

The National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc.
GREYSTONE GROUP WASHINGTON REPORT
Legislative Report 11-2018
October 5, 2018

Hearing Title: Hearing to Consider the Nomination of Andrew M. Saul, of New York, to be Commissioner of Social Security for the term expiring January 19, 2019

By: U.S. Senate Committee on Finance

Date: October 2, 2018

Link: <https://www.finance.senate.gov/hearings/hearing-to-consider-the-nomination-of-andrew-m-saul-of-new-york-to-be-commissioner-of-social-security-for-the-term-expiring-january-19-2019>

Hearing Background:

The nomination of Andrew M. Saul to be Commissioner of Social Security was received by the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance on April 17, 2018. This purpose of this hearing was for the Committee to consider, discuss and question the nominee.

Members of Congress Attending the Hearing:

Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-UT)	Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-OR)
Sen. John Thune (R-SD)	Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ)
Sen. Patrick J. Toomey (R-PA)	Sen. Thomas R. Carper (D-DE)
Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC)	Sen. Michael F. Bennet (D-CO)
Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO)	Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)

Committee on Finance Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-UT) Opening Statement:

<https://www.finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/10.2.18%20Hatch%20Opening%20Statement%20at%20Saul%20Hearing.pdf>

Committee on Finance Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-OR) Opening Statement:

<https://www.finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/100218%20Wyden%20Statement%20Saul%20Social%20Security1.pdf>

Nominee and His Statement

Andrew M. Saul, Nominee for Commissioner, Social Security Administration

<https://www.finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/02OCT2018SAULSTMNT.pdf>

Summary and Impressions of Hearing:

Andrew M. Saul has been nominated by President Trump to serve as Commissioner of Social Security. If confirmed, Saul will be the first confirmed Commissioner at the Social Security Administration (SSA) since 2013. Both Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-OR) noted in their opening statements that although the President has nominated Mr. Saul to serve the remainder of the six-year term that expires January 19, 2019, along with the following six-year term that expires on January 19, 2025, the hearing would consider only the first nomination.

Due to Senate procedure and precedent the second nomination will be considered by the next Senate. Both Hatch and Wyden indicated in their opening statements that the expectation is that if Mr. Saul is confirmed for the first nomination, the second nomination before the 116th Congress should be taken up as promptly as possible next year.

The hearing was rather straightforward and there were no real unanticipated lines of questioning from the Committee members in attendance. As expected, SSA's Information Technology (IT) and Systems were discussed at length, along with workload backlogs, and customer service. Field offices, the customer service they provide, and the field office structure were also discussed. Throughout the proceeding Mr. Saul noted the importance of bringing service to the beneficiaries and that service to the customer is crucial in their locations.

On the topic of SSA's IT and Systems, the agency's past projects were certainly raised, including the Disability Case Processing System (DCPS). In response, Mr. Saul indicated, "One of my primary tasks in the first, let's call it six months or a year, will be to sit down and review the modernization plan that's in place at the Social Security Administration from top-to-bottom. I want to be sure that what we're doing is going to work for the present and for the future, in the interests of the beneficiaries."

In response to questions related to backlogs at SSA, Ranking Member Wyden offered the following:

"On the backlog, the previous two commissioners promised to fix the problem, and it hasn't been fixed. So what are you going to do differently to actually fix it so we won't see what I saw just a couple of weeks ago when I visited a field office?"

Mr. Saul told Ranking Member Wyden that he will investigate the problem on the ground, both in Oregon and beyond.

"I understand that the field office is where the rubber meets the road," Mr. Saul indicated. "When you talk about service to the beneficiaries, there's nothing more important than the personal contact in these 1,200-plus field offices spread throughout our nation. So I will, number one, not only get out to Oregon, but into many locations around the country, because before you know what you can do, I believe I'm going to have to really get out and see what the problems are."

However, Mr. Saul told Ranking Member Wyden that he could not promise to not close any field offices until he better understood the situation.

"I can promise you, senator, that I will go out there and before any decisions are made in any of the field offices, I will understand what the conditions are there in that locale," Mr. Saul said. "Nothing will be done without my OK."

Mr. Saul promised that he would also be undertaking a review of the backlogs, including a top-to-bottom review of disability hearings backlog as well.

In responses to questions from Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) Mr. Saul promised to support the goals of Social Security, committed to clearing the backlogs, and ensuring that employees are adequately supported. It was during this exchange that Mr. Saul also noted that he would be reviewing the entire personnel system (at SSA) including the management structure of the agency to make sure that the right people are in the proper positions. Mr. Saul went on to note that people have a responsibility to be accountable and provide service to beneficiaries.

Sen. Menendez indicated that he hoped that Mr. Saul would communicate with Congress regarding properly resourcing (the agency) and Mr. Saul responded that before he asked for money he would, "make sure we are spending it properly," but that he would, "ask for money if we need it."

The topic of privatization was raised as well, with Mr. Saul responding that he believed that issue should be left to “the Treasury and the legislative branch” and that his job would be to “manage the agency.” Ranking Member Wyden asked if Mr. Saul would promise to run SSA in a nonpartisan way and Mr. Saul agreed to do so. Mr. Saul’s association with the Manhattan Institute was also raised in the context of Social Security privatization and Mr. Saul responded that his interest in the Institute was due to the work done there focused on state and local government efficiency, not privatization of Social Security and that he, “did not share those views.”

Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) and Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) both made references to synthetic ID fraud and legislation currently pending in the Senate. Mr. Saul indicated that he was both aware of the legislation and will support it, that it is a “win-win.”

Sen. Thomas Carper (D-DE) offered questions related to the Death Master File, along with efforts to reduce improper payments. Mr. Saul indicated that he supported transparency and communication and SSA sharing information (where legal) to further efforts in these areas.

The topic of preserving reconsideration was raised briefly as well by Ranking Member Wyden on behalf of Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) just as the hearing was coming to a close. Wyden asked that Mr. Saul respond to this as part of the Questions for the Record.

We will continue to monitor the proceedings of the Committee on Finance and any resulting actions related to this latest hearing. Responses to Questions for the Record posed to the nominee by members of the Committee will be included as part of the hearing proceedings as well. We will keep NCSSMA members updated on any additional developments on the confirmation process.

Related Articles:

Social Security nominee promises ‘top-to-bottom’ review of IT modernization plan

<https://federalnewsradio.com/agency-oversight/2018/10/social-security-nominee-promises-top-to-bottom-review-of-it-modernization-plan/>

SSA nominee 'scared to death' of legacy IT systems

<https://fcw.com/articles/2018/10/02/ssn-scary-legacy-tech-saul.aspx?m=1>

NCSSMA Twitter Account

Reminder: NCSSMA has a Twitter account and we encourage you to join in and follow us! You can view and follow our page on your **home computer** at <http://twitter.com/NCSSMAORG> or your **personal mobile device** at <https://mobile.twitter.com/NCSSMAORG>.

Greystone Group LLC
3303 South Wakefield Street
Arlington, VA 22206
202-547-8530
Contact: Rachel A. Emmons
E-mail: rachele@greystone-group.com