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CONGRESSMAN


Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

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RAHALL MEETS WITH SOCIAL SECURITY CHIEF, APPLAUDS DROPPING OF BENEFIT APPEALS PLAN

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) met today with Social Security Commissioner Dorcas R. Hardy to discuss Social Security issues, especially the agency's plan to restructure the benefit appeals process. Rahall congratulated the commissioner for her decision to cancel the controversial plan.

"This plan would have created a new set of bureaucratic hurdles for our mentally and physically disabled people, as well as others seeking to appeal benefit denials," Rahall told Commissioner Hardy. "The appeals process is difficult enough without making it even harder for an appeal to be filed."

The plan, drafted by the Social Security office of appeals, would have revised procedures under which those denied benefits or cut off the rolls by the agency can appeal to an administrative law judge. Under the draft plan, a claimant would have been required to submit evidence to support an appeal seven days before the hearing. Otherwise, this evidence could be excluded, even if relevant, and the claim dismissed.

"This would have placed a tremendous burden on those who are appealing their denials," Rahall noted. "Of these cases, 80 percent of them involve disability benefits. Certainly, our disabled and handicapped should be given some consideration in appealing their case."

"I commend Commissioner Hardy for her action. She displayed a true understanding of the obstacles this plan would pose, and she acted accordingly," Rahall said. "I hope that this spirit of fairness of cooperation will become the rule, rather than exception, of the Bush Administration."

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