

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 21, 2006

The Honorable William H. Frist
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senators Frist, Reid, Cochran and Byrd,

As work continues on the fiscal year 2007 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill, **we urge you to fully fund the President's budget request of \$9.5 billion by providing at least an additional \$401 million -- as requested by the President -- for Social Security Administration (SSA) administrative expenses.**

Recently, our nation's SSA field offices have been asked to take on significant new responsibilities, including administering part of the new Medicare Part D benefit and handling new workloads related to the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Protection Act of 2004. Although our nation's field offices have experienced significant staff departures in recent years, funding shortages at SSA have only allowed the Commissioner to replace these departures on a one for three basis. These staffing shortages, combined with the new workloads, have slowed processing times for disability claims, reduced the number of SSI redeterminations, and lessened the quality of service our constituents have come to rely on.

Beneficiaries depend on the Social Security Administration and its staff to answer their questions and provide access to the benefits to which they are entitled. As we prepare for the retirement of the first baby boomers in just two years, it is critically important that we provide SSA with sufficient resources to hire, train, and retain an adequate number of field office staff available to help constituents.

On July 20, the Appropriations Committee reported out a fiscal year 2007 Labor-HHS appropriations bill that would provide only \$9.1 billion to SSA for administrative expenses, \$401 million less than the President's budget request and \$54 million below the 2006 appropriated level. Commissioner Barnhart has stated that this level of funding would result in a 10-day furlough of all SSA staff. A furlough of this scope and magnitude will create a significant

hardship on the elderly and disabled persons who depend heavily on field office staff resources – particularly those in rural areas who must travel long distances to access services. Furthermore, according to the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the funding level provided for in the Committee-reported bill would only allow the Commissioner to replace one employee for every eight retirements or departures. At this level of staff replacement, SSA cannot effectively serve the American people, nor should they be expected to.

In addition, according to Commissioner Barnhart, the funding level provided in the Committee-reported bill will result in a severe reduction in the number of continuing disability reviews (CDRs), from a planned level of 597,000, down to 111,000. We are particularly concerned about this consequence of underfunding SSA, because CDRs save the federal government \$10 for every \$1 spent and because CDRs ensure that beneficiaries are legitimately collecting benefits.

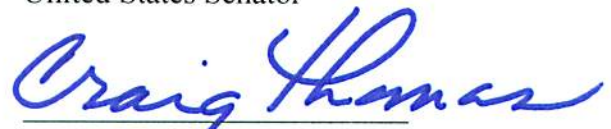
This is an issue of vital importance that will affect millions of Social Security beneficiaries. We strongly urge you to provide, at a minimum, an additional \$401 million for Social Security Administration administrative expenses, without which the SSA cannot effectively serve the people who depend on them.

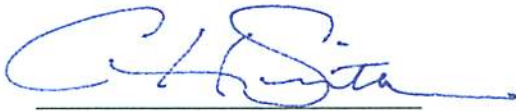
Sincerely,


United States Senator


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United States Senator


United States Senator

Chris Dodd

United States Senator

Hillary Rodham Clinton

United States Senator

Michael B. Enzi

United States Senator

Carl Levin

United States Senator

Ron Wyden

United States Senator

Marco Pryor

United States Senator

Barack A. Obama

United States Senator

Jay Byrnes

United States Senator

Al Franken

United States Senator

Reid Stearns

United States Senator

James M. Jeffords

United States Senator

Patrick Leahy

United States Senator

Paul Harkin

United States Senator

Mark Dayton

United States Senator

Susan Collins

United States Senator

Maria Cantwell

United States Senator

John Z. Sununu

United States Senator

Al Franken

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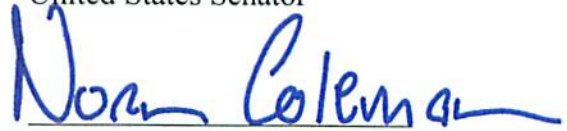
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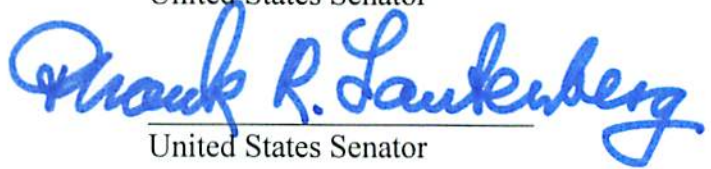
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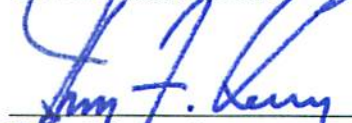
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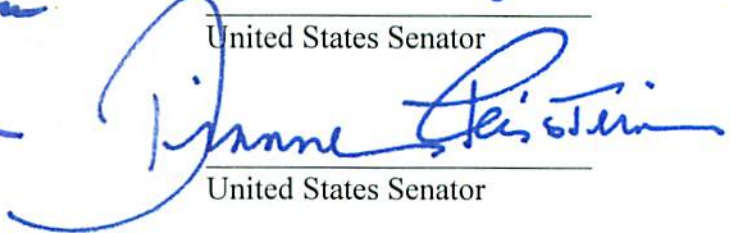
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cc: JoAnne B. Barnhart, Commissioner Social Security Administration