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Statement of U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Ranking Member of the Committee on Finance
Hearing on “More Work, Less Resources:
Social Security Field Offices Struggle to Deliver Service to the Public”
Thursday, May 8, 2008

In March of 2006, this Committee held a hearing on the administrative challenges facing the Social Security Administration. The witnesses at that hearing told us that increased workloads and limited funding were adversely affecting service delivery to the public.

Today’s hearing focuses specifically on Social Security field offices, but the testimony is much the same. We will hear how our constituents wait for hours to meet with field office personnel or how phone calls are met with busy signals or simply go unanswered. Clearly, our constituents deserve better service.

More money is part of the answer. The Social Security Administration has staffing shortages, disability backlogs, and deferred workloads that must be addressed. In the short-run, this can only be done with additional resources. But, throwing money at the problem is not a long-term solution.

The truth is Social Security policies, systems, and procedures are in need of a major overhaul. Several witnesses stated that it takes two to three years, or three to four years, to fully train a field office employee. That’s longer than it takes NASA to train an astronaut.

Of course, anyone who has taken a look at the SSI deeming rules, or the workers’ compensation offset rules, knows just how complicated these programs have become. But, it doesn’t have to be that way.

I recently instructed my staff to begin a comprehensive review to identify ways to reduce administrative complexity and improve program integrity. This is an ongoing effort that is still in progress. I hope to introduce legislation before the end of this summer.

In the meantime, we should consider the testimony of our witnesses today as we look for additional ways to help the Social Security Administration improve its service to the public.