

BARACK OBAMA

October 20, 2008

John Gage
National President
American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO
80 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear President Gage,

I am writing to respond to the concerns you raised with my staff regarding the challenges facing the Social Security Administration (SSA), and the issue of Social Security privatization.

First, I strongly agree with you that there is a critical need to increase funding for the SSA administrative expenses account to address the serious challenges facing the agency. Due to prolonged underfunding, SSA has reduced staffing levels even as its workload has increased. SSA agency staffing will soon reach its lowest level since 1972 even though SSA's beneficiary population has nearly doubled since that time.

An unfortunate result of underfunding is an unprecedented backlog in SSA disability claims. As of August 2008, about 767,000 people were awaiting a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge on their Social Security disability claims, compared to about 312,000 cases pending in October 2000. There has also been an increase in Field Office waiting times.

Second, I want assure you that I will continue to strongly oppose Social Security privatization. As you know, I have spoken out many times against President Bush's Social Security privatization plan, including a major speech in the midst of the 2005 privatization debate at the National Press Club. I also voted in 2005, 2006 and 2007 against amendments supported by Senator McCain and other Republicans that aimed to privatize Social Security.

Thank you, John, for everything you and your members do for America.

Sincerely,



Barack Obama



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