

# Social security bills compared

United Press International  
WASHINGTON—Congress will make a fundamental decision soon on how to pay for Social Security: whether to continue taxing employers and employees equally or to increase the tax share carried by employers.

This will be a main issue when House and Senate negotiators meet in the near future to reconcile different Social Security bills passed earlier this year.

Both bills call for hefty increases in the payroll tax boosts already scheduled in an effort to put the program on a financially sound basis into the next century.

The House bill follows a tradition, set when Social Security was launched in 1935, of taxing employers and employees equally. The Senate would raise taxes for employers much more rapidly than for workers.

At present, an employer and employee each pay the same amount of tax on a worker's earnings up to \$16,500.

The House bill would gradually raise this "base" equally for employers and employees to \$42,600 in 1987.

The Senate bill would raise the base on which the employer's tax is calculated to \$50,000 in 1979 and \$5,000 in 1985. But the Senate would raise the base for the employee's tax to only \$33,300 in 1985 and \$33,900 in 1987.

After that the employee base would rise with inflation until it caught up with the employer base shortly after the start of the next century. From then on, employers and workers would once again pay the same amount.

Each bill also raises the percentage of earnings on which the tax is levied. The Senate slightly more than the House.

Here are some examples of what the changes would mean in actual paychecks:

An average worker — who now earns \$10,000 — now pays \$1,000 a year in Social Security tax. Assuming this worker's pay rose with inflation to \$18,619 in 1987, he would pay \$1,862 in Social Security tax in that year to \$1,201 under present law.

The maximum tax an employee can pay (more than the base) can be raised to \$965 a year. Under the Senate bill, the maximum would reach \$2,407 in 1987. Under the House bill it would reach \$3,024.

For an employer, the Senate would raise the maximum tax to \$3,325 in 1987. Under the House bill it would rise to \$3,024, the same as the maximum for employees.

Supporters of the Senate version say it raises the money necessary to finance Social Security without putting as much burden on middle and lower-income workers.

They also argue that business can afford the higher Social Security tax because it is allowed to write much of it off against income taxes — in the case of large corporations, nearly half. Individuals do not have such a write-off. Senate sponsors point to the fact that Social Security benefits are geared to employees' earnings during their working lives up to the amount of the base.

Therefore, increasing the employee base automatically leads to increased benefit costs in the future. Raising the base for employers does not add to future benefits.

The Carter administration supported the Senate plan. It originally proposed no base ceiling at all in calculating the employer's tax.

Critics of the Senate version denounce it as a "soak the employers scheme" and an attempt to find "an easy answer" for financing Social Security without arousing the anger of voters.

## After all, the mail is 80% bills, anyway

United Press International  
FRANKFORT, Maine — Charlie Mitchell is learning the hard way you can expect your mail through rain, sleet, snow and hail but not if the mailman has to cross the street.

The Postal Service stopped deliveries to Mitchell's rural Frankfort home two weeks ago, saying his big metal mailbox is on the wrong side of the road.

A mailman now passes the box twice a day without stopping, and Mitchell has to drive several miles to the Post Office to pick up his mail.

"It's not bad, though," he said. "After all, the mail's 80 percent bills anyway."

About a month ago, the Postal Service told Mitchell and 55 other people to move their mail boxes across the road. All but two complied.

Mitchell remained adamant. He said he will pick up his mail at the Post Office, even though that means he will only receive mail once or twice a week instead of daily.

# USDA says just enough turkeys will be available

United Press International  
WASHINGTON—There will be less turkey and cranberries this Thanksgiving than last year, the Agriculture Department says.

Supplies of turkey and cranberries in coming weeks are classed as merely "adequate." But, the monthly Food Marketing Alert report said, consumers will find "plentiful" supplies of

beef, pork and chicken for holiday meals.

The report covers only potential supplies for the month of December. It does not predict prices.

The term "plentiful," officials explained, means supplies are more than enough to fill normal commercial needs. An "adequate" supply is defined as

just enough to meet normal needs.

Marketing of newly slaughtered turkeys will be up 7 percent from last year, the report said, but storage stocks at the beginning of December are down sharply from a year earlier and total supplies are expected to be 10 to 12 percent below a year ago.

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