

The National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc.

**THE WASHINGTON REPORT
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- **Recent Congressional Action Related to the Social Security Program**

Below is a compilation of recent congressional action related to the Social Security Program. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like us to provide additional information regarding any of the measures.

- **Social Security Protection Act of 2003**

Score one for the NCSSMA and the SFRMA. Earlier this year we were contacted by several members of the SFRMA about the need to include a 'good cause' provision in any legislation that suspends Title 2 (Social Security) benefits. The inclusion of this provision would allow the Commissioner of SSA to continue to pay Title 2 benefits for 'good cause'. Initially, legislation offered in both the House and Senate contained such a provision but it was only applicable to those fleeing to avoid prosecution, custody or confinement – and not to those violating a condition of parole.

We are pleased to report that after working with the staffs of the House Social Security Subcommittee and the Senate Finance Committee, it appears that the language we were seeking will be included in the Social Security Protection Act of 2003. The language is in both the House and Senate versions of the act; we will keep you posted as the legislation moves forward.

On October 29, the Senate submitted its report on the legislation and the bill has been placed on the Senate calendar.

H.R.3382

Title: To amend titles II and XVIII of the Social Security Act to waive certain waiting periods for Social Security disability and Medicare benefits in the case of a terminally ill, disabled individual.

Sponsor: Rep Rogers, Mike D. [AL-3] (introduced 10/28/2003) **Cosponsors:** (none)

Latest Major Action: 10/28/2003 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the Committee on Ways and Means, and in addition to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.

- **Recent Congressional Action Related To Civil Service Issues**

Below is a compilation of recent congressional action related to civil service issues. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like us to provide additional information regarding any of the measures.

S. 349

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) signed on to support to **S. 349**, a bill that would repeal the GPO and WEP. S. 349 is being sponsored by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA).

S. 926/H.R. 3080

On October 28, 2003 **Rep. Jo Anne Davis** (R-VA) spoke on the House floor about **S. 926**, the Senate companion bill to H.R. 3080 (*Congressional Record*, Page: H9835). **H.R. 3080** is a bill that would increase the annual amount federal agencies can pay towards employee student loans.

“Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in favor of S. 926, a bill introduced by my colleague, Senator Voinovich to increase the annual and total limits of student loan repayments by executive branch agencies.

This is identical to a bill that I introduced on the House side, H.R. 3080. We are considering the Senate version of this bill, the Federal Employee Student Loan Assistance Act, which has already passed that Chamber in an effort to speed up approval of this important piece of legislation.

I want to thank the leadership for bringing this matter to the floor today. As the chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Civil Service, Census and Agency Organization of the Committee on Government Reform, I have raised the same questions at many of our hearings this year: How do we attract the most qualified people to government service and how do we keep them once they have started?

Recruiting, retaining, and rewarding talented and hardworking individuals are at the very core of making our civil service the best that it can be. Very clearly, having the ability to tell potential recruits, come work for the United States Government and we can help you repay your student loans, is an extremely valuable tool.

All of us are surely aware of how expensive a college or graduate-level education is. And it is the prospect of these daunting student loans, \$50,000, \$75,000, or even more than \$100,000, that can prevent public service -minded people from coming to work for the government. They simply cannot afford it.

Student loan repayment is at the top of the list for newly graduated students looking for jobs. To keep up with the higher salaries of the private sector and nonprofit organizations, the Federal Government must have an effective student loan repayment program. This legislation before us today raises the annual maximum amount that agencies could give towards student loan repayment, from \$6,000 a year to \$10,000 a year. It also raises the total amount an agency can contribute toward an individual's loan, from \$40,000 to \$60,000. These changes reflect the increases in annual college tuition costs since the Federal Government's original Student Loan Repayment Bill was enacted in 1991.

All funds to pay for the repayment program come out of the agencies' own budgets, so this legislation has no negative impact on the current budget. It is the right thing to do and something that we must do in order to remain competitive in the job market. I strongly urge my colleagues to pass the Federal Employee Student Loan Assistance Act before us today.”

H.R.3080

Title: To amend section 5379 of title 5, United States Code, to increase the annual and aggregate limits on student loan repayments by Federal agencies.

Sponsor: Rep Davis, Jo Ann [VA-1] (introduced 9/11/2003) **Cosponsors:** 2

Latest Major Action: 9/11/2003 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Government Reform.

S. 589

The following discussion about **S. 589**, the “Homeland Security Federal Workforce Act”, occurred on the Senate floor on November 5, 2003 (*Congressional Record*, p. 14075). The bill was passed by the Senate on November 5, 2003.

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) spoke about the student loan repayment aspect of S. 589:

“Specifically, with respect to the Homeland Security Federal Workforce Act that we consider today, I believe the program it establishes for student loan repayment can be an important incentive for our national security programs and understand those to include our law enforcement agents and officers. I regret that the substitute amendment lowers the maximum amount of loan repayment from \$80,000 to \$60,000 but believe it is an important start and should be used broadly as an incentive to both recruit and retain our national security employees. According to Dr. Paul Light of the Brookings Institution Center for Public Service, in 2002 the Department of Justice and the Department of Defense together awarded student loan repayment to only seven employees. To have its intended effect to recruit and retain outstanding talent to government service, especially national security positions that include law enforcement, we need to have a broad-based incentive through loan forgiveness. Student loans, include law school loans, that saddle talented and public-spirited graduates are a key reason so many opt for higher paying jobs in the private sector. An effective program of student loan forgiveness can help counterbalance that pressure.

I regret that the bill as written limits its application to executive departments like the Department of Justice and does not include Federal courts, which oversee our federal public defenders. Our prosecutors and our public defenders need this assistance and incentive to join and remain as critical components of the criminal justice system. To skew programs to help only one side of the criminal justice system is shortsighted and unfair. For more information on this important topic of loan forgiveness, I urge consideration of pages 37 through 40 of Senate report 107-315.”

S.589

Title: A bill to strengthen and improve the management of national security, encourage Government service in areas of critical national security, and to assist government agencies in addressing deficiencies in personnel possessing specialized skills important to national security

and incorporating the goals and strategies for recruitment and retention for such skilled personnel into the strategic and performance management systems of Federal agencies.

Sponsor: Sen. Akaka, Daniel K. [HI] (introduced 3/11/2003) **Cosponsors:** 8

Latest Major Action: 11/6/2003 House preparation for floor. Status: Held at the desk.

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