

Statement of Carolyn W. Colvin
Nominee for
Deputy Commissioner of Social Security
Before the Senate Finance Committee

December 9, 2010

Mr. Chairman, Senator Grassley, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee for Deputy Commissioner of Social Security. If confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to work with you, President Obama, and Commissioner Astrue to help meet the challenges that the Social Security Administration is facing, and I ask for your support.

I have spent my career leading Federal, State and local organizations through development, change and innovation. My prior work experience--especially the experience I have gained in social service agencies--has taught me about our obligation, as a Nation, to the well being of our constituents. It has taught me that government can take measured, responsible steps to assist those less fortunate than ourselves, while also promoting the kind of earned-right social insurance programs that America's workers deserve in retirement.

My years of public service have taught me that I may not always have all the answers, but at least I know the right questions to ask.

In my tenure as the Deputy Commissioner for Operations at the Social Security Administration, I provided executive leadership and directed the work of nearly 50 thousand employees serving in headquarters support functions, the regional offices, SSA's 1,300 field offices, teleservice centers and program service centers. In addition to my service as the Deputy Commissioner for Operations, I also served nearly four years as the Deputy Commissioner for Programs and Policy. So I have extensive experience in performance management and leadership of the Disability Determination process and what was then called the Office of Hearings and Appeals.

Despite significant fiscal challenges, I can see many innovative developments at SSA that have occurred over the last 9 years, especially in the areas of Internet and cyber services. When I left SSA in 2001, we were proud of the fact that we had over 10 million Internet users; a number that

has now grown exponentially. I am excited about the iClaim process, other new online business processes, Video Service Delivery, and changes in SSA's National 800 Number Network. I was pleased to discover that the Immediate Claims Taking Process, which was initiated during my tenure, has grown tremendously.

But the Social Security Administration faces many challenges. With this Committee's help and increased funding supported by Congress, Commissioner Astrue has made significant progress with the disability backlogs. But it is clear that more needs to be done. No one at SSA could have predicted the economic downturn that has diminished the progress that SSA had hoped to make in reducing the backlogs. Disability and retirement claims are increasing at a rate not expected even 15 months ago. In the inevitable chain reaction, SSA is seeing increases in initial disability claims pending and hearings receipts.

I look forward to being part of the solution to these problems that are so important to the people of our great Nation. If confirmed, my primary goal will be to find common ground to support the President's initiatives to strengthen SSA's efforts to carry out its mission. The President's FY 2011 budget request supports increased staffing, which will help to process the spikes in initial retirement and disability claims, as well as disability appeals.

The President also supports dedicated funding for improved program integrity. This investment will help to assure that the government is spending tax dollars efficiently and that benefits are paid only to eligible beneficiaries in the correct amounts. These activities are critical to the American taxpayer.

To quote the President, "Social Security is indispensable to workers, the disabled, seniors, and survivors, and is probably the most successful program that our country has ever established."

One of the great fortunes of my life has been that my career path has allowed me to work on so many of the issues I care most deeply about. Human service issues give me a renewed sense of purpose every day. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting the President and the Commissioner as they work together with this committee to continue to ensure that Social Security programs will be preserved, protected and improved for future generations.

Thank You. I would be happy to answer any questions.