoke around their adult children's [necks](#)?

But the point is not to shore up Social Security. It is to kill it -- softly. That's why the Bush plan would be rolled out over a generation -- with little cuts, year by year, that would slowly make the program less and less helpful to (and more and more of a burden on) 2/3rds of American wage earners. As [Paul Krugman](#) duly notes, the "goal is to turn F.D.R.'s most durable achievement into an unpopular welfare program, so some future president will be able to attack it with tall tales about Social Security queens driving Cadillacs."

## Bush's "Risk Free" "Empty Promises"

Maybe I'm just dense, but aren't the future obligations of the Social Security trust fund that Bush so frequently maligns as worthless 'IOU's' in face [guaranteed](#) by the same U.S. Treasury bonds he calls a "risk free" investment in the context of his private accounts?

Check out the President's [Fact Sheet: Strengthening Social Security For Those In Need](#):

Out of one side of his mouth the president makes a clarion call to:

"Replace The Empty Promises Being Made to Younger Workers With Real Money."

The logic being, apparently, that Treasury Bonds held in the Social Security trust for future workers are not worth the paper they're printed on -- so that you'd be better off managing the money yourself. Hell. You'd be better off with the money under your mattress.

But then, out of the other side of his maw, Bush claims that the same financial instrument behind those "empty promises" are absolutely "risk free."

"Voluntary Personal Accounts Should Include The Risk Free Option Of Investing In Treasury Bonds," says the president's fact sheet.

In sum: Take your money out of those unforgivably untrustworthy government bonds, and then invest them in 100% risk free ... government bonds.

Am I missing something? Or has Bush drunk the Heritage Foundation's Kool-Aid?

### **God's Time is Perfect!**

Finally. Red State America gets a teen mag all its own: [Teen Virtue](#) magazine!

The website isn't fully live yet, but you can join 564 signers of the publisher's [Virtue Pledge](#).

And there's also an online advice column: [Virtuous Reality](#):

"Re: What would you do if no dudes ever asked you out?"

Reply:

Girl, you should be happy because without a guy you have more time to read god's word than to worry about calling/IMing him. Stay cool girl, god bless ya!"

You really can't make this stuff up.

### **A Draft in the Air**

What do you get when you combine nose-diving military enlistments with a bleak assessment from the Pentagon's top brass that the ongoing Iraq-tastrophe hampers U.S. military readiness -- leaving the nation perilously short handed in the face of North Korean and Iranian provocation?

The answer: A lot of nervous-twentysomethings.

There's a draft in the air. And the longer the Pentagon clings to the notion that the All-Volunteer Army can just soldier through, the more likely it's going to provoke a crisis that will only be solved through conscription.

Consider the following: The manpower crisis among the branches of the Armed Forces actually responsible for fighting the wars of the Bush era (i.e. the Army and the Marines) is [deepening](#).

The active-duty Army has missed its recruiting goals for three straight months and is running 10 percent behind for the year. In the words of its own commander the Army Reserves is degenerating into a "broken force." While not releasing figures for the National Guard, the Army acknowledged that its band of "weekend warriors" hasn't hit a recruiting target since October. The Marines, meanwhile, have missed their enlistment marks for four months running.

Despite having been empowered with record-breaking financial incentives, recruiters continue to scrape the bottom of the manpower barrel, and have now resorted to signing up grunts [straight from the funny farm](#), helping high school dropouts cook up [fake high school diplomas](#), or teaching druggies how to detox before their urine tests.

"The problem is that no one wants to join," one recruiter [told the New York Times](#). "We have to play fast and loose with the rules just to get by."

Not only is this lack of manpower threatening our operations in Iraq -- forcing the repeated redeployment of exhausted units, and necessitating the widespread use of "stop loss" to prevent troops from retiring once their contracts are up -- now we hear that the Pentagon's ability to back up the President's threats to Iran and North Korea has become severely constrained.

Bush has repeatedly said all options are "on the table" in dealing with the other points on the Axis of Evil. But this week, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Richard "See No Evil" Myers presented a classified report to Congress warning that the Armed Forces may buckle under the strain of enforcing the Bush Doctrine.

According to the [Los Angeles Times](#), Meyer "stated that the military is at 'significant risk' of being unable to prevail against enemies abroad in the manner that Pentagon war plans mandate."

Instead of conceding the realities of this manpower crunch and addressing with the kind of candor it would take to head

off a true crisis, the latest bad news has driven our Secretary of Defense to wild, Rumsfeldian hyperbole: "I think the only people who could conceivably be talking about a draft are people who are speaking from [pinnacles of near-perfect ignorance](#)."

That would include General James Helmly, the commander of the Army Reserves who warned back in January -- before this latest round of recruiting shortfalls -- that the Army had pulled out all the stops to shore up its numbers. If financial inducements didn't work, he said (and they haven't) it could force the nation into an argument about reinstating the draft.

Another ignoramus in Rumsfeld's book would include a former member of the Joint Chiefs. "The Army's maxed out here," retired General Merrill McPeak told me for a piece I reported for [Rolling Stone](#) earlier this year. "The Defense Department and the president seem to be still operating off the rosy scenario that this will be over soon, that this pain is temporary and therefore we'll just grit our teeth hunker down and get out the other side of this. That's a bad assumption."

McPeak, who served as Air Force chief of staff under the first President Bush, also told me that Rumsfeld & Co. have pursued a strategy that may make a draft inevitable: "The force that's in there is too large to be sustained but too small to get the job done. If you and I were sitting around a kitchen table saying, 'OK, let's dream up the dumbest strategy we could?' That's what we're doing in Iraq."

If reconsidering a draft really isn't on the table, as Rumsfeld claims, then neither are all of our military options. And don't think our enemies haven't noticed. Iran and North Korea have lately seemed emboldened by our continuing misadventures in Iraq. They may have concluded what renowned military sociologist Charlie Moskos believes: "I think our manpower constraints will determine our military policy rather than vice versa."

In the meantime, Moskos says, we're going to continue to see, "dropping standards and more civilian contracting, and something else may develop -- which is hiring non-Americans to enter the military. I understand a lot of Filipinos are banging at the door of the U.S. Embassy."

### Environmentalism a la Bush

Yes it's a joke, but why do I get the sense that this is what Bush really means when he talks about being a "good steward of the land."

"He spends his days clearing brush, cutting trails, taking down trees, or, as the girls call it, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. George's answer to any problem at the ranch is to cut it down with a chainsaw -- which I think is why he and Cheney and Rumsfeld get along so well?" -- [Laura Bush](#)

*Tim Dickinson reminds you that if Cinco de Mayo is preventing you from soberly embracing the Bush-backed [National Day of Prayer](#), not to worry. You can always fall to your knees on May 15 for the [Global Day Of Prayer USA](#).*

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2	<a href="#">"Boris The Spider "</a>	<b>John Entwistle</b>	SHOP
3	<a href="#">"Lonely No More "</a>	<b>Rob Thomas</b>	SHOP
4	<a href="#">"Wires "</a>	<b>Athlete</b>	SHOP
5	<a href="#">"Speed Of Sound "</a>	<b>Coldplay</b>	SHOP

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