Bisignano Response to Sen. Warren

Fact Check:

Notwithstanding a staffing level reduced to a fifty year low and active beneficiary customers rising every day to a new record high, SSA made every service metric but one (processing center backlog) move in a better and more timely direction to improve customer service.

“We are better serving our beneficiaries and the American public.”

**Social Security has lost more staff in a shorter period of time than ever before — including 30-40% of the Agency’s IT staff. Every reputable paper in the nation including NYTimes, Washington Post, and WSJ has reported on depth on the precipitous decline in customer service.**

**(With the elimination (illegal firing) of the entire Office of Customer Service Transformation, the Agency has stopped publishing the results of Customer Satisfaction Surveys like the Medallia always on survey for those who call the 1-800 number and get through, and those who do not get through.)**

”Biden Administration’s delayed and mismanaged re-opening of SSA.”

**False: Field Offices were opened 5 days a week as soon as vaccines were made available.**

”…offices after COVID-19, combined with the prioritization of employee telework over customer service,”

**False: SSA improved customer service timeliness by the end of the Biden Administration to levels not achieved in ten or more years. And 2024 saw SSA achieve the biggest year over year increase in productivity in nine years with a three day on site, two day telework split.**

”…average speed of answer (ASA) on the National 800 Number reached an all-time high of 42 minutes in November 2023;”

**True: And through a hundred different actions and a flawless migration to a new phone platform, the speed to answer was reduced to 12.8 minutes by October of 2024.**

“…field office wait times spiked to 32 minutes in February 2024;…”

**True: And was greatly reduced every month thereafter until the massive staff reductions imposed on the agency by Trump, Musk, DOGE**

“…and the disability claims backlog reached an all-time high of more than 1.25 million in June 2024.”

**And thanks to much needed policy changes (5 year past relevant work rule, and collateral estoppel), that backlog which had been rising during ten years of staff reductions started to be greatly reduced by June 2024. How much of the reduction is momentum and the ongoing benefit of theses policies, and how much is due to the bottleneck caused now by staff reductions at in-take is speculation on the absence of data.**

“You further question the long-standing methodology behind the performance data, which is prepared by SSA’s dedicated career workforce and regularly reported to Congress across administrations.”

**The publishing of key performance metrics by line of service (real time month to date and seven year trends) was first turned into practice in the March of 2024. Far fewer metrics are posted online now, definitions have changed, and the numbers reported do not comport with customer experience.**

**But the agency has had a longer practice of collecting certain key measures of staffing and productivity, and Congress should ask for these reports:**

**1) the weekly performance reports from the beginning of the fiscal year which shows productivity and timeliness of delivery over time of all of the workloads in the agency**

**2) the “Field Office Optimizer Tool” which ranks Field Offices not only by timeless of service delivery, but also by productivity, volume of customers, and the staff.**

**3) HR and payroll numbers — the question remains: how many people are still working at SSA; where do they work; what do they now do?**

**They know but they aren’t telling.**

“… we have created the capacity to serve more people than ever while reducing wait times.”

**Social Security’s customer service staffing has been reduced by a greater amount in a shorter period of time than ever before in the ninety year history of the program. More people die awaiting their initial disability decisions than ever before. Backlogs at the Processing Centers are higher than every before. And it takes longer than ever before for claimants to receive their first benefit even after waiting for longer than every for an allowance.**

“…90 percent of calls handled on the National 800 Number to be served via automated self-service options or convenient callbacks, minimizing caller wait times.”

**The shift to AWS Connect was effectuated in the final year of the Biden Administration giving the agency new capabilities like the call back option. Speed to reach a chatbot should not be counted as the speed it takes to reach an agent — and yet, this is how the agency in its budget submission admits it has redefined “speed to answer.”**

Last year, callers experienced answer times nearly 30 minutes on average.

**Bisignano is talking about the average speed to answer on the year. By the end of the year with the migration to a new phone system, the speed to answer had been reduced in October to 12.8 minutes.**

We also achieved a 0 percent busy rate in a recent week while handling nearly 800,000 calls.

**The busy rate is on/off switch with the ability to toggle at peace volume.. We turned it off in the beginning of 2024 so no caller ever got a busy signal. The busy signal was turned one toggled up at the beginning of this year before recently being turned off again.**

“… [the amazing thing about these improvements] is we achieved them without a workforce management system integrated into the platform. As you may know, a workforce management system is an industry-standard tool for forecasting call center demand and managing agent performance.

**Bisignano is deflecting and redirecting. When SSA moved to AWS connect, the decision was made to also move to the workforce management (agent scheduling tool) offered as part of AWS Connect. [In fact, 8% of the calls had been handled on AWS Connect for year prior to the migration and the workforce was also managed and optimized during that time with the AWS tool. The further customizing of the this tool was likely put on hold like so many other projects when the DOGE team took over the agency.**

In our field offices, we are reaping the benefits of serving the public better over the phone.

**Speed to answer the phone has likely improved with continued rollout of the AWS system which technically allows staff on any office to answer another offices phone. But if the issue is specific to the office which a customer called, those answering from another office cannot resolve the problem, nor do they have the ability to transfer the call to the right Field Office.**

This effectively means that five times more people now visit field offices with appointments and wait on average just 6 minutes to be seen, compared to 28 minutes for visitors without appointments. // The net result is we have reduced the average wait time in field offices from about 30 minutes last year to just over 20 minutes so far this year, or a nearly 30 percent reduction.

**People who used to be able to walk into an office to resolve an issue, are now told they must make an appointment and come back 40-60 days even for routine matters like Social Security replacement cards.**

my Social Security, had scheduled downtime of 29 hours a week.// 280,000 more customers to access their online accounts in the first two weeks alone.

**The SSA.gov site typically was down from 2am to 5am to allow for routine maintenance. Making sure it was never down in these hours was never a high priority. Since the beginning of this second Trump Administration, the SSA.gov site (and other public facing and public platforms) has gone down numerous times with greater frequency and for longer durations after reducing IT staff by 40%.**

“…we achieved them while sending over 3.1 million payments, totaling over $17 billion, to beneficiaries eligible under the Social Security Fairness Act (SSFA),”

**The automation required for the processing of 3.1 million was accomplished before Commissioner Bisignano’s time at SSA. It was accomplished by career civil servants — many of whom were summarily pushed out of the agency with cash-to-quit incentives, constant threats of riffs, and the intentional creation of a hostile and abusive work environment.**

At the same time, we continue to drive down disability backlogs…from the all-time

high in June 2024.

**The policy changes which started to reduce the disability backlog were made in March of 2024. Questions should be asked as to whether it’s continued reduction is the product of the better policies or a bottleneck now created at the front end of the application process.**

We have also maintained historic lows of disability hearings pending, with average wait times reduced by nearly 60 days since June 2024.

**It is true that by the end of the Biden Administration, the speed to and ALJ decision has been reduced to a 25 year low. It is now ticking back up again. Therefore Frank chooses to compare to June of 2024**

Across all of our service indicators, the evidence is clear: better management is improving the customer experience on the phones, in the field offices, and online. Nothing in the data supports the irresponsible allegations of mismanagement and a customer service crisis at SSA.

**There is no one who works in a Field Office, or who regularly works with SSA, who would agree with this statement.**