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Baucus Blasts House Plan to Gut Social Security Programs

Senator Calls House Budget Radical, Proposal Would Undermine Safety Net for Seniors

Washington, DC – In response to an inquiry from Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), the Social Security Administration (SSA) today warned that drastic funding cuts proposed by the House of Representatives would dramatically impact service to beneficiaries and needlessly waste taxpayer dollars.

In a letter to Senator Baucus, Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue outlines how the House budget would force the agency to scale back operating hours at field offices across the country. The result, according to Astrue, would be long delays and deteriorations in service to seniors and other Social Security beneficiaries.

“It is critically important that we work to preserve Social Security and protect its beneficiaries and save taxpayer dollars. The House’s radical plan does nothing more than threaten America’s seniors by undermining this critical safety net and severely cuts programs that help the federal budget,” Senator Baucus said.

While a Senate proposal increases SSA funding levels next year, the House bill cuts \$762 million from the agency’s current budget. According to SSA, the cuts in the House bill would increase the average wait time for disability decisions and hearing decisions by as much as two weeks and forego up to \$6 billion in budget savings.

“This severe cut would force us to curtail our service to the public and our program integrity efforts,” Astrue writes to Senator Baucus. “The backlog of initial disability claims would continue to increase and our hearings backlog reduction plan would be derailed. There would be long waits in our field offices and on our 800-number because of inadequate staff to address critical public service needs.”

The report from SSA is in response to a [request](#) from Senator Baucus to explain how Congress’ proposed budgets would impact Social Security beneficiaries. The [findings](#) are troubling. According to SSA:

- The House budget would cut 5,000 jobs at the Social Security Administration.
- The House Budget would cut Social Security field office hours and delay more than 30,000 people with Social Security claims from getting the support they need.
- Compared to the Senate Budget, the House Budget would force thousands of folks with Social Security claims to wait two additional weeks to get the service they need and create a backlog of 100,000 claims and 100,000 hearings.

- The House Budget would cost taxpayers \$5 to \$6 billion by cutting a program that fights fraud and reduces waste.

As Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Baucus is responsible for oversight over Social Security. He has consistently fought for adequate funding for the agency to ensure they can serve the public and save taxpayer dollars by reducing fraud and waste.

At a [2007 hearing](#), Senator Baucus secured a commitment from Administrator Astrue to tackle the disability backlog problem. Since then, Senator Baucus has consistently kept pressuring SSA to show measurable results and the average processing time – the period between an individual appealing a decision and receiving a hearing – has decreased 514 days in 2008 to 360 days in 2011.

At a [hearing](#) earlier this year, Senator Baucus urged Commissioner Astrue to meet SSA's goal of lowering the time to 270 days by the end of fiscal year 2013, something the agency would clearly be unable to achieve under the House budget.

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