

AGING MATTERS

Still unsure about Social Security, LaTourette seeks constituents' ideas

When President Bush stopped by Lakeland Community College in Lake County last week to push his plan to fix Social Security, the local congressman, Steven LaTourette, had the honor of introducing him to the invitation-only audience.



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But when the president took off in a helicopter for the short ride back to Air Force One parked at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport, LaTourette was still not on board with the president's plan. LaTourette, a Concord Township Republican, wants to see how the plan is translated into legislation, and then he says he'll decide.

While he's waiting, LaTourette would like to hear from his roughly 600,000 constituents who live in Lake, Geauga and Ashtabula and parts of Cuyahoga, Summit, Trumbull and Portage counties.

On Thursday, he unveiled an interactive questionnaire on his Web site to get voters' opinions on the Bush proposal for Social Security. (Lorain Democrat Sherrod Brown also put a survey on his Web site in early March.)

LaTourette is the only Northeast Ohio congressman who hasn't come out against Bush's proposal to allow Americans to divert part of their Social Security taxes into private accounts. And he's the only Republican Congress member in the area.

Before answering the survey's 21 questions, respondents are asked to type in their ZIP codes. Only those in ZIP codes within LaTourette's district will be able to view the questionnaire. It is available at www.house.gov/latourette or by calling his office at 1-800-447-0529.

"The problem now is we're getting so little correspondence

from people sharing their own thoughts instead of these mass, form e-mails," the spokeswoman said.

But LaTourette has no plans to hold public meetings on the issue, as Democrats have done.

Some Ohioans, however, need little encouragement to express their opinions. The Coalition to Protect Social Security, formed this year by the Cleveland labor federation and other organizations, has collected nearly 2,000 signatures on petitions against privatization. The coalition is distributing thousands of blank postcards addressed to LaTourette and Ohio senators Mike DeWine and George Voinovich.

"We're out to convince them that it's not in *their* best interest to destroy Social Security," said the coalition's John Gallo at its fund-raising dinner Thursday.

Free advice: Seniors may look like easy prey for scam artists and landlords who won't fix things, but now there's help to fight back. Attorneys from the Cleveland Law Department and some private law firms are volunteering in the first free seniors' law clinic hosted by the Legal Aid Society and the city. It will be held Saturday, May 7, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Cleveland City Hall, 601 Lakeside Ave. Lawyers will provide advice on noncriminal issues, including consumer, housing or family matters, living wills and Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid benefits. Seniors must be 60 or older but don't have to live in Cleveland. Parking is free. Call 216-687-1900.

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