



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SSA FIELD OPERATIONS LOCALS
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO
Representing over 25,000 Social Security Employees working in over 1,300 field installations and 36 teleservice centers across the nation, Puerto Rico and Pacific Islands

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Letters to the Editor
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Sirs:

It's curious that Social Security Administration (SSA) Commissioner Michael J. Astrue enjoys his job and intends to finish his 6 year term and "serve President Obama" ("Social Security looking for land for new data center", Feb. 19). Employees certainly aren't enjoying his continued presence as Commissioner. Union leaders throughout SSA have signed a No Confidence petition asking President Obama to seek Mr. Astrue's resignation and, if he refuses, to fire him for malfeasance. Every employee that I talk to is hoping that this Commissioner resigns and that President Obama appoints someone who cares about Social Security.

His highly publicized Internet claims initiative ("Social Security launches online sign-up for benefits", Jan. 7) is a disaster for the public. He has ordered SSA claims takers to stop providing advice and assistance to claimants on when to start their benefits and which benefits to file for. (Many claimants have a choice on whether to file for widows or retirement benefits.) In his zeal to eliminate employee assistance to claimants, even when employees who review internet claims find that claimants who made choices that may cost them thousands of dollars of lost benefits, they are prohibited from contacting claimants and pointing out these facts. According to a union survey of Claims Representatives who review Internet claims, 88% would, if allowed, re-contact the claimant who filed by Internet since the starting month they selected for benefits appeared disadvantageous. 79% of Internet claims reviewers would re-contact the claimants to explore eligibility for other benefits if allowed to do so. Unfortunately, Commissioner Astrue has ordered employees to refrain from such re-contacts. His philosophy is that the claimant makes their choice and who are SSA employees to question it even if they permanently lose thousands of dollars. This ownership mantra sounds like the Bush privatization refrain of 2005. The American public rejected that flawed policy as they should reject this one.

If this fraud against the American public is not malfeasance then I have no idea what the word means. Internet filers are taking a big risk. Their choice could cost them large amounts of lost lifetime benefits. I highly recommend that anyone filing for SSA benefits should insist on an appointment with an actual employee and they should ask a lot of questions regarding how long they will be ahead depending on which month they start their benefits and which benefits they should select.

Mr. Astrue's comments in The Sun regarding the new National Computer Center (NCC) are another sign of his mismanagement of SSA. He has made no effort to provide either the union or the 1000 employees of the NCC any information regarding the project. Despite his denials, management in the NCC is planning on a move to Frederick. Now we find out in the Sun article that the staff for the NCC will be cut from 1000 to between "60 and 80". That is a 92% cut in staff and the employees found out about it by reading the newspaper. Why is the bill

for the NCC an enormous \$750 million? Who knows? Mr. Astrue presents no case for the price tag nor does he explain why the facility should move to an area represented by Republican Roscoe Bartlett.

Employees are upset about the direction of the Agency. In this time of economic troubles, America needs an SSA Commissioner who has the best interests of the public in mind. Mr. Astrue doesn't and should resign.

Sincerely,

/s/

Witold Skwierczynski
President