

Commissioner's Broadcast

March 11, 2009

A Message To All SSA And DDS Employees

Subject: FY 2009 Appropriation

So, lots of great news.

First, President Obama is set to sign the omnibus appropriations bill for fiscal year (FY) 2009. Accordingly, I am lifting the hiring restrictions that have been in place since the start of the fiscal year.

The appropriations bill provides \$126.5 million more than was included in the FY 2009 President's budget, which already represented a 6 percent increase over FY 2008 funding. Knowing our annual funding allows us to take swift action on many critical initiatives.

In addition to our appropriation, the economic recovery act that the President signed last month provided us with another \$500 million to process our increasing disability and retirement workloads and invest in related information technology projects. Unlike our annual appropriation which we must use within a fiscal year, we will be able to use this \$500 million over the next eighteen months. The act also gives us \$500 million to replace the National Computer Center, which will allow us to take timely action to ensure that our new data center will be built and operational by the time our current center is near the end of its functional life.

The economic recovery act also requires us to make a one-time payment of \$250 to Social Security and Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries. To cover our administrative costs, the law provides us with \$90 million to make these payments. We have been busy coordinating with other agencies to ensure that the right beneficiaries receive payments and that we avoid making duplicate payments. We are on track to send payments to beneficiaries over a several-week period in May. We will provide you with more information and updates as they become available.

Finally, on February 26, the President released his budget overview for FY 2010, and it showed the President's strong support for the work we do. The FY 2010 request for our agency is \$11.6 billion, which would be a 10 percent increase over our FY 2009 appropriation.

We have received this level of support from President Obama and the Congress because we have laid out in detail the investments in employees and technology that are necessary to meet the service challenges of the next decade. While we have many pressing needs, it is important that excellence and accountability come before haste. To this end, the

Administration has asked all agencies to establish unprecedented controls over the contracting process and to be transparent as to how they spend this money.

A few months back, I wrote to all of our managers asking that they begin laying the groundwork for bringing on new employees. While I am confident that they have followed my earlier advice and begun planning for the upcoming surge in hiring, we need to remember that our goal is to find the best available candidate, and quite often that person is not the fastest or easiest to hire. We have a commitment to create a workforce that reflects all Americans. We must be thoughtful in our outreach and set a high standard – this is the toughest labor market in decades, so we have a wonderful opportunity to continue our practice of hiring extraordinary employees who will be the agency's foundation in future decades.

I also am asking everyone to remember that we are a leader in hiring persons with disabilities and that we should continue our outstanding record in hiring and promoting these employees. Accordingly, I am asking all agency executives to continue their efforts in reaching out to the Wounded Warrior transitional programs and Ticket to Work beneficiaries who are trying to return to work. I have designated Kristen Medley-Proctor, an SES candidate, to oversee and coordinate our recruitment and hiring efforts during the next four critical months. She can be reached at kristen.medley-proctor@ssa.gov. We must ensure that we match disabled persons and opportunities on a national basis and that we use our special hiring authority for persons with disabilities where appropriate.

We obviously have many exciting challenges ahead of us. I am confident that we are up to the task, and I will keep you posted on our progress over what promises to be an extraordinary six months.

Michael J. Astrue
Commissioner