

Shaw, Foley lobbied with Social Security cakes

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WASHINGTON — In one of the more tasteful publicity stunts surrounding the Social Security debate, two Publix birthday cakes — festooned with 7 and 0 number candles — are headed today for the Palm Beach County offices of Reps. Clay Shaw and Mark Foley.

The 7-inch vanilla cakes — complete with butter-cream icing and an inscription that reads, "Cut the Cake and Not Benefits " — are to be delivered by members of two organizations adamantly opposed to private investment accounts for Social Security.

The cakes are being delivered to mark Social Security's 70th anniversary Aug. 14 and express opposition to private investment accounts.

Shaw of Fort Lauderdale and Foley of Jupiter are Republicans who have expressed support for Social Security private accounts.

Democratic Reps. Alcee Hastings of Miramar and Robert Wexler of Delray Beach have opposed private accounts. No cakes for them, but they've been invited to a public Social Security birthday celebration Aug. 11 at the South Palm Beach County Civic Center in suburban Delray Beach.

"We want to remind our members of Congress what a great program (Social Security) has been and ask them to strengthen it, not to weaken it by the kind of privatization proposals that Clay Shaw is proposing," said Philip Compton, director of Floridians United to Protect Social Security, which is sponsoring the cakes along with the Florida Alliance of Retired Americans.

Both groups have ties to organized labor.

The groups are particularly focused on a proposal offered by key Republicans including Shaw and Rep. Jim McCrery, R-La., that would earmark the Social Security Trust Fund surplus to finance individual private accounts. The plan could become part of a larger retirement security bill expected to be considered next month by the House Ways and Means Committee. Shaw and Foley serve on the committee.

Compton warned that the proposal, often called the McCrery-Shaw plan, would reduce future benefit levels and hasten the trust fund's insolvency date by two years. Compton argued that the plan would open the door for future efforts to expand private investment accounts, which could result in reduced benefits if investments performed poorly.

Shaw spokeswoman Gail Gitcho said Shaw "has never, ever supported a plan that would cut benefits... because you don't have to cut benefits to save Social Security."

Foley's press secretary, Jason Kello, said: "I'm sure our guys in Palm Beach will appreciate the cake. I hope they save him (Foley) a piece. Social Security is a great program and it deserves a birthday cake."