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President Bush misled North Carolinians about the severity of the nation's Social Security problems and "ought to be ashamed of himself," Democratic Rep. G.K. Butterfield said Thursday.

Butterfield, Rep. David Price and three other North Carolina Democrats chided Bush for his remarks within hours after the president's visit to Raleigh.

"We face some very long-term challenges with Social Security," said Price, D-4th District. "But there is no crisis. Ironically, what the president wants to do with his privatization scheme would make these challenges far worse."

Under Bush's proposal to create private investment accounts, young workers would be most negatively affected, he said.

"People should get back the money they pay into the system and they should have the kind of benefits they were promised," Price said.

His fellow Democrats were no less critical.

"It's a ridiculously complicated system that would leave workers much [worse] off," Rep. Brad

Miller, D-13th District, said of Bush's proposal to allow Americans to invest a portion of the Social Security taxes into private accounts.

Social Security will be bankrupt by 2042, Bush told 1,700 invited guests Thursday at a downtown Raleigh performing arts center.

"Younger workers ought to be allowed to set up a personal account and invest in stocks and bonds so that their money can increase faster, at a faster rate than that which their money increases in the Social Security system," he said.

But Democrats challenged Bush's bankruptcy claim and said the proposal misleads many young people who think it is similar to a 401(k) plan.

"It is your money, but you cannot get at it and you don't get to control it," Miller said.

"If everything went right, you would just barely keep up or stay even with someone who hadn't gone into the plan," he said.

Instead, Bush should provide tax incentives to encourage young and low-income workers to save, said Rep. Bob Etheridge, D-2nd District. One suggestion would be to put a portion of each worker's income tax refund into a savings plan for retirement.

The administration also should be focusing on helping the economy grow and getting the deficit under control, Etheridge said.