

## *Message from the Commissioner*

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August 2006 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of legislation creating the Social Security Disability Insurance program. Our golden anniversary provides us with an opportunity to celebrate program accomplishments and analyze the challenges faced by the program over the past half-century. It also is a time to embrace the first significant changes made to the Social Security Administration's disability determination process since the program's inception with the initial implementation of the Disability Service Improvement (DSI) initiative. DSI will substantially increase our ability to make accurate and timely disability decisions. And it furthers our commitment to provide the type of service the American people expect and deserve from our Agency.



**Jo Anne B. Barnhart**

This issue of the *Social Security Bulletin* salutes the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Disability Insurance program. It is dedicated to recording the program's past and to focusing on its future. Most importantly, it is a publication that documents the Social Security Administration's pledge to provide high-quality assistance to members of our nation's most vulnerable populations.

The history of the Disability Insurance program is the subject of the initial articles in this issue. The first article details how the original Social Security planners worked to include disability insurance as part of the Social Security Act mandate. The debates over the initial program design—specifically over how to define disability and to ensure financing—in many ways mirrors the current-day program discussions. A second article highlights the most recent history of the Disability Insurance program—the past five years of achievements. Topics include a long list of recent improvements, ranging from the transition to electronic disability records (eDib), to an updating of the medical listings used to classify disability, to implementation of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999.

Turning to the future, the third article describes DSI. This initiative has been a major focus of my term as Commissioner and represents the culmination of extensive inter- and intra-agency collaboration, as well as a massive outreach effort involving all parties interested in disability issues. The article reprints my June 2006 Congressional testimony that describes the new process, coincidentally being rolled out in the same month as the program's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

An examination of the Disability Insurance program cannot be complete without addressing the solvency and financial outlook. Included in the *Bulletin* is an examination of the fiscal challenges from the perspective of Agency's actuarial projections. The article clarifies why cost remains a topic of great concern.

The issue concludes with three articles that provide more information about the Disability Insurance program. One is a nontechnical, reader-friendly "primer" on the Social Security Act programs that serve the disabled. Another article presents a selected bibliography of disability-related publications released by the Social Security Administration. Finally, an announcement details the release of a significant new empirical report on trends in the Disability Insurance program. It presents and describes an extensive set of data charts that include a decades-long series of noteworthy program statistics.

I welcome you to join me and the staff of the Social Security Administration in celebrating the achievements of a valuable program that successfully addresses the financial needs of our nation's insured disabled workers. Please fully explore this special issue of the *Social Security Bulletin* to salute the disability program's past and to preview its future.