

# EDITORIAL

## *Hot potato*

## *about to burst*

Although current recipients of Social Security, the elderly, disabled, dependent, and needy, are most immediately concerned, the Social Security dilemma affects every American of whatever age and status. So pervasive is the program that solving the funding problem is of paramount importance.

And yet, the politicians are terrified to take a firm stand on the question. Their spineless stance is a national disgrace. Editors and economists, columnists and commentators across the land, have come up with dozens of recommendations. None, of course, is palatable to every voter; every politician, therefore, fears his re-election potential may be endangered if he supports any suggested solution. Unfortunately, we must depend upon legislators for answers.

No solution can satisfy everyone completely. Not finding some solution will satisfy nobody. A combination of the best of the suggestions will hurt least and damage the majority but little. Very small adjustments to individual benefits, spread among the millions receiving benefits, or to become eligible for them, would mean the difference between survival of the program and its ultimate failure.

Failure would throw the national economy into chaos. Unless everyone compromises to some extent, the system will collapse. Since collapse will spell disaster, it is imperative that Congress come up with recommendations and take action to keep Social Security viable.

Imposing new taxes is never popular; the alternative is reduction in benefits. Taxation appears the better choice. Higher payroll taxes put undue burdens on young people as well as on corporations who match individual contributions. There are many other possible ways to tax, however; some are worthy of consideration.

Benefits to individuals with more-than-adequate incomes might be taxed. Or consider an excise tax on luxury items like pleasure boats, furs, jewelry, or admission to professional sporting events. Or, conversely, some tax exemptions could be eliminated, such as corporate purchase and maintenance of hunting lodges, boats, and planes. Even the three-martini lunch or private club membership might be eliminated as a business expense.

Another possibility is an increase in estate taxes when inherited property passes from generation to generation. Nowhere is it cast in concrete that heirs are entitled to inherit all property a decedent has accrued in his estate.

If reduction of benefits is to be part of the compromise, basing periodic increases in benefits upon the wage scale rather than upon the CPI would cost individual recipients less than 20 cents a day; this reduction could be tailored to affect only recipients who can afford that reduction.

A gradual rise in the eligibility age for those enjoying good health would not be a burden, nor would eliminating the mandatory retirement age and earned-income restrictions now in force. This would add many dollars to Social Security funding.

These are but a few of the possible compromises.

The worst possible scenario is continued inaction on the part of Congress. What seems to escape the notice of politicians is that coming up with no answer is the one totally unacceptable answer. No answer from this is certain to destroy their political futures. Americans can live with decisions. We cannot survive vacillation.