

ROLL CALL

1/18/07

To the Editor,

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell are right — current divided government with a President in his final two years of office presents the best opportunity for a bipartisan solution for Social Security. (“Social Security Progress Remains a Long Shot”, Roll Call, 1/11/07)

Consider precedent:

Efforts by the Clinton administration and a Democratic Congress to reform health care on a partisan basis failed, just as the Bush administration's effort to reform Social Security with a Republican Congress failed. By contrast, a Democratic President and Republican Congress reformed welfare and balanced the budget in the 90s, just as a Republican President and Democratic Congress came together to avert the crisis facing Social Security in 1983.

Simply put, it is better for both parties to address Social Security in a bipartisan way in the 110th Congress instead of waiting until 2009.

In 2008, the first baby boomers will begin collecting benefits – and the Social Security cash surplus will peak. Declining Social Security surpluses – and eventual deficits, beginning in just 10 years – will greatly stress the federal budget.

From 2009-2017, the number of Social Security beneficiaries will grow five times faster than the number of workers paying into the system. Despite the bipartisan desire that Social Security reform not affect seniors, the next president and the 111th Congress may find it nearly impossible to protect retirees already receiving benefits.

No one knows today what party will send the next president or Congressional majority to Washington; nor do we know whether those leaders will be in a position to fix Social Security right away.

That's why today's leaders should place all options on the table and act on them in the next several months. It's in the best interests – both moral AND political – of all concerned.

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