



News Release

SOCIAL SECURITY

Annual Columbus Day Weekend Shutdown of Social Security Computer Center Will Not Affect Timely Registration of Voters

For over fifteen years the Social Security Administration has scheduled a shutdown of its National Computer Center on Columbus Day weekend for repairs and maintenance; it has only been postponed once and that was due to special workloads created by Hurricane Katrina. The repair and maintenance is a major production for the agency's system and facility experts that involves scheduling of overtime for key staff, committing contractors to extremely tight turnaround times for the work, and other complexities. As the antiquated National Computer Center has frayed over the years, the importance of timely repairs and maintenance has increased significantly.

Among the many new responsibilities that Congress has added to Social Security's workloads is verifying a small percentage of voter registrations. This year there has been unwarranted concern that the annual shutdown will somehow interfere with voter registration. The system will be up and running until midnight Friday night, so there is plenty of time for voters registering Friday, October 10 to be verified. Voters registered on Saturday, October 11 or Sunday, October 12 can be verified starting Monday, October 13 at 5 a.m. EDT, more than three weeks before the election. When state and local election registrars are working on Columbus Day, Social Security systems will be available to verify registrations, and the agency will be providing its usual same-day service. The expected increased volume of transactions on Monday does not present a problem for prompt response.

Delaying the shutdown into 2009 would pose a small, but not insignificant, risk of a major interruption of service for the hundreds of millions of Americans who rely on our computer systems to provide retirement, disability and survivors benefits, Medicare benefits, employment verification and other services. We have recently indicated in our new strategic plan that Congress needs to support a new National Computer Center, which would help us provide services without interruption.

"As many Americans are enjoying Columbus Day weekend, the hardworking men and women of the Social Security Administration will be working intensely to satisfy every reasonable expectation of service, including voter registration verifications," Commissioner Astrue stated. "I regret that people unfamiliar with the facts of this situation have sought to create a partisan issue where there is none."

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