

Saturday, March 12, 2005

A late response

I haven't actually been reading Kim du Toit or Mrs. du Toit since they had their big CSS change...my browser doesn't work well with the new stylesheets and so I've fallen behind. But for unrelated reasons, I happened upon this post from February 11 (link is the printer-friendly version, since the regular permalink goes to the wrong place) this evening, and felt a need to reply.

The Social Security debate has always frustrated me because I was never able to figure out why anyone would support the idea. I understand that near to- and retired workers would not want the program to change, but why would younger workers not want reform or to eliminate the program (even if current and near current recipients were protected)?

[...]

It isn't that they trust the government. It isn't that they don't understand that the program has been a boondoggle from the beginning. And it isn't even that many might also understand that the program will be bankrupt (and they'll get nothing) in as soon as 20 years. Nope; it's much more simple than that (and much more difficult to fix).

They don't trust THEMSELVES.

They don't trust their ability to save on their own, manage (meaning open the mail and do nothing) their own retirement account, or want to deal with the matter at all. They do not believe they are capable of managing the account, contributing to it, and they don't want to think about it.

Some of it may be that. Some of it, though, may be a reaction to the anti-reform propaganda.

Even if you discount all altruistic motives (which is silly, but let's grant the premise for the moment), people around my age (I'm 29) have really good reasons not to want Social Security to completely die (which is what AARP et al are implying will happen if any reform is attempted). We know we're getting totally cheated on Social Security. We know there will be no payments to us when we're ready to retire unless we save the money ourselves.

But we're young enough to remember living with our parents, and WE DON'T WANT THEM MOVING IN WITH US! We'll compromise our political principles and economic self-interest to any extent necessary in order to prevent that from happening. I consider myself a more principled person than is typical among my generation, and am adamantly opposed to the present SS system, but if I were presented with a choice between continuing social security as it exists today and having my mother move in with me, I'd choose the status quo in a heartbeat, and not look back. Indeed, if that prospect were weighed against any alternative (except of course for the obvious one...mom being homeless) I would choose the alternative. Higher taxes? Yes. Having to work two day jobs to meet the SS burden? Yes. I honestly think I'd volunteer to give up a limb if it would somehow prevent my mother's Social Security benefits from getting cut.

Now of course some of us are intelligent enough to know that no reform plan that would cut current benefits is being considered, and no hypothetical reform plan which would have that effect would ever get passed in Congress. I suspect that most people perceptive enough to realize that are in the pro-reform camp.

But those who don't know better will listen to the scaremongering of the Democrats' interest groups. And the subtext of that scaremongering (or at least the subset of it that's directed toward my generation) is "Oppose reform or Mom and Dad will have to move in with you, and you'll never be free to enjoy your life again!"

Is there really any wonder that folks who have that message ringing in their heads would be anti-reform?

Posted by Matt at 04:18