

Social Security...the Line Starts Here

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By Matt Brunk

In another North American call center disaster, is the ongoing crunch that the folks at Social Security are having. In a recent article from the AARP- "**Social Security Meltdown: Will Anyone Be Left to Help You?**" the article states that the easier way to seek help is to call the Social Security Administration's (SSA) 800 number at 1-800-772-1213 since the busy rate is 7.6 percent instead of calling your local SSA which averages a busy rate of 51 percent. These figures are according to the SSA's own studies.



AARP also reports that since 1977, staffing is down by 24,791 while the number of beneficiaries is up by 16.4 million. For those stuck visiting their local SSA offices there are long lines and even longer waits. It's a camping event.

It wasn't enough that the government stole money from the Social Security funds- did I say steal? So sorry, **they leveraged the money** earmarked as Social Security funds (known as "**trust funds**") all those years and did other things with money that didn't belong to them. Now, that those funds are coming due in a big wave of claims; citizens get a second kick in the teeth and are not getting serviced. Then, to add insult to the injured; the age for retiring changed (upward) by legislators and leaving the good folks at SSA to inform taxpayers in their annual Social Security Statement, that they shouldn't expect to get 100 percent of their projected benefits: "**...without changes, by 2041 the Social Security Trust Fund will be *exhausted and there will be enough money to pay only about 75 cents for each dollar of scheduled benefits.**"

*These estimates are based on the **intermediate assumption** from the Social Security Trustees' Annual Report to the Congress.

I'd complain but I don't think I could get through by calling. Writing won't do much good since the staff is already overwhelmed and visiting- well grab a beach chair, thermos and iPod. I've been wondering why my brother-in-law hasn't received his benefits in over a year since retiring.

For all those vendors and consultants out there- this isn't a bone, this is an opportunity. Certainly, there's a better way to leverage the SSA staff and call centers in ALL SSA offices and locations. Hopefully, there's a technology set of solutions that would automate the process of filing and collecting Social Security benefits in a cost effective and expeditious manner. With the knowledge base of technology and call center applications available; one can only assume that something can and should be done now, not tomorrow. SSA needs empowerment and that will only come from legislators willing to listen to and heed taxpayers.

October 2007, marks the year that the first baby boomer retires and **following her** are 78 million other boomers lining up at the doors of the SSA offices. Not that I think adding staff is "the" solution but it's probably part of a solution. The government process is broken and is frustrating not only citizens, but those working in SSA offices trying to shore up the flood gates using duct tape. I'd love for corporate America to say to the US government- "so sorry, we could only collect 50 cents on the dollar that you require." Granted, that would be illegal, but what's the legality of not paying citizens what they're due? Then, to not answer the phone? This is probably more of the criminal act of not paying. The 90's brought forth "road rage" and now we can probably expect to see new meaning given to 'rage' when someone tries to butt in line at a SSA office. It will be interesting to see where and when the rage kicks in- getting 75 cents on the dollar (there's more math hidden in this statement) or someone butting in line?

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