

## Paradise Postponed

**N**OT EVERYBODY FEELS THE SAME WAY about retirement. Some people look forward to it. It's their Valhalla, a reward for a lifetime of hard work and sacrifice. They can relax, linger over their morning coffee instead of fighting rush hour traffic. They can travel, play golf, volunteer, start their own business, read *War and Peace* or maybe write their own great American novel. Whatever. Basically, to them, retirement means they can do whatever they damn well please. At long last.

For others, retirement looks more like being put out to pasture than Green Pastures. They either can't imagine a life without the work that's for so long defined them, or they can't imagine how they're going to live on what Social Security will pay them.

And how did the folks in the first group get to be in the position of not having to depend on Social Security alone? Generally by starting early to plan and by investing wisely in the stock market. For them, Social Security is just the opening act, not the main event.

But Social Security was most definitely the main event on May 7, when the American Academy of Actuaries held a briefing on Capitol Hill for congressional staffers. The topic: "Social Security Reform: What Should the Commission Do?"

The commission, of course, is the one President Bush had formed just the week before to work out how he will fulfill one of his campaign promises: the diversion of a part of Social Security payroll taxes to individual private retirement accounts, with assets invested in the stock market.

Basically, what Bush wants to do is combine the main event and the opening act. Will the results make show business history? Or will we all end up demanding our money back after the main event? Nobody knows for sure. But one thing Academy Senior Pension Fellow Ron Gebhardt took pains to point out is that pain will be an unavoidable factor in any solution that will truly fix Social Security. The only things at issue will be who it's going to hurt the most, where it's going to hurt them, and for how long.

One possible source of pain may be the necessity of putting off the paradise of retirement a little longer than anticipated. In this issue of *Contingencies*, Fred Kilbourne, with his characteristic whimsical seriousness (or is it serious whimsicality?) takes a look at the idea of extending the work lives of American workers beyond the traditional retirement age. He critiques a study that looks at the consequences of that, and pulls in parallels from his own extensive work experience.

If we do end up working longer, it'll be good news for some, frustrating for others. The decisions made, by both the current commission and the legislators it will advise, will end up determining if all the pain is worth it.



EDITOR

# Contingencies

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