

Crapo Statement at Social Security Administration Commissioner Nomination Hearing

November 2, 2023

Washington, D.C.--U.S. Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, delivered the following remarks at hearing to consider the nomination of Martin O'Malley to be Commissioner of the Social Security Administration (SSA).

As prepared for delivery:

"Thank you, Senator Wyden.

"Governor O'Malley, congratulations on your nomination and thank you for your willingness to serve.

"This nomination is long overdue, coming more than two years after President Biden removed the prior Senate-confirmed Commissioner. During this time, the Social Security Administration has struggled to fulfill its customer service mission.

"The Social Security Administration is responsible for overseeing the Social Security program, which provides more than \$1 trillion in benefits to millions of seniors, individuals with disabilities and their families each year. The SSA also administers the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, assigns Social Security numbers and issues Social Security cards.

"Given the SSA's important responsibilities, the public rightly expects the agency to provide timely, responsive service. However, SSA is not living up to these expectations.

"For fiscal year 2023, Americans waited more than seven months, on average, for a disability decision at the initial level. For those denied at the initial level, they waited another seven months at the reconsideration level and another nearly 15 months if they sought a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge.

"While not all applicants will qualify for disability benefits, they all deserve to receive a decision within a reasonable period of time. The Social Security Administration must take additional steps to reduce wait times for a disability decision and address outdated disability program rules.

"SSA's National 800 Number is one of the primary channels for seeking assistance from the agency and it must do more to address wait times. In fiscal year 2023, callers to the National 800 Number waited more than 35 minutes, on average, to speak with a representative, compared to approximately 13 minutes two years prior and around 10 minutes a decade ago. SSA should also continue improving its online offerings, which

not only increase flexibility for beneficiaries, but also allow the agency to be more efficient with its resources.

“Americans rightly expect that the SSA will be a responsible steward of taxpayer funds. However, for fiscal year 2021, the SSA issued approximately \$2.49 billion in improper payments for Social Security and \$4.91 billion for SSI. The agency has additional tools to prevent improper payments before they occur, and the agency should use them.

“Finally, while the President and Congress are tasked with ensuring Social Security’s long-term solvency, the SSA plays a critical role in making sure the Administration, Congress and the public have accurate and timely information about the program’s long-term finances. This year, for the first time in over a decade, the Social Security Trustees Report was delivered to Congress by the statutory April 1 deadline. I expect a new Commissioner to help ensure that the Trustees Report deadline is treated as a deadline, not a suggestion.

“Governor O’Malley, if confirmed, you will face immense challenges and a relatively short timeline to get the Social Security Administration back on track. This may be a tall order, but the American people deserve nothing less.

“I look forward to hearing your testimony and responses to our questions to better understand: how you would evaluate and address SSA’s customer service challenges; what specific data you would look at to evaluate the use of telework; how you would ensure that the SSA’s independent status is maintained in practice; and what would be your top areas of focus with respect to modernizing the SSA’s information technology?

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman.”