



APPENDIX A

Selected Excerpts from Social Security Advisory Board Reports, Testimonies, and Presentations

Budget

The SSA has always stepped up to meet every new challenge and it can do it again. But it takes adequate resources and investment in its staff. Chronic under-funding has contributed to the current crisis and has diverted the agency's attention away from long-term planning. *Statement to the Subcommittee on Social Security of the Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—September 2008*

Rather than commit to long-term increased support of what is an unsatisfactory process for stakeholders at all levels, maybe it is time to restore a temporary multi-year capital fund to modernize the functions at all levels of this operation and develop systems to implement the solutions. *Statement to the Full Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—April 2008*

One of the bad choices that managers have to make when administrative funding is inadequate is whether or not they should divert funds from activities which have a long-run payoff in lower costs in order to meet the immediate pressures of rising claims backlogs. In that sort of competition, the needs of the disabled claimant obviously and correctly win out. But funding at a level that forces that choice is the ultimate in penny-wise and pound-foolish behavior. *Statement to the Subcommittee on Social Security of the Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—February 2007*

Although the administrative costs of the Social Security program are treated as “discretionary” from a budget perspective, these programs are a very basic and direct Federal responsibility, and the failure to provide adequate funds to administer them has results that are anything but discretionary. If the agency does not have adequate funding, it will have to continue to postpone program integrity actions, which means losing programmatic savings well beyond the administrative resources involved. *Letter to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees and Subcommittees—April 2004*

Disability Program

There are several workgroups in place looking at the content and format for collecting initial disability claim information...it must be tied to an overarching unified business process. There needs to be a purposeful analysis of why we do what we do and how can it be done in a better way that will be useful to any adjudicator anywhere in the system. *Speech to the National Association of Disability Examiner—September 2008*

The DDS “one system”...will require compromises. But the creative aspects of hammering out what the system will look like and how it will work should generate new thinking about the process and its interconnectedness with the field offices and the hearings offices, about the



platform on which it is built, and how people will use it. *Speech to the National Association of Disability Examiners—September 2008*

But we were dismayed when we recently learned that ODAR has had limited involvement with the development of the DDS eCat initiative. ODAR has not been able to explore fully how eCat can lead to efficiencies in the hearings development process. *Address to the National Educational Conference, Association of Administrative Law Judges—August 2008*

The focus of this hearing—clearing the backlogs and providing adequate resources—needs to be about more than just the state of the workload at the hearings level. It must take into consideration the critical steps all along the determination process. It must recognize the problems with the systems infrastructure that supports the work being done by staff at all levels. *Statement to the Full Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—April 2008*

Our Nation’s policymakers need to acknowledge that the current disability programs, though well intentioned, are badly fractured and disjointed. A unifying point of vision, oversight and management is desperately needed. *A Disability System for the 21st Century—September 2006*

The Social Security disability programs had their origins in the 1950s—a world vastly different from today’s world in several important respects including the nature of available work, the educational levels of the workforce, medical capacity to treat disability conditions and the nature and availability of rehabilitative technology...but the core design of the programs, rooted in a definition of disability as inability to do substantial work, has remained unchanged. *The Social Security Definition of Disability—October 2003*

With regard to the disability program, dispersion of functions throughout many different entities within the agency poses a difficult problem; the disability program lacks the tightly defined policy and administrative parameters of the RSI programs. *Charting the Future of Social Security’s Disability Programs: The Need for Fundamental Change—January 2001*

Information Technology

I am concerned that all the separate initiatives to build electronic pathways to solve Social Security’s disability problem may fail because no one is making sure they link up to create a path to a real solution. *Address to the National Educational Conference, Association of Administrative Law Judges—August 2008*

SSA has made tremendous strides in the development of the electronic folder. For all of its strengths, it has some striking weaknesses; primarily that it is not a “single system.” Case production processes are not coordinated from beginning to end. *Testimony to the Full Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—April 2008*

This is about moving away from COBOL-based operating systems, a 1950s’ technology, to modern software languages and tools. This is about moving away from manual work sampling to integrated data collection that permits inline measurement and quality review systems that can assess what works, what does not, and the difference between the two. We are talking about the potential for redesigning work in an organization that is stifled by institutional barriers between



components and work rules that are crippling productivity advances. *Statement to the Full Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—April 2008*

A strategy is needed to address the growing demand for telephone service; field offices are “virtually impenetrable” by phone. Better information is needed regarding how the public views the nature and quality of the agency’s telephone service. *Challenges Facing the New Commissioner of Social Security—December 2001*

Efforts to improve SSA’s systems must be strengthened. With expected growth in workloads, systems improvements must be accelerated to meet the demand, particularly with regard to the disability processing systems. *How the Social Security Administration Can Improve Its Service to the Public—September 1999*

SSA must develop new ways of delivering service beyond the traditional office or telephone service. Internet has significant potential for helping alleviate resource problems while improving service; other technologies should also be explored such as kiosks and videoconferencing. *How the Social Security Administration Can Improve Its Service to the Public—September 1999*

Management Information

The only way to truly prevent the backlog from recurring is by identifying and targeting the root cause of bottlenecks and vulnerable processes and then implementing performance measures that track outcomes. *Address to the 2008 National Educational Conference, Association of Administrative Law Judges—August 2008*

Part of the problem here may be that data itself is often of little value if not refined into information and knowledge that managers on the ground can use to improve the efficiency of the units they run. (For example) data on individual ALJ productivity can only be properly assessed in an analysis that controls for other environmental variables—number of support staff, workload characteristics, percentage of remanded decisions and other variables. *Address to the 2008 National Educational Conference, Association of Administrative Law Judges—August 2008*

The agency urgently needs a quality management system to produce program information needed by policy makers; the system must incorporate all parts of the disability determination process. *Charting the Future of Social Security’s Disability Programs: The Need for Fundamental Change—January 2001*

The agency does not have the ability to accurately measure workloads and therefore cannot assess its workforce needs accurately. Automation expected to improve productivity and efficiency often is not delivered on schedule or does not produce expected savings; however no adjustments are made to resource levels. *How the Social Security Administration Can Improve Its Service to the Public—September 1999*



Policy/Process Development

A third suggestion I would make is for a thorough evaluation of the Social Security programs with a view of finding policy improvements that might suggest ways to make the program easier to administer. As we move into a future with larger workloads and continuing budgetary limits, it would be useful to evaluate existing procedures and rules to see if they can be made more objective. *Statement to the Subcommittee on Social Security of the Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—February 2007*

SSA's Demonstration Projects: While there have been some positive outcomes, projects have not always been focused to enhance policy decision-making. For example, projects that focus all of the RTW efforts inside the structure of the disability program missed assessment of early intervention. *A Disability System for the 21st Century—September 2006*

A single presentation of policy is critical to ensuring consistent/fair decisions. Policy makers need far better information than is now available in order to develop and implement the kinds of changes in policies and procedures that are needed to improve accuracy and consistency in decision making. *Challenges Facing the New Commissioner of Social Security—December 2001*

Workforce

Unlike other newly hired federal employees, administrative law judges do not serve a probationary period. Adding a probationary period as a condition of employment would provide the agency with a more formal mechanism wherein struggling employees could receive additional policy training and guidance on workload management. *Letter to The Honorable Sam Johnson, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Social Security of the Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—October 2008*

In view of the fact that SSA employs more than four out of five ALJs and pays a proportional share of the costs of the selection process, it should have a process that identifies candidates that meet its unique needs. *Address to the Subcommittee on Social Security of the Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—September 2008*

We talk about our commitment to public service and our willingness to address the needs of those individuals who turn to Social Security on a daily basis. But the reality is that thousands of disability cases languish for years as the claims representatives, the disability adjudicators, and the administrative law judges struggle with crushing backlogs and steadily declining numbers of workers. *Statement to the Full Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives—April 2008*

The offer of early out retirement is part of the agency's overall staffing strategy to manage the retirement wave. Our concern with the agency's use of early out is twofold: first is the obvious loss to SSA of experienced staff, and secondly, the example it sets with regard to the employment of older workers. *Letter to Commissioner Michael J. Astrue—March 2008*

The fact that most administrative law judges are admirable employees does not mean that the agency should ignore its stewardship responsibilities here. It seems to me that ALJs who are



carrying out their duties in a responsible manner should want to work with the management of the agency to develop reasonable standards and procedures that will fully protect decisional independence while identifying and seeking appropriate correction of situations where there is failure to meet those standards. *Address to the 2007 National Educational Conference, Association of Administrative Law Judges—July 2007*

There are long-standing institutional problems that must be addressed. The agency's culture discourages open discussions and timely resolution of issues; there are weaknesses in communication between headquarters and field, and ongoing issues have resulted in inadequate teamwork among various components (especially with regard to the disability program). *Challenges Facing the New Commissioner of Social Security—December 2001*



APPENDIX B

Listing of Upcoming Reports

The following reports will be published over the next several months. All documents will be posted to the SSAB website at <http://www.ssab.gov/index.html>. Printed copies can also be ordered through the website or by calling 202-475-7700.

- *Working for Retirement Security*—this report summarizes the policy issues involved in extending the working lives of older Americans. The report discusses the barriers to working at older ages and highlights the work of experts who participated in a forum on policies pertaining to older workers sponsored by the Social Security Advisory Board and the University of Illinois Center for Business and Public Policy.
- *Social Security Administration: 21st Century Service Delivery (working title)*—Focusing on the development of information technology (IT), this report outlines the agency's current problems with service delivery and discusses how and why its systems infrastructure must change if the agency is to meet 21st Century challenges.
- *The Social Security Statement: Is It Achieving Its Intended Purposes? (working title)*—in developing this report, the Board has taken an in-depth look at the *Social Security Statement*, its purpose, its content, and its impact on public understanding. This report outlines a number of recommendations for improving and clarifying the information provided.
- *Unexpected Consequences of SSA Policies: Substantial Gainful Activity*—this paper is the second in a series of issue briefs that looks at the unexpected consequences of certain SSA policies and offers some recommendations for policy change both in terms of more immediate actions and long term restructuring.
- *Unexpected Consequences of SSA Policies: Representative Payees*—the third in this series of issue briefs focuses on issues involving the appointment of representative payees who receive and manage Social Security payments for incapable beneficiaries. Some of the issues discussed include accounting practices, misuse, payees for difficult populations, and systems improvements.