



For Immediate Release
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BAUCUS OUTRAGED BY BACKLOG OF SSA DISABILITY CLAIMS
Hundreds of thousands of Americans waiting for benefits, Social Security short-staffed

Washington, DC – At a hearing of the Senate Finance Committee today, Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) said it’s “unacceptable” that massive case backlogs at the Social Security Administration have left Americans waiting as long as four years for disability benefits. Baucus, whose committee has jurisdiction over Social Security, has called for a \$430 million increase in the agency’s administrative appropriation, to meet levels set by the congressional budget for Fiscal Year 2008 and to enable the short-staffed Social Security agency to hire enough staff to process applications in a timely way. One witness testified that countless disability applicants are left penniless, homeless, and without medical treatment, and that some even die, while waiting for their benefits. (Read Nancy Shor’s testimony by [clicking here](#).) Americans visiting Social Security field offices are experiencing longer and longer waits for service as well.

“This whole situation is tragic. I can’t believe our country, the United States of America, has let this happen. It’s an outrage,” said Baucus. **“I hope this hearing documents the need for more resources at Social Security so that Americans with disabilities get fair hearings in a timely manner. In the judicial system there’s a common saying, that ‘justice delayed is justice denied.’ That’s true here too. So now it’s time to fix it.”**

Estimates indicate that by the end of the fiscal year, there will be a backlog of more than 575,000 initial applications for disability benefits, and 750,000 more applicants may be waiting for a judge to hear their appeals for denied disability claims. Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue testified today about a number of administrative and regulatory measures his agency could take to reduce the number of backlogs, or at least to slow the growth of cases that remain pending for long periods of time. But Astrue said that at the funding level recommended by the White House, which is higher than last year’s appropriation but \$430 million less than Congress’s budget recommendation, it’s unlikely the agency could end backlogs entirely within the next five years.

Baucus asked what difference it would make to raise Social Security’s administrative funding to Congress’s recommended level. Astrue replied that hundreds of judges needed to hear appeals could be hired by next year with those funds. The Commissioner also said that more authority to push administrative law judges to increase their productivity, and more efficient systems for processing claims, will be essential to progress on the backlog problem.

“I will do my level best to get the amount of Social Security administrative funding that’s in the budget resolution adopted. At the very least, that’s what we have to do,” said Baucus. **“Together, we’re going to solve this problem.”**

All witness testimony and a full webcast of today’s hearing will be available shortly at <http://finance.senate.gov/sitepages/hearings.htm>.