

Reaction positive among those at Bush gathering in Tucson

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Section: State and Regional**Length:** 516 words**Byline:** By ARTHUR H. ROTSTEIN, Associated Press Writer**Dateline:** TUCSON, Ariz.

Body

President Bush's call for Social Security reform, including allowing personal retirement accounts, was a definite hit Monday inside the Tucson Convention Center.

"I think it's a good idea for what he's got planned as far as making yourself a personal savings account, because I don't want to work for nobody else, I want to work for me, for my retirement," said Christopher Martinez, 33, who drove more than 60 miles from Casa Grande to hear the president.

Bush said Tucson was the 17th stop on his 60-day, 60-city stump for "a permanent fix" for the nation's Social Security system, and his appearance drew demonstrators outside the convention center, some holding signs critical of the president's plan.

Most in the standing-room audience of more than 1,500 people obtained tickets from congressional offices. The Tucson Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce sponsored the event.

Henry Tarbox, 70, of Tucson, said he's long supported Social Security reform and privatization and that people who listen to Bush will understand that "this is the way we've got to go, otherwise there's not going to be any money left."

The president, engaging in a dialogue with five panelists chosen by his staff, praised President Franklin D. Roosevelt for creating the Social Security safety net in 1935.

But Bush noted that under its pay-as-you-go system, the federal government spends surplus money not paid out in Social Security benefits, and that the system's current surplus will become a deficit by 2018.

That led Eddie Caballero III, 35, of Tucson, to comment afterward: "I don't understand why we're spending the surplus. If there's a surplus for 21 years, why don't we just not spend the surplus... Why don't we just save that money?"

Vanessa Cartwright, 23, a law school student and self-described independent, said she thinks Bush's proposal was excellent. "This is a big national issue," she said. "I'm very concerned when I get out what's going to happen to my money."

She said she liked the idea of having an account that she could withdraw from and control.

Tiffany Shedd, 36, an attorney from Arizona City, said personal savings accounts might enable her and her husband, a cotton farmer, to view Social Security as an asset instead of a "win the lottery" situation.

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She agreed with Bush that private accounts should be voluntary, and also said she's concerned that without reform, her young children will be saddled with "doing the heavy lifting and supporting the generation ahead of them."

Morgan Franz, 15, a charter high school student with red and blond spiked hair, said he liked Bush's ideas. "It's going to help a lot of people and it's just a very thoughtful idea," he said. "It was very interesting how he brought different generations into the whole idea."

University of Arizona political science professor John Garcia said a presidential appearance "highlights the issue" but may be more of a publicity or public relations campaign, without generating real dialogue or discourse.

On the Net:

Social Security Administration: <http://www.ssa.gov>

Graphic

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