

[Obama decides against Social Security cuts](#)

By [Brian Hughes](#) Staff Writer

Despite a promise to reform the government's massive entitlement programs, President Obama will propose no changes to the Social Security system in the deficit-reduction plan he'll offer next week.

Obama is expected to announce on Monday a plan to reduce the deficit by about \$2 trillion over the next decade. But in declaring Social Security off the table, as many of his liberal supporters have demanded, the president is abandoning a previous push to rein in the entitlement program.

"This is clearly political," said Michael Tanner, an expert on Social Security at the libertarian Cato Institute. A cut in Social Security "is something the Democratic base would never accept. There would be a march on the White House by congressional Democrats."

During negotiations over whether to raise the nation's borrowing limit, Obama proposed reducing cost-of-living adjustments for Social Security beneficiaries -- much to the chagrin of Democratic lawmakers. Rejecting entitlement reductions altogether, Congress raised the debt ceiling after agreeing to about \$1 trillion in spending cuts with another \$1.5 trillion in reductions to be identified later by a bipartisan congressional committee. Administration officials say Obama's decision to back off Social Security reforms was not based on politics but on the determination that the program was not a major influence on the nation's debt when compared to entitlements like Medicare and Medicaid.

"The president, from the beginning, has stated ... it is not a driver of our near-term deficit," said White House press secretary Jay Carney. Tanner noted, however, that Social Security is already costing taxpayers more money than it's taking in -- a situation to be exacerbated in future years by a swiftly aging population.

White House aides also confirmed that the administration is mulling alternatives to raising the Medicare eligibility age, as Obama previously proposed. Obama floated the idea of raising the eligibility age from 65 to 67 during talks over debt-limit negotiations. Officials now say they're considering higher premiums for the wealthiest Medicare recipients and reductions in reimbursement rates for doctors.

Just last week, in his jobs speech before a joint session of Congress, Obama said he was committed to reforming Medicare.

"With an aging population and rising health care costs, we are spending too fast to sustain the program," he said. "And if we don't gradually reform the system while protecting current beneficiaries, it won't be there when future retirees need it."

But it's Social Security that has already evolved into a major 2012 campaign issue for both parties.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, among other White House contenders, jumped on Texas Gov. Rick Perry's characterization of the program as a "Ponzi scheme." Perry has not backed down from those remarks, saying he used strong language to describe a system that would go bust for future generations without changes.

Democrats, meanwhile, praised the president's reluctance to take a scalpel to Social Security.

"I'm beyond relieved that he finally came to his senses on this," said one Democratic strategist. "Let Republicans hang themselves. All [Obama] would do is anger liberals, while still not changing any minds on the other side -- what's the point?"