



SOCIAL SECURITY
Office of the Inspector General

March 21, 2011

The Honorable Sam Johnson
Chairman, Subcommittee on Social Security
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Attention: Kim Hildred

Dear Chairman Johnson:

This is in response to your March 10, 2011 correspondence asking questions for the record, further to my testimony on February 11, 2011 before the Subcommittee on Social Security and the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, at a joint oversight hearing, *Managing Costs and Mitigating Delays in the Building of the Social Security Administration's New National Computer Center*. I appreciate the opportunity to provide additional information regarding this critical issue. Below are responses to your specific questions.

1. Should the National Computer Center (NCC) fail, do you have any concerns with the Second Support Center's (SSC) ability to run both its workloads and the NCC's workloads at the same time? Has this ability been adequately tested?

With minor exceptions, we believe the SSC has the ability to run both its workloads and the NCC. If the NCC should become unavailable, the SSC can recover all mission-critical workloads with the exception of some disability-related workloads. Per SSA, the Agency has purchased and configured the equipment to enable it to recover all disability-related workloads. Due to budget constraints, SSA has not tested the equipment to date; however, the Agency plans to test the equipment as part of its July disaster recovery exercise.

In our Congressional Response Report: *The Social Security Administration's Disaster Recovery Capabilities* (A-14-11-21138), we stated, "until SSA tests and validates the critical NCC applications restored at the SSC at a level of processing that represents the daily workload levels of the Agency, there is a risk that the systems will not fully function if the NCC is unavailable." SSA responded that it believes, based on its capacity analysis, there is limited risk that the systems will not fully function if the NCC is unavailable.

2. Please provide your assessment of how the Commissioner is utilizing the Future Systems Technology Advisory Panel (FSTAP). Are there recommendations that have not been implemented that you think deserve further consideration?

To date, the Commissioner has asked the FSTAP to conduct various reviews and provide recommendations on how the Agency could improve its Information Technology investments and operations. The FSTAP has issued four reports since its inception in May 2008:

- *Low Hanging Fruit Quick Victories*, September 2009
- *Data Center Migration*, January 2010
- *Legacy Systems Conversion Report*, May 2010
- *Re-Imaging Social Security*, June 2010

The Commissioner requested three of the four reports. One report, *Low Hanging Fruit/Quick Victories* was a byproduct of initial briefings and site visits to various Social Security offices. The FSTAP has made over 50 recommendations or suggestions to SSA to help improve its systems and operations. We have not received information from SSA on the status of these recommendations. We do agree with most of the recommendations made by the FSTAP and believe SSA should develop an appropriate and timely action plan to implement them.

3. What is your understanding of the controls built into the National Support Center project by both the U.S. General Services Administration and the Social Security Administration which seek to prevent further delays and make sure the project stays within budget? Do you have any concerns with these controls?

We have not seen the controls built into the National Support Center project; however, we plan to review GSA/SSA's contingency planning. At this point, we are concerned that no contingency plan exists to prevent further delays and make sure the project stays within budget.

We are currently negotiating with our contractor to conduct our review, in which we will 1) determine if SSA has contingency plans to keep the NCC operational until the new data center is operational; 2) compare SSA's contingency plans to industry best practices; and 3) make recommendations to resolve weaknesses in SSA's contingency plans. We plan to initiate this review shortly.

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify these issues for the Subcommittee on Social Security. I trust that I have been responsive to your request. If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me, or your staff may contact Misha Kelly, Congressional and Intra-Governmental Liaison, at (202) 358-6319.

Sincerely,



Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.
Inspector General