

**The National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc.**

**THE WASHINGTON REPORT  
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- **Federal Overview**

Both the House and Senate will be in session in Washington until the Memorial Day recess which begins on May 26<sup>th</sup> and runs through June 6<sup>th</sup>. The Republicans have acknowledged however, that their approval ratings are higher when Congress is not in Washington, so look for your Members of Congress to spend more time at home, particularly on Fridays and Mondays. This is an excellent time to meet with your Congressional Delegation.

Congress began working on appropriations bills this week, even though many Members acknowledge that the funding allocations are unrealistically low. It is anticipated that once Members begin to face the reality of the allocations, there may be an upward adjustment in the allocations, but probably not until later in the process – perhaps as late as September.

In addition to the “must pass” appropriations bills, the Congress is considering legislation on education reform, trade relations with China, and prescription drug benefits. There continues to be a great deal of discussion about Social Security reform, but no legislative action is expected this year.

- **Supervisory Overtime Pay**

There are bills in both the House (H.R. 2696) and Senate (S. 1885) to provide overtime equity in the federal workplace. Both bills would increase the overtime cap for managers and supervisors to GS-12, step 1 and ensure that no one is paid less for overtime work than their regular rate of pay. H.R. 2696 was introduced by Rep. Tom Davis (R-VA) and currently has four cosponsors: Rep. Neil Abercrombie (D-HI); Rep. Benjamin A. Gilman (R-NY); Rep. Maurice D. Hinchey (D-NY); and Rep. Walter B. Jones, Jr. (R-NC). S. 1885 was introduced by Sen. Charles S. Robb (D-VA) and currently has two cosponsors: Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski (D-MD) and Sen. Paul S. Sarbanes (D-MD).

- **Senate and House Hearings on Social Security Program Representative Payees**

The Senate Select Committee on Aging recently held a full committee hearing on whether the Social Security Administration has allowed some payers to deceive the elderly and disabled. Susan Daniels, Deputy Commissioner, Disability and Income Security Programs and James Huse, Inspector General, presented testimony before the committee. Copies of the witnesses’

written statements are available. Please contact us if you have any questions or would like copies.

The House Subcommittee on Social Security held a hearing May 4<sup>th</sup> on misuse of beneficiaries' payments by representative payees. We attended the hearing and will provide a legislative report with a summary of the proceedings.

- **Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Hearings on Federal Employee Incentives Programs and the Federal Government's "Reinvention" Program**

The Committee has held hearings on the effectiveness of these initiatives. Henry Romero, Associate Director, Workforce Compensation and Performance Service, Office of Personnel Management, was a witness at the incentive programs hearing. Morley Winograd, director of the National Partnership for Reinventing Government, was scheduled to testify at the hearing on government reinvention.

Winograd is preparing a civil service reform legislation package to present Congress. According to Winograd the package includes an emphasis on "balanced measures" that recognize and reward employees whose performance advances their agencies' goals.

Committee Chairman Fred Thompson (R-TN) has introduced "The Government in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act," (S.2306). This legislation would "restructure" the executive branch and calls for consolidating and reorganizing a number of programs, departments and agencies to improve overall productivity and accountability.

- **Social Security Reform**

On Thursday, May 4<sup>th</sup>, two press conferences focusing on Social Security reform proposals were held:

Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), and Sen. Bob Kerrey (D-Neb.) joined Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain (R-Ariz.), in announcing the proposed formation of a bipartisan Congressional Commission for Comprehensive Reform on Social Security. The Commission would be given the task of providing a comprehensive reform plan for the next president's approval by the end of 2001. The proposed 12-member commission will be made up of House and Senate members from both parties with an *ex officio* seat for the Commissioner of Social Security. The Commission will have to be authorized by Congress.

Sens. Moynihan and Kerrey criticized Vice President Gore's approach to Social Security -- saying his retirement plan would make the system dependent on general tax revenue. They have offered a proposal to create individual Social Security accounts, but Moynihan has stated that it is not a privatization plan.

Immediately after the three senators completed their announcement, Sens. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) and Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) spoke on the proposals to privatize portions of the Social Security program and the risks such plans present. They were critical of George W. Bush's interest in including individual investment accounts as an element of overhauling Social Security.

Sen. Dorgan, who heads the Senate's Democratic Policy Committee (DPC), stated that while proposals to privatize Social Security might be a boon to Wall Street, they would put the retirement security of millions of Americans at risk.

"With a booming stock market, investing retirement funds in the market may seem like an attractive option," Dorgan said, "but Americans already have that option with personal funds, IRAs, and 401K plans. It is not necessary to destabilize Social Security or gamble away the guaranteed retirement security of millions of retired Americans to allow people to invest retirement money in the stock market. They are already free to do that."

- **Public Service Recognition Week (May 1<sup>st</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup>)**

During four days of this week (May 4<sup>th</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup>), more than 100 government agencies, nonprofit organizations and private companies will recognize public employees with events on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The Public Employees Roundtable (PER) of Washington sponsors the annual event. PER is a coalition of 32 management and professional organizations (including NCSSMA) representing more than 1 million public employees and retirees. This is the program's 16<sup>th</sup> year and the theme for the 2000 celebration is "Public Employees: Working for America."

In conjunction with this week's events, PER will present awards recognizing outstanding individuals and federal programs. The winners of the individual awards will be announced later this week. The winners in the program categories are:

- Federal Category – the IRS Electronic Tax Assistance Program, Washington
- International Category – the Agency for International Development's U.S. Global Technology Network Program, Washington
- Community Service Category – Students and staff at the Public Health Department of the Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine Program, Brooks Air Force Base, Texas

- **GMU Researchers Evaluate Agency Performance Reports**

According to an article in the Washington Post (May 5<sup>th</sup>) the Mercatus Center at George Mason graded 24 agency reports on how easily they could be found on the Internet and understood by the public; how well the reports explained program results and goals; and whether they offered solutions to problems. The Agency for International Development, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Veterans Affairs ranked the highest.

Maurice P. McTigue and Jerry R. Ellig were the researchers. They examined the first-ever annual performance reports required by the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). The law is aimed at improving the government's management of programs and providing the public with information on an agency's performance – what they are getting for their taxpayer dollars.

According to the article, Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Fred D. Thompson (R-Tenn.) is frustrated with the GPRA's slow progress, and has said that his committee will pull together assessments of GPRA efforts in the government from GAO investigators and Agency IGs – resulting in possible oversight hearings in the Senate.

- **President orders transportation benefit**

In conjunction with Earth Day, President Clinton has issued an executive order which requires federal agencies to increase transit benefits to employees by October 1<sup>st</sup>. The type of benefit will vary by location. In the Washington, D.C. area federal agencies must offer employees a transit benefit of up to \$65.00 per month to use public transportation. A nationwide pilot program provides the same benefit to employees at the Department of Transportation, the Department of Energy, and the Environmental Protection Agency. All other federal workers outside of the D.C. area will be eligible to receive a transit benefit of \$65.00 from their pre-tax wages. Agencies which already have more generous transit programs or benefits in place may continue to offer them. The costs of implementing the order must be absorbed by agencies within the president's FY 2001 budget request.

- **Mike Causey leaving the *Washington Post***

Mike Causey, the author of "The Federal Diary," will be leaving the Washington Post, effective May 8<sup>th</sup>. A survey by the Post found that other than the comics, the "Federal Diary" was the most widely read portion of the paper. Mike is joining a federal information technology company that is creating a new government portal website (Plantegov.com) for federal employees and agencies. He will be writing columns for this site about many of the same subjects he addressed in his Washington Post column.

- **Final Thought from Capitol Hill**

"The Democrats, I guess, are intent on being party poopers."

-- Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, speaking last week after Democrats helped defeat cloture on the GOP-backed so-called marriage penalty tax relief bill.

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