

This Is What Passes For Liberal At *The Washington Post*

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The *Washington Post's* [new designation of opinion columns](#) as "Right-Leaning" and Left-Leaning" continues to demonstrate just how [rare actual liberal viewpoints are in the Post's opinion section](#). Today's "[Left-Leaning](#)" page features a [column](#) by Robert Pozen advocating a reduction in Social Security benefits for middle-income workers.

Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research [takes issue with](#) Pozen's proposal to reduce Social Security benefits for "school teachers, construction workers, and office clerks." Regardless of the merits of such a proposal, it's striking to see it presented as a "left-leaning" view.

And who, you may wonder, is Robert Pozen? Well, he served as Secretary of Economic Affairs for Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, and he served on President Bush's Social Security commission, where his views drew praise from conservatives who want to privatize Social Security and criticism from progressives. *The New York Times* [reported](#) on April 30, 2005:

The intellectual force behind President Bush's plan to overhaul Social Security, the man the president calls his favorite "Democrat economist," is not an economist. He is Robert C. Pozen, a lawyer and mutual fund executive who serves as chairman of MFS Investment Management in Boston.

A registered Democrat, Mr. Pozen donated money to the presidential campaign of Senator John Kerry last year and voted for him on Nov. 2. He was a classmate of Hillary Rodham Clinton at Yale Law School.

Mr. Pozen, who served on Mr. Bush's commission in 2001 that developed initial plans for carving private accounts out of Social Security, has been thrust into the spotlight by Mr. Bush's embrace of his proposal. But Mr. Pozen says his ideas on public pensions are free of politics.

"I consider myself a middle-of-the-road guy who tries to be carefully nonpartisan on this issue," he said. "I believe passionately in Social Security reform."

Opponents of the White House plan say that while Mr. Pozen's ideas may sound progressive, they are far from the Democratic mainstream. Mr. Pozen's proposals are "bad policy," said Senator Max Baucus, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, after the committee's hearings on Social Security this week.

The conservative side of the economics profession lauds progressive indexing. "It is a pretty fair way to approach the problem," said Michael Tanner, who heads the Project on Social Security Choice at the libertarian Cato Institute.

On March 17, 2005, the *Boston Globe* [reported](#):

The Pozen plan would cut in half Social Security's estimated \$3.7 trillion deficit over the next 75 years. Pozen argues that more draconian approaches would be politically unrealistic.

At the moment Republicans are more enthusiastic about the plan than Democrats. Republican Senators Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Robert Bennett of Utah have said they want to incorporate progressive indexation in their Social Security fixes. Conservative think tanks like the idea, too. "It redirects Social Security benefits to those who need them the most," said David John, a policy analyst with the Heritage Foundation.

John says Democrats are cool to the plan right now, because it includes private accounts. Still, he suggests some Democratic moderates might be willing to back a version of Pozen's scheme down the road.

Liberal economists don't see the plan's appeal. Alan Auerbach, an economist at the University of California at Berkeley, calls the Pozen scheme "Bush lite." He says progressive indexation still cuts benefits sharply over time. Peter Diamond, an MIT economist, fears that Pozen's plan could make Social Security too unattractive to the affluent. "I worry it would undo political support for the program," he said.

That's what passes as a "left-leaning" viewpoint in the *Washington Post's* opinion section: A column calling for a reduction in Social Security benefits written by a former Romney administration official whose previous Social Security proposals have been embraced by George W. Bush, the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute and derided as "Bush lite" by liberal economists.