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Bush Finds Some Republicans Need Wooing

By RICHARD W. STEVENSON

MONTGOMERY, Ala., March 10 -- When President Bush began barnstorming on behalf of his Social Security plan last month, his goal at many stops was to convince Congressional Democrats that backing his call for individual investment accounts would be good politics. He is still trying to flex his political muscle to that end, but in a sign of the trouble he faces on the issue, he is increasingly using his travels to buck up -- or even win over -- members of his own party.

On the first day of a two-day swing that will take him through four states that he carried last November, Mr. Bush made his initial stop on Thursday in Louisville, Ky., where he provided political cover to Representative Anne M. Northup, a Republican from a district won by Senator John Kerry in the 2004 presidential race. Ms. Northup, who flew in from Washington on Air Force One with Mr. Bush and introduced him to the crowd, has been an advocate of his call to allow workers to invest part of their Social Security payroll taxes.

Not present was another member of the Kentucky Congressional delegation, Representative Geoff Davis, a Republican who said that he applauded Mr. Bush for addressing Social Security's projected long-term financial problems but that he was undecided about private accounts.

From Kentucky, Mr. Bush went to Alabama. While most of the Alabama Republican delegation supports him on Social Security, one Republican House member, Representative Mike D. Rogers, wrote in a local newspaper last week that he was "opposed to privatizing Social Security" and that he had "serious reservations about burdening Alabamians with the need to become experts on the stock market or picking the right stock to ensure a good retirement."

Mr. Rogers was in the audience for Mr. Bush's appearance here, and the president addressed his qualms.

Mr. Rogers told him, Mr. Bush said, that there were a lot of people in Alabama who rely solely on Social Security. The president said he had told Mr. Rogers and other members of Congress, "I understand why somebody would get nervous when they're talking about Social Security," and that he would concentrate on convincing older people that for them "nothing changes" when it comes to their retirement benefits.

On Friday, Mr. Bush will go to Shreveport, La., for an appearance with Representative Jim McCrery, a Republican who expressed doubts about Mr. Bush's approach last month but changed his mind after a visit from White House officials.

To Democrats, Mr. Bush's itinerary, which will also take him to Memphis, is a sign

that support for his approach to Social Security is seeping away even within his most loyal supporters.

"His burden is not persuading Democrats, but people in his own party who have walked away from the idea that we're going to pull money out of Social Security, run up \$2 trillion in debt and, by the way, cut benefits by 40 percent," said Representative Rahm Emanuel of Illinois, citing figures that some Republicans dispute.

In Louisville, Mr. Bush was interrupted three times by hecklers, two of whom criticized him over Social Security. The interruptions were a relatively rare occurrence among crowds that are usually screened. But the heckling did not stop Mr. Bush from trying to turn up the pressure on members of both parties.

"See, if Congress doesn't think there's a problem, nothing is going to happen," Mr. Bush said. "But when Congress realizes people all over the country say, We've got a problem, then I pity the politician who stands in the way of the solution."

White House officials said the states chosen for Mr. Bush to visit this week had less to do with Democrats and Republicans than with reaching older voters.

But Republicans said the White House also hoped the trip might help win over some Democrats. In Alabama, Representative Robert E. Cramer, a Democrat, is not necessarily opposed to personal accounts, aides said, but does not have enough information to make a decision.

At a rally in Memphis on Friday, Mr. Bush will be joined by Representative Harold E. Ford Jr., Democrat of Tennessee. The White House gave Mr. Ford's office 100 tickets to the event.

Mr. Ford has proposed creating investment accounts for all Americans at birth. But he said that he opposed the president's plan to create accounts out of payroll taxes.

"The reason I'm excited about him talking about these accounts," Mr. Ford said, "is that I believe we need to do more to help people save and create wealth, especially for low-income and moderate-income Americans."

But, he added, "anything we do should be outside of Social Security."