



MEMORANDUM

October 1, 2009

To: Reporters and Editors

From: Dan Virkstis for Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.)

Re: Baucus Statement on Reduction in Social Security Administration Disability Hearings Backlog

Senator Max Baucus issued the following statement today on news the Social Security Administration (SSA) reduced its backlog of disability hearings nationwide. The agency reported that, for the first time since 1999, SSA has ended the year with fewer pending disability hearings than in the prior year. Social Security ended fiscal year (FY) 2009 with 722,822 hearings pending, compared to 760,813 hearings pending at the start of the fiscal year, a reduction of more than 37,000 cases. SSA also made clear these reductions would have been larger if not for the increase in applications for disability benefits due to the recession. In addition, the average processing time for these cases improved from 514 days in FY 2008 to 491 in FY 2009.

“This announcement shows SSA has taken a good first step in its effort to reduce the huge number of backlogs of disability hearings. I am pleased with this progress but expect an aggressive path forward so disabled Americans, including veterans, are provided the service and benefits they need and deserve in a timely fashion,” said Baucus. **“I urged Social Security Commissioner Astrue, at his confirmation hearing, to make reducing the disability backlog his top priority, and though much work remains to be done, I commend the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review and other offices at SSA for their hard work and commitment to this important goal.”**

In May of last year, the Finance Committee held a hearing to examine service delivery to the public in Social Security’s field offices. Among the issues discussed was the fact that many applicants to the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program and the disability portion of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program face significant delays before receiving benefits. Total waiting times can exceed three years in some cases. Such delays create serious or desperate financial situations for applicants and their families. The largest contributors to these delays are the waiting times for disability appeals hearings.

Decreasing disability hearings backlogs and improving service to the public in SSA’s field offices require adequate funding for SSA’S administrative costs. In July of this year, Baucus applauded the Senate Appropriations Committee for including in their FY 2010 funding bill the President’s request of approximately \$11.4 billion for SSA’s administrative expenses.

The Senate Committee on Finance holds jurisdiction over the U.S. Social Security program.

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