

STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SECURITY

...don't cut it.

September 25, 2018

The Honorable Orrin Hatch, Chairman
U.S Senate Committee on Finance
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Hatch and Ranking Member Wyden,

The Strengthen Social Security Coalition consists of over 350 national and state organizations, representing over 50 million Americans, including seniors, women, people with disabilities, workers, people of color, and veterans. The coalition is strongly opposed to President Trump's nominee, Mr. Andrew M. Saul, of New York, to be the next commissioner of the Social Security Administration (SSA). Given our strong objections, the coalition is particularly concerned that the Senate is considering confirming him not just for the remainder of the current term, but for a new six-year term, following that.

The commissioner of the Social Security Administration must have deep knowledge of Social Security, a program which is vitally important but extremely complicated. In addition, the commissioner must have a deep and clear understanding of the challenges facing SSA. Mr. Saul has no previous work experience related to Social Security or SSA. While the experience Mr. Saul gained from his time working on the federal thrift savings plan (TSP) was undoubtedly valuable, it has little value to helping him run the Social Security system, unless he seeks to privatize the program.

The Social Security Administration is facing numerous challenges including long waits at field offices, on the 1-800 number, and, most distressingly, for final determinations for those whose work has been ended as the result of serious and permanent disability. The head of this crucial agency should be someone who is up to speed, not someone who will require on-the-job training. New claims representatives are trained for over a year before they are ready to help the public; a commissioner should have much more experience, training, and expertise before taking control of such a large, vital agency.

Further, the person serving as SSA commissioner, a position of public trust, should be of the highest ethical standing. In November 2007, Mr. Saul was forced to drop out of the race for a New York Congressional seat after the New York Times uncovered questionable contributions to his campaign. At the time of his campaign, Mr. Saul served as a state officer, as the vice chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). He was also a presidential appointee, serving as the chairman of the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board. New York laws prohibit members of boards, like the MTA, from taking donations from companies or individuals seeking to do business with their agency. Mr. Saul's campaign received donations from heads of Vornado Realty Trust and Tishman Speyer Properties, development companies that submitted bids with the MTA soon after their leadership donations. In addition to a state level violation, Mr. Saul's receipt of donation is a direct violation of the federal Hatch Act, which forbids federal employees from soliciting campaign contributions.

Further, in 2012, Mr. Saul was riding his bike in his neighborhood in New York and directly disobeyed the instruction of a law enforcement officer who told him not to enter a restricted area. Instead of obeying the law, he lied about his identity to the police officer. An investigation of the incident by the Bedford Police Department, which included the testimony of two eyewitnesses, concluded that the police officer had acted reasonably, while Mr. Saul was classified as uncooperative.

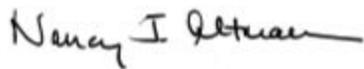
The leader of the Social Security Administration has responsibility not just for Social Security, but also the Supplemental Security Income program, as well as some aspects of Medicare. These programs serve virtually every American. The American people should have leaders who are expert about the programs they are administering, as well as trustworthy and honest, recognizing that they serve the American people.

Especially concerning, President Trump has chosen to nominate Mr. Saul not only for the remainder of the current term, but also a new six-year term, on top of that. This is unprecedented and shows an overreach of power. Mr. Saul is unqualified for even the completion of the current term. He certainly should not be confirmed for an additional six years after that, a period which, by definition, will run beyond the current administration, even if the current president is elected for a second term.

The Senate Finance Committee should protect the American people and their Social Security by rejecting the nomination of Mr. Andrew Saul. We urge you to oppose this nomination; the coalition sees a vote for Mr. Saul as a vote against Social Security.

Our coalition would be happy to work with you and help suggest more appropriate, more qualified leaders for the Social Security Administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy J. Altman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Nancy J. Altman
Chair, Strengthen Social Security Coalition