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TO: NATIONAL COUNCIL SSMA OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
RE: Legislative Report #41

I am this week making final visits for 1998 to a number of Hill staff who handle civil service or Social Security oversight issues. The historic vote on Presidential impeachment articles to be held later this week is keeping House offices fully staffed. Meanwhile, many Senate staff are boning up on the procedures which will follow if even one of the four articles is approved by a simple majority in the full House vote. At the time of the House vote, there may be an attempt by the President's supporters to re-commit the articles to the Judiciary committee for further consideration of recommending censure rather than impeachment, but most people I speak with on the Hill do not anticipate a parliamentary move such as that being successful. If the House passes one or more articles (they will be debated on the floor as a single package but then voted on individually), it will be up to the Senate to determine whether to go forward with a full trial or to take a different action, such as censure. As I am sure you are all aware, Senate Majority Leader Lott has made comments indicating that he would pursue a full trial.

Even during this most unusual time in Congress, some normal planning and workaday activities are underway. I have learned that NCSSMA and I will be dealing in the 106th Congress with several new key staffers -- or staffers newly taking on Social Security issues -- in both the House and Senate Labor/HHS/Education Subcommittees (which determine SSA's budget each year), so I have been making acquaintances and discussing NCSSMA with those so far identified. Appointments will be arranged for Ron Niesing to meet with them as early in the new year as possible, and we are also working on setting up appointments for Ron to visit with the new Social Security Subcommittee Chairman Clay Shaw of Fla. and the new Ranking Minority Member as well (now reportedly to be Rep. Matsui of California).

Turning congressional attention to Social Security service delivery issues continues to be something of a challenge during this period of continuing focus on reform of the program. However, we will have at least five hooks to utilize in advancing NCSSMA concerns and views in the upcoming year:

* NCSSMA will continue to try to alert key policymakers to the linkage between reform and implementation, with the obviously related service and planning dimensions.

* The Senate Aging Committee, the House Social Security Subcommittee, and the House Labor/HHS/Education Subcommittee remain very concerned about the disability program and disability redesign, so in addition to ongoing hearings about the future of the program, hearings held by these committees will focus or touch on the status of and SSA's plans regarding disability. NCSSMA will have opportunities to contribute to the discussion both directly, through congressional testimony, and indirectly, through working sessions with key staff.

* The House Government Reform and Oversight Committee and the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee continue to try to get federal agencies to improve their performance plans called for under the Government Performance and Results Act. The Social Security oversight and appropriations committees are waiting for SSA's improved plan and have asked NCSSMA for its views and suggestions in that regard. As Congress pursues the mandates of GPRA and holds agencies accountable for follow-through, NCSSMA will have ongoing opportunities to contribute your ideas through numerous channels on the Hill.

* Similarly, staff at the National Partnership for Reinvention report that Vice President Gore will continue to press federal agencies not only to improve customer service goals and standards but to follow-through on other fronts that affect both service delivery and costs -- especially partnership/labor-management relations and the empowerment of front line employees. At the monthly meetings between the NPR staff and the Coalition for Effective Change, I will continue to try to draw attention to service delivery and related issues at SSA and to identify avenues NCSSMA might follow to increase the visibility of its positions.

* Finally, the Social Security Advisory Board has undertaken its study of service delivery at SSA. Ron Niesing and other NC representatives had the opportunity to brief both the staff and the Board members themselves early this year when this project was in the planning stage. Now, a team from the Board has visited facilities in California, Pennsylvania and New York, and they are staffing up to work intensively on this study over the next several months. NCSSMA continues to be in touch with them and will be called upon for further input. While I am not yet certain of the timetable for a final, published report, we can anticipate that it will create an impetus for wider interest in the structure of the agency, resource allocations, types of service delivery and many related concerns raised by NCSSMA.

These opportunities on the SSA service delivery front, together with the activities I have outlined over the past few weeks with the CEC, OPM, GAO and potential Hill action on the civil service front, combine to promise a very busy year ahead. I am certain to need ideas and assistance not only from the NC officers and Executive Committee but from many SSMA members as well as we work on this broad range of interests and concerns.

I plan a final 1998 legis report next week to cover any pending odds and ends I unearth as I clear my desk before the holiday period.

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