



SSA Budget Fears Realized by Bethany Paradis, Boston Region



A final budget of \$11.4 billion was enacted for SSA's FY 2011 administrative expenses as part of a year long continuing resolution in March, 2011. This level of funding is \$23.0 million below the FY 2010 enacted level and nearly \$1.0 billion below the President's FY 2011 budget request. While this result is not favorable for SSA and the public we serve, it could have been a lot worse. Everybody is grateful that we avoided furloughs and limited overtime has resumed to deal with critical workloads. It is very clear, however, that significant challenges remain and NCSSMA has already begun efforts on the FY 2012 SSA budget.

In a message sent to employees on May 10, Commissioner Astrue stated that, "Budget cuts of this magnitude have very real implications." SSA is under a hiring freeze this year, which means we will not be able to replace employees who leave. We are currently expecting a loss of 3500 employees this year and 4400 next year. The Commissioner indicated that executives are working to come up with creative ideas to save money such as suspending the mailing of the Social Security Earnings Statement. The agency is also working with OMB on some initiatives to reduce work-

loads. SSA's goal to eliminate the hearings backlog by 2013 will continue to be a top priority and ODAR will be provided with resources to meet that goal.

Newspapers across the country are reporting that our contact stations have closed as travel was suspended. There is renewed interest in consolidating offices where possible to save money. With the improvements that we have made in telephone and internet services, driving distances to field offices is not as big a consideration as it once was. That is not to say that the public is happy with these sacrifices. Many still prefer to deal face to face with an SSA employee to conduct their business.

While details on what to expect from this year's budget are still being determined, I can share what managers across the country are already experiencing. In the words of an Illinois manager, "We are 'walking on eggshells now'. It feels like we are being held together by tape and glue." Losing employees during a hiring freeze is of paramount concern to managers:

"In just three years, we have lost 23% of our staff and are now down to only 10 permanent employees to serve an increasing number of beneficiaries. When I consider our office's own retirement wave, in just three years from now, I expect to have only one of our current service representatives and two of our current claims representatives left to serve the public." --South Dakota

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Special Interest Articles:

- Why do Supervisors and NCSSMA need each other?
- Meet Rachel Emmons, Washington Representative
- Field Office Telephone Service Update
- Disability Committee

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"There is a mutual benefit to having supervisors represent NCSSMA as officers or on work group committees because, while they are expanding their own perspectives, they are also contributing valuable perspectives to the committees."

Patty Maddox ADM, Denver Region



NCSSMA to Testify at June 14 Congressional Hearing

NCSSMA President Joe Dirago will testify at an Oversight Hearing on Social Security Administration Program Integrity Workloads. This is a Joint Hearing before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and The Subcommittee on Social Security of the Committee on Ways and Means in the United States House of Representatives. NCSSMA's testimony will emphasize that the agency is already over-stretched in critical program areas as it struggles to keep up with rapidly increasing workloads. Properly funding SSA so that it can process core workloads and invest in program integrity initiatives will save taxpayer dollars and is fiscally prudent in reducing the federal budget.

Budget continued

"...This year, we have lost one service representative and two claims representatives to retirement. We are about to lose a technical expert next month which will leave us with two technical experts and seven trainees. The technical experts are the primary mentors in the office and will be stretched very thin to mentor the seven trainees between two of them."--Chicago

"This office went from keeping up with workloads with a staff of 12 down to 9 (a net loss of three staff slots) and struggling just to keep appointment slots on the calendar 3 to 4 weeks out...I am now faced with two more claims representatives retiring in the middle of a hiring freeze."—Oregon

Added to the concern of losing employees through normal attrition is the fear that those currently eligible to retire will leave to avoid pension losses. Also high stress and low morale because of diminished agency resources may encourage people to leave.

"This year we anticipate many employees leaving for retirement before changes occur to their retirement due to proposed re-computations and lack of COLAs."—California

"We are a high visitor traffic urban office. Recent losses due to retirement and promotions are affecting the service we provide to our beneficiaries. In addition, we have eight employees who are eligible to retire..."—Indiana

"Dealing with staff stress and employee burnout [is becoming critical] ... Several employees report medical signs of stress – anxiety, heart palpitations, depression, family problems, substance abuse, etc... All this on top of Congressional efforts to freeze salary and reduce retirement and health benefits [is destroying morale.]"—Utah

Staffing shortages and limited overtime are a frightening prospect when workloads are at an all time high for field offices. With agency emphasis on reducing waiting times in our reception areas and improving our telephone service, many offices relied on overtime to get the work done, especially program integrity workloads. SSA's focus on eliminating the backlogs and speeding up the hearings decisions in the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) is succeeding. The result is an increasing volume of claims flowing back to field offices and the Office of Disability Operations for adjudication. These claims are complex and time consuming to process, eating up scarce resources. As field offices juggle priorities, waiting times will increase, telephone service will diminish, and backlogs are already occurring.

"The teleservice centers have seen a marked increase in calls from customers requesting status of items pending in the field offices and the program service centers. These inquiries result in the teleservice centers sending requests

to field offices and the program service centers. These inquiries have to be handled and they take time away from the technicians who are struggling to get the cases worked."

"Who is caught in the middle of this whole mess? [The answer is] members of the public who need our services. What do we not get to--appointments to take the claims, processing the claims we have taken, keeping up with address/direct deposit changes to get benefits where they belong, processing children's applications for a Social Security Number so parents can file taxes or get the child health care or other necessary benefits?"—Oregon



One of the primary problems with having even a static budget from one year to the next is that fixed costs increase so the agency is actually incurring a reduction in funding. Just covering basic overhead costs and supplies is now problematic.

"I don't have enough money to provide paper and toner. Even with our vigorous conservation efforts... our supply situation is dire."--Texas

NCSSMA is already working on the FY 2012 budget. Joe Dirago, NCSSMA President, submitted testimony supporting the President's budget request to the Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies on May 5. Also in May, NCSSMA provided a list of possible legislative and/or regulatory proposals to increase SSA program efficiency and lower operations costs to staff from the Social Security Subcommittee and SSA leadership. To assist the agency in determining how we can survive in this austere budget environment, NCSSMA compiled a list of cost saving ideas that was discussed with the Commissioner at a meeting attended by Joe Dirago, Vice President Steve Clifton, and Washington Representative Rachel Emmons on May 25. During this meeting, they also discussed the ramifications of the FY 2011 SSA budget and working with agency leadership in these difficult times. The trio also met with Hill appropriators to educate them on the affects the budget was having on public service and the need for adequate funding for FY 2012.

FrontLine is Produced by the Communications Committee

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 Clayton Wood



President's Corner :

Federal Employees and SSA Face Many Challenges!

by Joe Dirago, NCSSMA President

With the final resolution of the FY 2011 federal budget, the road ahead for the Social Security Administration (SSA) and for federal employees in general is filled with many challenges. SSA Field Offices are already coping with the realities of a less than favorable FY 2011 SSA budget, which does not allow for hiring staff replacements. Compounding this is that we are confronted with the possibility of an even more dire budget situation for FY 2012. Federal employees have become targets for spending reductions and our pay and benefits are under attack. A two-year pay freeze of federal employee pay was enacted and there are many legislative proposals that address the national debt through federal workforce cuts. These include extending the current civil service pay freeze through FY 2015, reducing the size of the federal workforce, and changes in our retirement benefits.

NCSSMA was founded 41 years ago to be the "unfiltered voice" of SSA frontline management. Over the years, our agency and federal employees have faced similar difficult challenges and NCSSMA represented its membership's concerns in a professional and reasonable manner. The situation confronting us now may be daunting, but we have been challenged in the past and endured.

We all agree that fiscal responsibility is necessary and federal employees are willing to do our part to help ensure a strong America for future generations. However, NCSSMA remains in opposition to legislation that unfairly targets civil servants. NCSSMA continues to work with the Government Managers Coalition (GMC) and the Federal-Postal Coalition (FPC) to represent your concerns and to advocate for equitable treatment of federal employees.

NCSSMA recognizes that in the current budget environment it will be difficult to provide adequate funding for SSA. However, our emphasis has been on maintaining Social Security as one of the most successful government programs in the world and the importance of providing good service to the American public. As SSA managers, we know that Social Security is a very productive agency and a key component of the nation's economic safety net, but sufficient resources are necessary.

To advocate for an adequate SSA budget in FY 2012, on May 25, Steve Clifton, Vice-President, Rachel Emmons, Washington Representative, and I met with key Senate and House Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee staff. We provided information regarding SSA's appropri-

ated funding needs, the current challenges facing SSA Field Offices and Teleservice Centers, as well as insight and NCSSMA's perspective on other legislation currently being considered by Congress that may affect SSA and our members. We focused on the impact of the FY 2011 SSA budget with an emphasis on staffing losses and diminished public service.

NCSSMA will continue to represent your concerns and advocate on behalf of its membership. Honest and direct communications with agency leadership and our elected representatives is an essential part of that process. Difficult decisions will be necessary regarding the federal deficit as well as our agency's budget. It is imperative that our perspective on the situation be considered as part of the decision making process. We will keep you abreast of significant developments as they transpire.

Please continue to express your concerns with NCSSMA leadership so that we hear your voice! Stay tuned for more information, which will be communicated over our home e-mail network.

NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members! ARMA

Jennifer George
Matthew Cooper
Alisha Anderson
Leigh Baird
Gisela Bales
Sarah Branam
Mike Barranco
Elizabeth Woodruff
Tracey Matthews
Cynthia Hatchel
Melissa Brock
Nancy O Carpenter
Vanessa K Hoke
Pamela Spann
Ruqayyah C Nicholas
Susan Gill
Regina Masters
Orby Van Ellis
Sandra B Cook

Marc Lynn
Frank Medina
Jacqueline Lopez
Ricardo Quinones
Jeyman E Cadayid
Joseph Riley
Joseph Oakes
Charlotte R Foster
Christy Christofidis
Tiffany m Dickson
Josephine L Garrett
Shelia H Noland
Ida Jo Price
Christal M Whitfield
Carmen Wormely
Maggie Bowers
Brenda B Brown
Etta Gaye Atwood



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TSC Connection

by Andrea Wahle, TSC Representative



I occasionally hear complaints from supervisors concerning the consistent application of rules and procedures from unit to unit or section to section within a facility. Because of individual interpretation of policies and procedures, we may never have true uniformity. However, we still can strive for consistency within our own unit. Ask yourself, *do I apply*

the rules evenly across the board, or do I give a little slack here and there to employees with whom I have a stronger relationship?

If so, is it because it is sometimes harder to admonish an employee who has an otherwise solid work history? Let me give you an example, Andy and Randy both arrive late one morning and neither has called in to advise you he was running late. Andy is one of your top performers and usually follows appropriate leave request procedures. Randy, however, is a different story. You often have a hard time getting him to stay signed on to the phone and he frequently submits same day leave requests. Do you discuss the issue with them both, or do you “let it slide” for Andy? If you don’t have the discussion with Andy this time, when do you?

As a leader, it is your responsibility to know when to hold fast to the rules, and when to make your own compassionate allowances. There is a significant difference between following progressive discipline for a repeat offender, and simply discussing an issue with a first timer, but the discussion still needs to take place. Andrew Carnegie once said, “The older I get the less I listen to what people say and the more I look at what they do.” These little lapses in consistency can undermine our strength as leaders. Your good relationship with Andy may even suffer if he suspects he has received preferential treatment.

I once had an employee who was thrilled when she received an unsatisfactory rating on a Service Observation; because she saw it as proof that I could be objective while performing my duties as a supervisor despite our close relationship. Whenever I feel tempted to skip a crucial conversation, I try to remember this TSR and do it anyway. It is vital that we apply the rules consistently to all employees, regardless of past behavior. Failing to do so can undermine our authority as supervisors and inhibits our ability to be effective leaders. More often than not, avoidance results in an even more difficult situation down the road. Don’t put that difficult conversation off until tomorrow; better to take the lead and deal with it today.

Professional Liability Insurance— Have You Considered It?

In March 2011, FrontLine published a short article on professional liability insurance, which provides protection to a supervisor accused of misconduct or wrongdoing in the course of doing his or her job. On March 19, 2011, NCSSMA President Joe Dirago sent members a message over the home email network that provided more detailed information about professional liability insurance. The message addressed the following concerning this important topic.

- What is professional liability insurance and what does it cover?
- Why should I sign up for professional liability insurance?
- Why don’t all SSA managers sign up for professional liability insurance?
- Where do you recommend that I purchase professional liability insurance?

Various companies provide professional liability insurance and we encourage you to investigate them and make your own choice. Many NCSSMA members found good value, coverage and service provided by Federal Employee Defense Service (FEDS) for professional liability insurance. For coverage explanations, scenarios, articles, and testimonials specific to the exposures of federal managers, visit the Executive and Managers pages at www.fedsprotection.com to explore this further.

All federal managers are entitled to reimbursement for half of the premium of professional liability insurance. Your net cost for \$1 million of professional liability coverage is about \$130 a year. Considering the importance of your career and the value of peace of mind, we believe the cost of purchasing this insurance is well worth the investment.

A Professional Liability webpage on our NCSSMA.ORG website (Members Only) is available with more information. Making the decision to purchase professional liability insurance is a personal one that only you can make. If you do not have professional liability insurance, please carefully consider this message and the importance of having this protection. We believe that it is a wise action to protect one of the most valuable assets you have -- your career!



www.fedsprotection.com

Around the Regions

In each edition we will share reports from some of the regional management associations in this column.



Philadelphia Region Management Association (PRMA)

Recruitment has been an ongoing effort for our membership committee and we would like to welcome our many new members from the Baltimore TSC as well as others from across our region. We are all looking forward to our annual meeting at

the end of July. It will be held in the Washington, DC suburb of Silver Spring, MD. PRMA has a positive working relationship with the Regional Commissioner and the Regional Office staff. We work together towards addressing management issues in a productive and collaborative manner. We anticipate welcoming our Regional Commissioner, Laurie Watkins, and some of her staff at the upcoming meeting, especially since our yearly face-to-face meeting has not happened due to budget constraints. In fact, with the very limited travel situation, this meeting might be the only chance many of our members have this year to connect face-to-face with other managers across the region and to learn from one another.

We created several committees this year that mirror some of the NCSSMA national committees. In addition to our vibrant membership committee, we added the following committees: communications, grassroots, service delivery, training, innovations, and TSC. All committees are up and running and have members from all over the region. We believe our new structure will make us even more effective at identifying and resolving management issues and at generating ideas that can improve the effectiveness of the agency.

Second VP, Charlene Morales, has played an active role this year in establishing our new committees and in rewriting our PRMA by-laws, which will be voted on at our annual meeting. First VP Rita Alexander has been busy making arrangements for our annual meeting. Treasurer Russ Lis has not had a minute to breathe between signing up new members and helping grassroots committee Chair Elvin Gonzales update home email addresses for our grassroots efforts. TSC Representative Kitra Martin-Davis organized a very successful recruitment event at the Baltimore TSC in May that resulted in 11 new members. Secretary Kitty Woodske, oversaw a huge project to document our process for arranging annual meetings. Meanwhile, President Jill Russell has been busy addressing National EC matters, co-chairing the NCSSMA Staffing and Training Committee and overseeing PRMA internal operations. Overall, it has been a busy and productive year for the PRMA.

Jill Russell, President

Kansas City Management Association (KCMA)

The Kansas City region will be hosting NCSSMA's annual meeting this year at the Hilton Branson Convention Center in Branson, MO. Nearby Branson Landing features a scenic boardwalk along the 1.5-mile Taneycomo Lakefront. It provides a great backdrop to get down to the business of debating resolutions, passing a budget and electing new officers. The meeting will also feature several agency executives as guest speakers to provide insights and information to members about SSA business.

The Kansas City Region also welcomes a new Regional Commissioner this year. In January 2011, Carolyn Simmons returned to the Kansas City Region. She will have oversight for seventy-two Field Offices, three Teleservice Centers, the largest Program Service Center in the country, a Regional Office, and the National Records Center. The Kansas City Region covers the four states of Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa.

Carolyn's journey through SSA has brought her back home to the Heartland. Her wealth of knowledge and experience will only add to this region's reputation of being top-notch in customer service and employee development. She brings a strong sense of direction as we head into the future. Carolyn Simmons began her career as a Benefit Authorizer in the Mid-America Program Service Center in Kansas City, Missouri. Not only did Carolyn prove to be a dedicated public servant, but she was also a "quick-study" who demonstrated strong leadership skills. These attributes allowed Carolyn the opportunity to hold a variety of positions within Social Security including Claims Representative, Operations Supervisor, Branch Manager, District Manager, Area Director, Assistant Regional Commissioner in the Kansas City Region, Deputy Regional Commissioner in the Chicago Region, and Associate Commissioner for Central Operations in Baltimore, Maryland.



Jim Gottlieb, Acting President

Chicago Social Security Management Association (CSSMA)

"Moving Forward – A Capitol Idea" was the theme and title of the Chicago Social Security Management Association's meeting and training session held May 6 and 7. The event was held in beautiful downtown Madison, Wisconsin near the campus of the University of Wisconsin (U of W). Notable guest speakers for the event included:

Marcia Mosley (Deputy Regional Commissioner, Chicago)
Joe Dirago (NCSSMA President)
Rachel Emmons (NCSSMA Washington Representative)

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Around the Regions continued

Dr. Michael Collins, PhD (Director of U of W Center for Financial Security)

Current and past regional participants of the SES and ALP programs conducted a question and answer session on Social Security's Executive Level Leadership Development Programs. The panelists shared their experiences and offered suggestions to those who are considering either of the programs. CSSMA was also pleased to announce the recipients of the 2010 and 2011 CSSMA awards:

The Robert P. Fleminger Award

2010 Alan Alexander

2011 Jackie Rosa-Stallworth

The CSSMA Community Service Award

2010 Patricia Heepe

2011 Jennifer Stayer

A million thanks to the planning committee, led by Mona Harter (DM, South Bend, IN), for their efforts in pulling together a successful event.

Rick Lenoir, President



The Honor of Giving to FEEA

by Lynn King, Dallas Region

As many of you already know, there are several facets to the Federal Employee Education & Assistance Fund (FEEA). Everything FEEA does is dependent on the generosity of Federal Employees across the Nation. FEEA is in fact Feds helping Feds. Fortunately, we just avoided a shutdown in April of this year, but some of you may remember the government shutdown that occurred in 1995 and 1996. No one seemed to care whether federal employees might be unable to meet their financial needs if they lost their salaries even temporarily. I realized during that time we were the only group concerned for our co-workers. It was then that I became an avid contributor to FEEA.

Since my involvement with FEEA, I have experienced a feeling of gratification on many occasions. I assisted my co-

workers in getting through disasters, man-made or natural, through my contributions. I am gratified that my money helped the survivors and victims of the Oklahoma City bombing and 9/11. I am glad my contributions helped after hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ike and Gustav. I feel a sense of pride that my contributions ensured that every child orphaned in Oklahoma City and at the Pentagon on 9/11 would get a full college education. I was pleased and gratified to know when we thought in April that shutdown and furloughs were a real possibility that FEEA was ready to handle 800,000 calls for assistance if a shutdown had occurred. I am proud that we commemorated Bettye Stroud (active DRMA member and Grassroots coordinator) with a scholarship to a deserving SSA child through FEEA last year. We will commemorate Shelton Walters similarly this year with a scholarship to another SSA child deserving of that assistance. I am excited about the ongoing scholarships provided deserving employees and their children every year.

After the Tornado outbreaks in April, Commissioner Astrue reactivated the SSA Relief fund administered by FEEA. In response to his message regarding that fund, hundreds of SSA employees donated to assist their co-workers through their time of need. At the end of the day on May 12, SSA employees and management associations all across the country had contributed in excess of \$16,000.00. What a group of people to work with every day---your generosity is overwhelming!

FEEA did not begin to receive requests for assistance until a short while ago, but they are pouring in right now. From 5/7-5/12, FEEA received and processed \$4500.00 in grants and another \$1800.00 in interest free loans for the victims of those storms. As employees return to work and learn more about the availability of assistance, we expect the requests to accelerate.

I would like to express a special thanks to Bruce Fraley (Immediate Past President of ARMA) and to Iris Wallace (Center Director for Human Resources in Atlanta) for getting the word out to the victims about this source of assistance for them. I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the contribution of \$30,000.00 from our corporate neighbor Blue Cross/Blue Shield for the disaster. Their donation is not exclusive to Social Security employees. It will assist federal employees affected by the disaster from all agencies. Thank you, BC/BS!

As members of NCSSMA, you can take pride in being a founder of this great non-profit organization. I hope you will consider supporting the ongoing activities of FEEA with your continued financial support at WWW.FEEA.ORG. You can also donate through the Combined Federal Campaign to FEEA in the fall. The CFC number is currently 11185.

Profiles Page With Rachel Emmons, Washington Representative

by Jan Still, Northwest Region



We often see the name Rachel Emmons mentioned in information sent out from the management association. Have you ever wondered who she is and what exactly she does? I often wondered the same thing, so I asked her, "Rachel, who are you and what is your background?" I discovered that Rachel is a

wealth of information and has a wide variety of interests and experience.

Rachel attended Iowa State University (ISU) on a music scholarship. She received a Bachelor of Music degree from ISU along with Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. She met her husband, Dr. Bruce Kenney, while performing in the Catholic University Symphony Orchestra. He is a retired member of the United States Army Band. To this day, her clarinet professor shakes his head that she would give up a career as a "starving musician" for a life in politics! How does one go from a music performance background to specializing in government relations and public affairs with specific emphasis and expertise in the federal legislative process? Rachel responded, "While I was studying at Catholic University, I worked part-time at Greystone Group. I found I really enjoyed what I was doing and when I finished up my doctorate I joined Greystone full-time." Rachel joined Greystone Group in 1994 and now owns the firm.

What is the Greystone Group?

Greystone Group is a small firm, one Rachel often refers to as a "boutique lobbying firm" because they specialize in representing education and other not-for-profit organizations on appropriations and public policy issues. Some of the legislative and policy initiatives the firm has worked on include educational media, community economic development, federal employee and government reform issues, and agricultural diversification. Greystone Group has been successful in securing federal funding for many projects and initiatives. In this role, Rachel has worked with many organizations, including but not limited to WETA; University of North Dakota; American Indian Higher Education; Minot State University and the National Council of Social Security Management Associations (NCSSMA).

How does Greystone Group help NCSSMA?

When Rachel took over Greystone Group in 2005 from the firm's founder, Sara Garland, NCSSMA was the first organi-

zation to sign up for representation. Greystone Group provides invaluable assistance to NCSSMA. Aaron Hunter, Senior Associate at Greystone Group, also plays a key role in representing NCSSMA and our members. He performs a yeoman's task in preparing for NCSSMA's annual "Capitol Hill Day", which often includes over 70 meetings in one day. Greystone Group is heavily involved in the management surveys NCSSMA conducts, from the initial planning stage to producing the final report. NCSSMA also relies on Rachel to help them prepare to testify before Congress. Rachel says, "Whatever you ask for, we will do." Greystone Group also prepares legislative reports to keep NCSSMA members informed about their activities and what is happening on the Hill.

Why is Rachel so important to us?

There are many dynamics on Capitol Hill, and she makes sure that we are up to speed on all the sensitive issues. Rachel has a great reputation and presence on the Hill, and has connections with many Members of Congress and staff. This includes the House Ways and Means Committee, House and Senate Appropriations and Budget Committees, the Senate Finance Committee, and many others. She knows the logistics of navigating around Capitol Hill and knows what is going on day to day. Rachel is an advisor to the NCSSMA President and the Executive Committee in regards to many of our issues.

How can we help Rachel?

The best thing for us to do is continue to tell our story. She wants to hear about wait times and phone issues--the daily things that go on in our offices. The more she knows, the more successful the story she presents on the Hill will be.

Are there any hot upcoming issues that members should know about?

The budget is always a hot issue. There is sentiment out there that Federal employee pay and benefits are too generous and paring them back is being considered as a way to reduce the deficit. Some thoughts out there include reducing the workforce, changes to FERS, and changes in the probationary period. There has been discussion of using a high 5 years calculation for retirement rather than the current high 3 years. Many issues have come up comparing private sector versus federal employees. She says you really cannot compare them--you must compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges.

Rachel divides her time between Washington, DC and Bozeman, Montana where she and her husband have a "ranchette" on 23 acres in the foothills of the mountains. She says their house is somewhat like a zoo. They have

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Rachel Emmons *continued*

two dogs, three cats, six Quarter Horses, and a wide variety of resident wildlife. They live off an old logging road in an isolated area. Rachel said they decided to move there when Bruce retired from the Army, as they love Montana, the pace of life, and the people. She grew up outside a small town in Iowa and Montana brings back good memories of that lifestyle. Rachel's husband works at the Montana State University bookstore and is a member of the Bozeman Symphony Orchestra with occasional "gigs" with the Helena Symphony as well. This is his retirement job, his "just for fun social outlet."

Rachel says she definitely has the best of both worlds. When she is in DC, she is busy with meetings and keeping up with what's happening on the Hill. When she's in Montana, she has her family, her horses, her "Ford" Mustangs, her pets, and picking up the clarinet every once in a while just to make sure she still knows how it works! Rachel loves the times when Congress is in recess and she can head to the "Greystone Group Western Office." She enjoys long trail rides with her horses and driving her Mustangs, one of which is a classic.

Rachel has a dark moss green 1967 Mustang convertible that she loves. She and her car were featured recently in Mustang Monthly magazine. The article, written by Jim Smart, described how Rachel found the car in 2000 and restored it. He wrote that she shows the Mustang in Mustang Club of America (MCA) Concours Driven class and participates in the National Capital Region Mustang Club (NCRMC). In fact, Rachel served as president of the NCRMC, which is a 450-member not-for-profit organization, dedicated to the preservation of the Ford Mustang and Shelby automobiles. As an NCRMC volunteer, she raised over \$30,000 for the organization's first national event. I spoke to Jim Smart about the article and he says he is a California Mustang guy who adores Rachel.

In closing, I must say it was a pleasure interviewing Rachel. She is warm, honest, and sincere, and sounds like she has an awesome adventure every day whether she is in Montana or DC. *Rachel, thank you for doing what you do day in and day out for the Management Association. You rock.*

We welcome your letters, stories, comments, editorials or suggestions for future articles.

**Send your feedback to:
Bethany.Paradis@ssa.gov**

Why Supervisors and NCSSMA Need Each Other

By Patty Maddox, Denver Region



Are you new to management? Or, have you been quietly reading *FrontLine* for years; trying to figure out what exactly NCSSMA does and whether you have a role in it? Many supervisors have wondered this before and many have discovered more than they could have imagined once they got involved.

While many NCSSMA members gain valuable perspectives on issues facing the agency through simply reading the newsletter and e-mails, those who are actively involved in the association achieve a much deeper understanding of NCSSMA's role in shaping the agency's policies. Many gain this level of understanding early in their management careers, as supervisors.

Eric Breiter, ADM in Billings MT, found that taking on the roles of Area Representative, Secretary, and Membership Ambassador for the Denver Region Social Security Management Association (DRSSMA) while he was a supervisor made him "more in tune with the issues that are facing us on a national level." Other members, who may not want to serve as officers, participate in regional or national committees instead. This puts them in communication with agency executives and increases their understanding of both the political influences and ramifications of changing policies or systems. There is a mutual benefit to having supervisors represent NCSSMA as officers or on work group committees because, while they are expanding their own perspectives, they are also contributing valuable perspectives to the committees. **Bethany Paradis**, DM in Saco ME, became active in both the New England Social Security Management Association (NESSMA) and NCSSMA as a supervisor. Her experience as an actively involved supervisor showed her that supervisors are critical to these organizations because "they bring different insights to the table" than higher-level managers since supervisors "are closest to the work, especially when it comes to technical issues."

These supervisor perspectives are just as valuable at the association meetings, at both the regional and national level. Similarly, those supervisors who attend the associations' annual meetings learn more about NCSSMA's crucial role in the agency's policy and budget development processes. **Nancy Martel-Tully**, OS in Hartford CT, attended last year's annual meeting as an Area Representative for NESSMA. She "found the experience very valuable" because she was able to "see the intense work on the national level that is done to support managers at the FO

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Supervisors and NCSSMA continued

level.” These meetings are a window into the political pressures facing the agency as well as an opportunity to hear possible solutions to current policy dilemmas from managers representing all areas of the country. This broadened perspective helps supervisors make more informed management decisions within their own offices.

In addition to learning about NCSSMA’s voice within the agency, participating in committees or annual meetings also helps supervisors develop their own confident voices. While serving on a committee or attending meetings, supervisors have the opportunity to speak directly to executives who are determining policy for the agency. This gives supervisors unparalleled opportunities to share their own perspectives in a way that could directly affect nationwide policies. Through her participation in NESSMA as Secretary, **Lisa Chربولowski**, OS in Manchester NH, has discovered that when attending association meetings (even at the national level), “it doesn’t matter what position in management you are, you still have a voice and can have input.” **Tammy London**, OS in Waco TX, served on the T16 committee for the Dallas Region Management Association (DRMA). She found “the ability to share ideas and offer suggestions for change and to actually see those changes become reality is a great feeling.” **Miriam Marquez**, ADM in San Marcos CA, joined the San Francisco Region Management Association (SFRMA) as a supervisor and became Treasurer. In this role, she was “able to see first-hand that our voice is heard and that we do make a difference.”

In addition to developing their confidence, supervisors have discovered other professional and personal benefits to becoming involved in the management association either at the regional or national level. Tammy London felt more “empowered” after working on a committee for DRMA and found all of the policy information shared by NCSSMA to be very “valuable” as she applied it to her own work as a supervisor. Bethany Paradis found her involvement in NESSMA and NCSSMA to be “a tremendous opportunity for growth.” She added, “You also gain exposure as you meet with national and regional executives to discuss issues. I learned leadership skills and diplomacy.” Many supervisors found the opportunity to network with supervisors across the area, region, and nation beneficial, as well as networking with higher-level managers and executives. It has been a good way to hear new ideas that they can apply in their own offices. At the same time, many supervisors have also happily discovered that their roles in the management associations have given them the opportunity to demonstrate their own abilities to managers outside of their immediate office. This may have helped them achieve promotions.

With such great benefits, why do some supervisors hesitate to get more involved with their regional associations? Many

new supervisors are just not sure what they would be getting themselves into because they are unfamiliar with what the associations do for them. Most currently involved supervisors knew another manager who was already involved and was able to explain the association’s role and structure while also encouraging them to join. Miriam Marquez described her manager, who preceded her as SFRMA Treasurer, as “one of (her) greatest mentors” and “a big advocate for our association.” He encouraged her to run as his replacement and even “taught her the ropes” when she was elected to the Treasurer position. **Elizabeth Leeds**, OS in West Toledo OH, described her initial hesitation by saying, “I didn’t initially know what I was getting into. If my up line management had not encouraged me, I might not have joined or would have waited much longer to join.”

Many supervisors who currently hold positions in the associations were first approached to join because other managers saw them as good candidates for vacant positions. For example, Eric Breiter described his initial reaction to being approached about joining NCSSMA by saying, “I did not feel that I was experienced enough to provide meaningful contributions.” However, in describing his reaction to later being asked to fill a specific vacancy in his regional association, he said, “My attitude changed when I was approached by another member who I trusted and who encouraged me to be involved and asked me to serve.” Like many others, Eric has moved on to more roles within the association after succeeding in that first role that he was asked to fill. Another example of a supervisor who joined the association because managers encouraged her to join, when they called to congratulate her on her promotion to supervisor, is Bethany Paradis. Those simple invitations that she received as soon as she joined management started her successful journey with the management associations, moving up from Area Representative to President of NESSMA. From there, she became Executive Officer and then Vice President of NCSSMA. Moreover, she continues to serve NCSSMA as the editor of *FrontLine*. In fact, Bethany’s contributions to the association have been so significant that NCSSMA awarded her the prestigious Collins award last fall. Bethany explained why she got involved by saying, “At some point in our work, we all get frustrated and wish we could change some of the policies and procedures. I saw the management association as a way to have a voice to try to change things.”

If you would like to learn more about how NCSSMA makes a difference in Social Security, visit the website at www.ncssma.org. If you are interested in learning how your voice can be heard, contact a member of your region’s association. The NCSSMA website’s “Member Services” page has links to each of the regional associations. You can make a difference!

NCSSMA Disability Committee by Kathy Vannatta, Chair

The NCSSMA Disability Committee consists of a member from each Regional Management Association. Committee members are Kathy Vannatta (Chairperson/DRSSMA), James C. Wallace (Deputy Chairperson/NYRMS), Linda Partin (ARMA), Sarah Markofski (CSSMA), Don Henn (DRMA), Peggy B. Rogers (KCMA), Judy Bernstein (NESSMA), Sheri Richardson (NWMA), Bernie Bernaola (PRMA), and Jeff Lin (SFRMA). Throughout the fiscal year, we work on assigned NCSSMA resolutions adopted during the annual meeting, and comment on various draft POMS, MSOM, and other disability-related proposed changes or enhancements. We have two assigned resolutions this year. One is to pursue provisions to mandate that third party for-profit representatives submit completed disability claims and appeals packages via the internet. The other is to advocate for the Work Incentives Simplification Proposal/Pilot (WISP) legislation and any future proposals that will result in lowered program costs, reduction of time spent developing these complex issues, increased public understanding of work incentives, and a greater number of beneficiaries returning to work.

The Disability Committee is passionate about the resolution to advocate for the "Work Incentives Simplification Pilot" (WISP). The current disability work provisions are more of a disincentive than an incentive to return to work. SSI work incentives are very different from those of Social Security Disability, which doubles the complexity for people receiving both types of benefits and for the employees who have to monitor the work and apply the policies. The public, many of whom have serious cognitive concerns as the basis for their finding of disability, do not understand these incentives or the work provisions well enough to take advantage of them or avoid overpayments. Consequently, disabled workers do not return to work because they are afraid of losing Medicaid, Medicare, and their benefits.

WISP coordinates and simplifies SSA work incentives to ensure they are more easily understood by the public and less costly to administer. WISP would replace the current complex work provisions in the Social Security Disability Program, including the Trial Work Period (TWP), post-entitlement Substantial Gainful Activity Determinations, Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE) provisions, and Expedited Reinstatement (EXR); providing for an earnings test comparable to that of retirement and survivor beneficiaries under full retirement age. If monthly earnings exceed the specified amount (either the current SGA level or the Monthly Earnings Test level), cash benefits would not be paid for that month. If earnings were below the specified level, benefits would be payable. Averaging concepts can also apply in evaluating earnings, which may simplify extensive development activities with employers and/or beneficiaries.

WISP also includes a provision to change how earnings are counted from "when earned" to "when paid"; which is consistent with the manner employer /agency wage reports are made to SSA and in alignment with how wages are treated for SSI purposes. Disability would not cease based on income, similar to SSI's 1619 program provisions. Beneficiaries would still be subject to medical reviews at their scheduled times, and Medicare entitlement would continue as long as the medical disability continues. A consistent SSI/SSDI wage policy would reduce the need for inputs to two programs by SSA employees, and reduce the number of erroneous determinations due to program differences. Significant administrative savings should result, with negligible impact to program dollars expected. Additionally, work years saved by SSA currently spent in enforcing the present provisions could be redirected to other priority workloads. WISP would simplify the entire work incentives process for both the beneficiary and for SSA. A readily understandable system such as WISP would also encourage more beneficiaries to return to work, acting as a true work incentive.

We believe this proposal would not only promote the Commissioner's commitment to remove barriers to work and strengthen access to healthcare, but also support the President's directive to reduce improper payments by minimizing the primary cause of improper payments in the SSDI Program. (Note: SSA has included the WISP in the President's FY 2012 budget request.)

NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members!

DRSSMA

Monica Zamora
Terra Treweek
Chandra King

KCMA

Emily Pratt
Cathy Holloway
Jeremiah DeVos

DRMA

John Story
Dianne Turner
Lonnie Cordova
Jennifer Washington
David Rangel

NESSMA

Jennifer Ortiz
Elizabeth Sanfilippo
Marjorie Rival
Lindsay DeMeo
Muyly Ngov
Annie Marin-Lopez

CSSMA

Denise Faulkner
Renee Almendarez
Carolyn Byrom
Stuart Adkins
Nicole Helmick
Tadd Blair
Nancy Lieser
Daniel Damceski
Diana Jones
Eric Christiansen
Antonio Manns
Ryan McCombs
Cindy Lugo
John Schlueter
Karen Salo
Tamara Barber
Brooke Cribbs
Matthew Eisenhauer
Gale Gibson
Stacy King
Stephen Kryscio
Framness Lar
Digna Walker

Field Office Telephone Service Initiatives

by Fred Bourjaily, Chicago Region



A few years ago, SSA initiated the Telephone Systems Replacement Project (TSRP) to replace obsolete telephone equipment in the field offices (FO). To get an update on SSA's field office telephone service initiatives we talked to Roy Snyder, Associate Commissioner for the Office of Telephone Services (OTS).

What resources are available to assist offices in managing TSRP?

In July 2010 the field office managers' workgroup developed and released two desk guides. The TSRP Task Guide identifies practices on a daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly basis to assist field office managers in managing their telephone system. The TSRP Strategies to Optimize Phone Service, identifies items managers should consider when attempting to improve their level of telephone service delivery.

Offices use installed TSRP equipment to monitor incoming general inquiry telephone traffic. Both real-time and historical Management Information (MI) is available. Philadelphia Region's TSRP Management Information Web Portal is a user-friendly web-based tool for viewing field office telephone MI. The web site is accessed through a link on the Office of Telephone Services' TSRP web page. Managers can use the website as an analytical tool to determine if changes are needed to their telephone service delivery strategy.

Additionally, the Atlanta Region rolled out the TSRP Assistant Tool in October 2010. TSRP Assistant is a program that provides an automated way for managers to monitor the phone system. The TSRP Assistant Tool monitors calls and automatically sends alerts to employees who are available to answer calls based on criteria set by managers. The tool is designed to help managers manage the Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) queue.

What can be done to ensure that all offices are made aware of new TSRP enhancements or features that can improve their service?

We have made some significant strides with the installation of the new TSRP phone system since the beginning of the TSRP contract. We work collaboratively with each of the regions, as well as each Regional TSRP Coordinator regarding any system changes, updates, new initiatives, and procedural releases related to the TSRP phone system. In addition, we have begun holding monthly TSRP Coordinator conference calls to discuss each of the TSRP initiatives at length, as well as updates related to the TSRP contract modification and the escalation features available to each TSRP office. Moreover, escalation is a topic that is covered with all managers in preparation for their Site Surveys and is part of the TSRP call flow and documentation. In January 2011, we sent a memo to the ARC-MOS regarding the escalation feature. The memo reminds managers that the escalations feature could be used as part of their management strategy for service delivery. Likewise, the memo references the availability of detailed information about the escalation feature on our TSRP website under Hot Topics.

Are there any updates on expediting Moves, Adds and Change (MAC) requests?

What are the current timeframes for processing MAC requests?

Since the start of the fiscal year, we have been working towards streamlining the MAC process. TSRP telephones are network devices and any changes to the existing telephone or call flow require the submission of a MAC. There are currently two classifications of a MAC: Standard or Complex. A Standard MAC includes changes to software and or hardware for a single field office. These types of MACs will not require any changes to the master call flow. Sites should expect a Standard MAC to be completed within 37 days from the time it is submitted by the field office.

A Complex MAC includes changes in telephone functionality or features and often involves programming at the Service Delivery Point (SDP) level, or any modification to the master

NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members!

SRMA

Lupe Jennings
Mary M Gilbaugh
Jason B Curran
Laura B Hill
Ellina Dylan
Marie Salas
Claudia Gastelo
Samantha N Bruno
Daniel Biller
Dianne Black
Nancy Borjon
Maria Cano
Amanda Donahue
Patricia Herrera
Marlene Lin
Stephen Marshall
Arisela Medina
Juan Rosales
Monica Silva
Maria Daghljan
Larry Hill
Stacye Johnson
Kacie Mas
Elizabeth Mosqueda
Anahit Sinaniah
Mona Willden
Henry C Hollenbeck
Gabriela Santis
Bridgette Camacho
Sara Arnold
Mary Minor
Mai Her
Maribel Salinas
Sina Ly
Anthony Wilkinson
Justin Soper
Zesor Escarcega
Michael Morales
Linda Hulsebus
Mary Timmerman-Parker
Steven Steinhauer

NYRMS

Gary Cima
Nilsa Deleon
Marcial Hernandez Jr.
Gladys Pitre
Laura Rogers
Allison Vercellone
Tamara Wilkinson
Yonette Backer
Anthony Bucci

(Continued on page 12)

Telephone Service *continued*

call flow. With Complex MACs, the TSRP vendor is required to perform significant programming to implement the change and often pricing is required before the MAC can be completed. FOs should expect a request for a Complex MAC to be completed between 50 to 90 days from initial MAC submission by the site to the TSRP Help Desk. We are currently working in collaboration with our partners in the Office of Systems to streamline the MAC process.



What contract modifications are being pursued?

We have successfully completed approximately 80% of TSRP FO installations (1028 FOs). The TSRP implementation is scheduled for completion by the end of March 2012. As such, we have submitted a host of TSRP contract modifications to improve customer service for all TSRP offices. Two such contract modifications include the Overflow Polite Disconnect modification and the Estimated Wait Time modification. For TSRP FOs, when callers currently contact the general inquiry telephone line and exceed the maximum wait time to speak to an agent, the call is routed to an overflow ring group. If the call is not answered in the overflow ring group after a specified period, the call is disconnected. The Overflow Polite Disconnect TSRP contract modification will provide for a polite disconnect to FO general inquiry callers when the call is not answered after eight rings. After callers have reached the eighth ring, they receive a courtesy disconnect message. The message states that all agents are assisting other callers and suggests that they call back later before the call is disconnected.

In addition, we have proposed the Estimated Wait Time TSRP contract modification. Currently, when callers contact our TSRP FOs via the general inquiry telephone lines, they are routed to designated FO agents through an Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) queue. Once in the ACD queue, callers are unaware of the length of time they must remain on the line until an agent becomes available. The Estimated Wait Time TSRP contract modification will provide callers with an estimated wait time before speaking to an FO representative.

Are there any national performance goals or targets?

There are currently no established national performance goals or targets for TSRP field offices. Decisions as to whether to establish performance goals or targets will not be decided until completion of TSRP installations.

What are the plans for Dynamic Forward on Busy (DFOB)? How does it work?

In our continuing efforts to balance the telephone workloads in the FOs and Teleservice Centers, Dynamic Voice Forward on Busy (DVFOB) is our most recent initiative that provides FO callers an additional avenue to obtain service. DVFOB offers callers who would normally encounter a busy condition the option of transferring to National 800 Number Network (N8NN) agent services. Specifically, when the GI call queue is full, the caller will be offered the DVFOB option. This results in improved service to the public by answering additional FO telephone calls. We have recently ended our DVFOB pilot, which yielded positive results. We have started our gradual DVFOB activation for all of our TSRP offices. DVFOB activation will be fully completed by June 2, 2011.

(Continued on page 13)

NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members!

NYRMS

Linda Gray
Joshua Seeley
Sarah Rivera-Epps
Michael Bellanca
Jimmy Mendoza
Lynda Bryant
Ignieris Perez
Kevin Ryan
Diane Schrenk
Andrea Davis
Aracelis Maldonado
Karina Basora
Michele Baer
Lisandro Polanco
Leonardo Zen
Tania Lopez
Tobiatha Moore

PRMA

David Chen
Juliana Helsel
Elaine Breiner
Erik Crumb
Sandra Zuber
Michael L Smith
Susan Parker
Lori McDuffie
Debra Johnson
Greta Hier
Jackeline Aponte
Arien Smith
Elsa Matute
Juanita McKinney
Sebastian Detres
Merry LeBlanc
Carlos Arujo
Joshua McMurray
Marilyn Melendez
Judith Mirro
Anna Zhugaevich
Brian Hughes
Readie Harris
Stacey Grimes
Bobbie Ardnt-Golden
Ronald Ferguson
Nancy Davis
Constance Salas
Elaine Booth
Melissa McKoy
Michael Mooney
Elizabeth Grullar-Gonzalez

NCSSMA Welcomes These New Members!

PRMA

Sandra Wrona
Jarrod Spencer

Roxanne Williamson
Aurelia Serrano-Wilson

Patricia Schuster
Crystal C Robinson



Telephone Service continued

What is FOVA?

In an effort to prevent callers from receiving a busy response when attempting to contact a Field Office, the Field Office Virtual Assistance (FOVA) is an internal SSA Operational initiative that allows the N8NN to assist TSRP FOs by answering their general inquiry calls. FOVA was designed to address the challenges that many of our FOs face with increasing telephone traffic. The FOVA concept involves the actual placement of over 400 TSRP telephones in TSCs co-located near a TSRP office. Using existing TSRP extensions for these FOs, N8NN agents are able to respond to incoming general inquiry calls as though they were physically located within the FO. As a result, FOVA improves customer service by allowing N8NN agents to not only answer FO general inquiry calls, but also reduces FO busy rates as well. This initiative is currently active in seven TSC sites throughout the New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Atlanta, and San Francisco Regions.

Is there anything in particular that you would like managers to know?

Each day, we are learning and exploring more about the vast capabilities our new phone system has to offer. While we are nearing the end of the TSRP contract for installations, we are just entering a new phase of the TSRP project. We have several contract modifications that effectively address service delivery from both an internal and external customer perspective. We are continuing to fine-tune and streamline some of our current TSRP deliverables such as the MAC process. In addition, we are expanding the capability of the TSRP phones system by developing cohesive relationships with our N8NN partners through the DVFOB and FOVA initiatives. Lastly, we want to continue encouraging managers and educating them on the myriad of possibilities available to them via the new TSRP phones system. Our staff is ready and willing to assist with any concerns they may have and we are committed to continued support.

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FrontLine Editor: Bethany Paradis Layout: Bethany Paradis

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Washington Representative
 RACHEL EMMONS
 Phone: (202) 547-8530
 Fax: (202) 547-8532
 rachele@greystone-group.com