



# FRONTLINE

Issue 25

ANNUAL MEETING EDITION

November 2008

## Special Interest Articles:

- West Point Annual Meeting
- Donation given to FEEA
- Community Service Award
- Collins Award Recipient
- Joining NCSSMA

*"Leaders aren't born they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work. And that's the price we'll have to pay to achieve that goal, or any goal."*

*Vince Lombardi*

National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc.

## NEW YORK HOSTS NCSSMA'S 39<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING AT WEST POINT

By Sue King, Chicago Region

*"Raising the Torch of Leadership"* was the theme of the 2008 NCSSMA Annual Meeting. October 20-23 was the perfect time to enjoy the fall foliage colors which were in full regalia. Held at the historic Thayer Hotel on the grounds of the West Point United States Military Academy, the theme of the meeting rang throughout the week – not only by its location at West Point, which trains future leaders of the Army, but also by the three main speakers of the meeting. Michael J. Astrue (Commissioner of SSA), Linda McMahon (Deputy Commissioner of Operations) and Mary E. Glenn-Croft (Deputy Commissioner of Budget, Finance and Management) shared their vision for SSA with the members. Mixed with informational sessions, optional tours, and social activities, the time spent was first rate all the way.

As I drove through the gates of West Point to check in, the cadet told me, "Duty, Honor, Country." The Thayer Hotel has been part of American history since 1926 when it was originally constructed to accommodate U.S. Military Academy personnel and their guests. Greeted with homemade chocolates, a welcome bag full of goodies, and a very friendly New Yorker at the registration desk, I felt honored to be attending my first NCSSMA annual meeting.

The event started on Sunday with a day trip to see New York City. The bus departed at 6:45 AM and headed for the city. The jam-packed day included Battery Park, a ferry ride that provided great views of Manhattan, time at the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island, historic Ellis Island, and



the Museum of Immigration. From there, the bus took attendees to M & M World, Broadway, and Times Square, where they could see such places as the Theater District, Fifth Avenue shops, Radio City Music Hall, Central Park, the Empire State Building, the Plaza Hotel, and the FAO Schwarz Toy Store. It was then back to the bus to see the Rockefeller Center and the Top of the Rock Observation Deck. Everyone got back to The Thayer Hotel in the evening very tired, wishing they had more time to shop in New York City.

Our group met in the lobby Monday morning for a bus tour of West Point. We drove through the hills and saw Michie Stadium, several chapels, statues, monuments, beautiful views of the Hudson River, cadets going to class, and took a walk through the cemetery. The tour guide provided us with lots of interesting historical notes, legends, and stories about West Point. The weather was perfect for this enjoyable morning and continued to be so as we took part in the Hudson River Cruise and luau lunch that filled our afternoon.

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## Annual Meeting at West Point continued



Boarding the large ferry boat, we had more time to mingle and work up an appetite. Lunch included an assortment of appetizers, rice dishes, shrimp kabobs and an actual pig roast.

With our minds full of historical facts, our bellies full of lunch, and lots of fresh outdoor air, we all needed a rest before the welcome reception that evening. The welcome reception Monday evening was full of conversation and entertainment. The New York Host Committee put on a spectacular song and dance number to "New York, New York." Linda McMahon joined us and spent time talking to several members that night. NYRMS Distinguished Service Awards were presented to Susan Sobel and Jamie Cutler for their hard work and dedication to make this meeting possible.

Tuesday morning we got down to business. After the welcome breakfast, Joe Dirago (NYMS President) welcomed everyone. Dom Fulgieri shared some valuable information with those of us not familiar with New York: never say "Bronx," it is always "The Bronx;" the Wall Street District in New York is the place responsible for making our 401Ks into our 201Ks; and he let us in on the fact that he does not root for any organized baseball teams – he roots for the Mets. Cindy Jebb (Colonel, USMA, West Point) and Paul Doersam (Deputy Regional Commissioner of NY) also greeted everyone and shared a few words.

The business meeting convened with a presentation of the colors by the USMA Color Guard and Mary Kay Messenger singing the national anthem. Greg Heineman, NCSSMA President, officially thanked the NY region and welcomed all to the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. After reviewing the 2008 budget, we discussed and voted on the necessity to raise

membership dues paid by the regional associations to the NCSSMA Treasurer. NCSSMA was currently operating in the red and would be out of money in a few short years if no action was taken. Dues hadn't been raised since 1996.

Linda McMahon, Deputy Commissioner of Operations, spoke to the members. She first thanked everyone for all their hard work. She mentioned budget expectations, redetermination plans and the upcoming iClaim limited rollout.

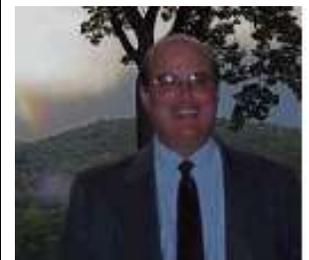


We need to get comfortable with looking at month of entitlement issues differently and thinking in terms of how the beneficiaries are looking at retirement: *How much will I get if I retire now? Can I live on that? Do I need to wait until I can receive more?* She also spoke about the increasing demand for Social Security cards and how the Agency is thinking of several ways to minimize the impact on field offices.

In the afternoon, Commissioner Michael J. Astrue was introduced by Beatrice M. Disman, NY Regional Commissioner. He began by expressing his gratitude for our leadership and expressed his belief that transparency is the key to effective leadership. The disability backlogs are his first priority and he talked about the progress the Agency has made since he presented his plan to Congress in May 2007. Although the Agency has had fewer ALJs this year than in 2007, we've held more hearings and cleared more cases. The experienced ALJs are  
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*"We need to get comfortable with looking at month of entitlement issues differently and thinking in terms of how the beneficiaries are looking at retirement."*

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## Annual Meeting at West Point continued

training the new ALJs and this takes time, but proper training is critical. QDD has been very successful and it is being tweaked to include more cases as well as Compassionate Allowances. Medical listings are currently in the process of being updated. He has also initiated action to establish a new office to improve notices. He concluded with a request to managers to remember our wounded warriors. They are often great and dedicated employees.

Commissioner Astrue then attended a meet and greet in his honor. He spent over an hour conversing with everyone and at one point, noticed a rainbow over the mountain and posed for pictures with us. What an experience that was! After that, Greg Heineman presented the Community Service Award to David Cook. (See Article on pg. 5)

The evening concluded with dinner at the Newburgh waterfront restaurant, Torches. It featured fine food, 25-foot ceilings, and a 6,000 gallon salt water "Aqua Bar" aquarium, home to 30 varieties of fish. It was only Tuesday evening, and I was amazed at the effort, planning, and coordination that the members of the NY region had already put into this meeting. I was thankful to be able to be amongst the leaders, speakers, and award recipients of the Agency and Association

Wednesday morning came too fast and I would have liked to sleep in, however I was glad I didn't because Mary E. Glenn-Croft, Deputy Commissioner of Budget, Finance and Management (BFM) spoke to the members. BFM is responsible for the ASP (Agency Strategic Plan), APP (Annual Performance Plan), and the PAR (Performance and Accountability Report). She's observed that SSA is "on the Hill" much more now than ever before and rather than telling our story with emotion, it is being told with data. Her component is involved every time a question is added to a form, facts are

needed, and projections are to be made regarding redeterminations and claims. She was intensively involved in writing the new ASP. Commissioner Astrue asked that it be different from past plans, under 40 pages and focus on a few select goals. One of the biggest issues facing us now is the National Computer Center (NCC), as it will be 30 years old and can only be shut down 36 hours a year for maintenance. Mary is responsible for calculating the costs of replacing the NCC, preferably with two systems so one can be a back-up. This will be a 10-year project.

The rest of Wednesday and part of Thursday were spent on the 2008 resolutions. After resolution #1 was submitted expressing sincere thanks and appreciation to the NYMS for hosting the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, and for treating the guests with friendship, courtesy, and the warmest NYMS hospitality, we went on to engage in lively discussion about such issues as staffing, resources, sanctions, awards, systems issues, workstation allotment, eServices, equipment contracts, MI data availability, PACs, OS upgrades, SPEG, the ACT system, notices, and third party fees. I was impressed by the focus on areas of concern brought about by the different regions and the problems each face, many that are found throughout the country. We ended up approving 15 resolutions for the upcoming year.

Interspersed throughout the meeting, various companies that sponsored this event had tables for us to visit and get information. We also had the opportunity to listen to their story as we reconvened after breaks and lunch. I heard anecdotal stories about the benefits of long term care, professional liability insurance and an especially compelling account of FEEA from Steve Bauer.

*(Continued on page 4)*



### Communications Committee

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Mike Wilson  
Tim Crews  
Denise Hachicho  
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### Editorial Board:

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Rick Warsinskey  
Rachel Emmons  
Jill Russell  
Karen Sims

## Annual Meeting at West Point *continued*

After Steve gave an emotional account of the many employees helped by FEEA and the hard times our own coworkers have encountered due to natural disasters and personal tragedy, Greg Heineman presented a \$2,500 check to Steve. This donation was specified for the FEEA Hurricane relief fund and was approved by the delegates. Rachel Emmons, NCSSMA's Washington Representative, announced a matching donation on behalf of her company, Greystone Group.

The banquet Wednesday evening featured a murder mystery produced by The Killing Kompany, which involved the shooting of a Congressman. Who would have thought so many of our members would be suspects in this dastardly deed? Joe Dirago presented Evie Davis and Dom Pratico with an award for their efforts as Co-Chairs of the NYRMS Host Committee. Greg Heineman then recognized Tony Perrotti with a Special Achievement Award for his dedicated service and recruitment efforts. Greg then presented the coveted Joseph P. Collins award to Phil Walton for his years of service as the past editor of NCSSMA's newsletter. (See Article of page 7.)

Thursday morning brought the completion of the business portion of the meeting. The members voted and the new 2009 officers are:

<b>President</b>	Greg Heineman Norfolk, NE
<b>Vice President</b>	Fred Bourjaily Flint, MI
<b>Secretary</b>	Concepcion Doolen Roswell, NM
<b>Treasurer</b>	Charlene Morales Richmond (East), VA
<b>TSC Representative</b>	Barb Perian Pittsburgh, PA

That afternoon we caravanned through the mountains to Brotherhood Winery, learned its history, the process of wine making, and had the opportunity to sample. I learned the proper way to open a wine bottle is to grasp the cork and turn the bottle, never turn the cork. From there, we visited Orange County Choppers (which was not a helicopter ride and was not in Orange County, California) and toured the facility. Specially made motorcycles for charity auctions, movies, celebrities, 9/11, POW-MIA were on display, just to name a few. We also saw the workshop where the bikes are made and the TV show is filmed, however we just missed Senior and Junior.

The week at West Point was an amazing and educational trip. The hosts of next year's meeting were right on when they said their goal is not to outdo the NY meeting this year, but to be as good as this one was. I'm looking forward to next year in Tampa!



Back left to right: Fred Bourjaily, Greg Heineman  
Front: Connie Doolen, Charlene Morales, Barb Perian

## Donation Given to FEEA

NCSSMA Members approved a donation of \$2500 to the Federal Employee Education and Assistance Fund (FEEA) for the Hurricane Gustav and Ike relief funds that are providing assistance to SSA employees. Greg Heineman presented the check to Steve Bauer, Executive Director of FEEA and a past president of NCSSMA at the Annual Meeting held in West Point.

Rachel Emmons, NCSSMA's Washington Representative, followed that donation with a matching donation from Greystone Group. Many of the Regional Management Associations are also sending in donations for this worthy cause. If you would like to donate simply use this link to FEEA's website <http://feea.nonprofitsoapbox.com/>. Click on the "Give Now" box and you will see a drop down box under gift designation where you can select "SSA emergency relief." The website also contains information on how to mail in a check if you prefer to do it that way.



## NCSSMA Recognizes Outstanding Community Service

By Bethany Paradis, Boston Region

As part of the National Council's efforts to recognize and encourage the public service that Social Security Management Association members provide to their communities, it established a national Community Service Award. This award is presented annually to a management association member nominated by the Regional Management Associations for his/her involvement in community affairs, volunteer services, civic clubs, humanitarian deeds, etc. The winner is chosen by the National Council. Greg Heineman, NCSSMA President, was pleased to present this year's award on October 21st to David Cook, District Manager of the Geneva, New York field office.

At the request of the City of Ithaca, Mr. Cook helped to reorganize the Ithaca Homeless Support Network, Inc. a not for profit organization into the Community Housing of Ithaca, Inc., a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO). He is currently President of the Board of Directors. This organization obtains grant monies from State, Federal and other sources to assist in providing affordable housing. As President, Mr. Cook has helped to obtain funding in excess of two million dollars for several housing projects. Mr. Cook also serves on the Board of Directors for the Rotary Club of Geneva and is instrumental in the distribution of interest free student loans to deserving college students. As a Board Member for NY Connects, he is involved in a program that is designed to provide one-stop assistance from A-Z, stay at home assistance, delivered meals, nursing home care, and aide service. Mr. Cook is also active on the House Committee of the Ithaca Elks Lodge working with various not for profit organizations fundraisers. He assists the committee with providing kitchen logistics, supplies and donates time to cook meals for various high school, college and other not for profit dinners.



Past community service activities included the Tompkins Community Action (TCAction) Board of Directors where he chaired the Personnel Committee. TCAction is a private, nonprofit organization that funds projects in the areas of Housing Services, Family Resources, Energy Services and Early Childhood development. As the Chair of the Personnel Committee, Mr. Cook assisted with the rewrite of the Employee Handbook, establishing pay scales and various other issues to include sitting in on grievances and EEO complaints. He was also involved in the Rotary Club of Ithaca and served as Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Visiting Nurses of Ithaca.

He was actively involved in the AIDS Council of Northern NY, the Clinton County Office for the Aging and Literacy Volunteers. Clearly, Mr. Cook has had a long history of community service. He was very honored to receive this award.

In his acceptance speech he shared some valuable insights. He stated that "volunteering is like planting a tree. You may never sit under it, but you know somebody else will." He cited examples of families in the housing units he has never met, but knows they have a warm and secure home now. He never met the mother of the fallen soldier who he played the pipes for, but recalls the two little girls whose firefighter father was killed in the line of duty. They just wanted to hold the pipes and have their pictures taken. He never met the adopted families his office helped out each Christmas over the past 15 years, but he recalls the stories about the mothers, who broke down crying at the sight of all the bikes and gifts.

In Mr. Cook's final words of advice, he quoted a great philosopher. "In a bacon and egg breakfast, the chicken is involved, the pig is committed. Be the pig." If you are committed, your staff will follow.

*(Continued on page 6)*



## Outstanding Community Service continued

### Community Service Honorable Mentions

Selecting the honoree for the Community Service Award is always challenging. All of the nominees are very deserving and should be commended for their dedication. We would like to take this opportunity to recognize the other nominees for this award and to congratulate them on their nominations. We owe them gratitude for the selfless service they provide and for the example they set for the rest of us.

#### **Michael Syverson, District Manager, Alexandria, Minnesota**

Since Mike arrived in Alexandria in 1995 he has been involved with the following numerous volunteer activities including the Kiwanis Club, the Developmental Achievement Center Board of Directors, Alexandria Public School District Lunch Buddy/Mentor program, the School Trust Fund Board of Directors, and the Lake Victoria Area Association. He has also served as a Cub Scout leader, basketball coach, and the Church Communion Minister.

#### **Kathleen M. Vadala, District Manager, Lynn, MA**

Cathi is on the board of directors of both Greater Lynn Senior Services (GLSS) and PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly). Both agencies are located in Lynn, MA. Cathi is the President of the board of directors of GLSS this year. For both agencies she participates in making property purchasing decisions, authorizing large expenditures, selection of directors and other key personnel among other responsibilities.

#### **Judith Hamilton, District Manager, Beaumont, Texas**

In 2005 both her office and her home were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, but she rose to the many challenges of serving a large population of poor and disadvantaged people. She cultivated and maintained a network of contacts, both within and outside of SSA, which proved invaluable when disaster struck. Immediately following Katrina, Ms. Hamilton relocated to Dallas and was assigned to lead a Human Resources Team from the Dallas RO whose goal was to account for all SSA and DDS employees displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. She and her team were able to locate all of the affected employees and ensure that those employees received the appropriate services to assist them in recovering from the impact of the devastating hurricanes. In addition to her many work-related accomplishments, Ms. Hamilton is a major community and church presence, both in New Orleans and Beaumont, actively involved in mentoring disadvantaged youth.

#### **Brandice Shafron, Group Supervisor, 7 Fields, PA ODAR**

Through the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, Brandi has served as a big sister to an underprivileged young woman since 2004. In this role, Brandi meets with this pre-teen one evening a week and serves as a female role model for her. She also volunteers through the Holy Family Institute to work with severely disturbed young women as a mentor. She began serving with Holy Family in the fall of 2007. To do this, Brandi had to undergo a rigorous and time consuming training program. In this role, Brandi meets weekly one-on-one with a teen-aged girl who has been abused, abandoned, thrown out of foster care and several other social programs. In fact, Holy Family Institute is the program of last resort for these troubled teens. Brandi offers the teen she mentors hope and lets her know that she matters despite her checkered past.

#### **Sylvester White, District Manager, Florence, Alabama**

Sylvester has demonstrated exemplary leadership to the Florence District with his involvement in numerous civic and social organizations. He is currently a board member of the Florence Kiwanis Club, the Shoals Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), the Salvation Army Advisory Board, and the River Bend Center for Mental Health. Sylvester is also a member of the Shoals National Championship Committee responsible for the Division II Football Championship. He coordinated a committee project called "A Day to Remember" that allows disadvantaged young people from all over North Alabama to attend the National Championship game free of charge with many game day related activities. Sylvester is the Chairman of the Northwest Alabama Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NWALVOAD). He is an active member of the local "Meals on Wheels" and somehow finds time to coach the Florence Kiwanis Little League Baseball Team.



#### **NY HOST COMMITTEE**



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## Phil Walton Honored With the Joseph P. Collins Award

By Bethany Paradis, Boston Region

NCSSMA's most prestigious award was given to Phil Walton, District Manager of Toledo, Ohio at the association's 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting held in West Point, New York. The Joseph P. Collins Award was established by the National Council in 1978 in memory of the first President of the Council. It is given each year to the member who, during the preceding year, has done the most to further the objective of the National Council. It can be used to recognize a single act during the preceding year or sustained performance over a period of time extending into the year preceding the award.

To help you understand why Phil was selected for the Joseph P. Collins award I will share excerpts from the nomination I received intertwined with the memories he shared with me. Phil was nominated "for his over ten years of outstanding service as writer and editor of NCSSMA's newsletters, *MASS Media* and *FrontLine*, from April 1997 to November 2007. His efforts have had a substantial and positive effect in advancing NCSSMA's objectives and he is truly deserving of this most prestigious award.

The specific objectives of the National Council that Phil's work with *MASS Media* and *FrontLine* helped to achieve are as follows:

**To further the best interests and general welfare of all district personnel**

**To foster the highest standards of professionalism**

**To encourage the establishment of policies that best serve the public interest in accomplishing the mission of our agency**

Phil was appointed as editor of *MASS Media*, NCSSMA's printed newsletter, in April 1997. While Phil was editor, *MASS Media* served as the National Council's primary method for



communicating with its members." He worked with Bob Boch and Bob Duncan to create each edition which was then sent to a printer in Indianapolis. Approximately 3500 copies were then shipped to Phil to be redistributed to the regions. Phil stated, "Some regions had one mailing point for their hundreds of copies, other regions wanted me to mail to each of their area representatives. We mailed individual copies to executive staff in Central Office and the Regional Offices in addition to about 30 key congressional offices and other external groups (e.g. SSAB). Needless to say the mailing operation was extremely labor intensive.

For a few of the editions I recruited my children, then ages 12, 8, and 5, to come into the office with me on a Saturday and count out *MASS Medias* and prepare the mailing. I did this a few times until I concluded supervising the task was more work than doing it--asking an 8 year old to count out 280 newsletters is pretty optimistic. They lose interest at about 8."

In Phil's first editorial he said, "When you get it in your hand it should answer one question: what's the NCSSMA been up to and what do they see coming around the bend? We'll try to answer that with each edition." Phil continued to do just that with the issues he edited.

In his acceptance speech Phil stated that he worked closely with the NC under six different NC presidents--Don Seatter, Ron Niesing, Steve Korn, Tony Pezza, Ron Buffaloe and Rick Warsinsky and found it to be very satisfying.

He shared a story about an encounter that occurred twenty years ago with Herb Doggette who was the Deputy Commissioner for Operations at that time. Phil was tasked with the assignment of picking Mr. Doggette up at the airport. "On the drive to the hotel he waxed philosophical. The crux of what he said was that in all his years, the biggest problems SSA had had come from within - not from Congress, not from the public, not from the courts, not from anyone or anything outside our organization. It was from within. Ideas came up, initiatives [were] developed, pilots too often were foregone conclusions and the downstream impact, when it came, seemed a huge surprise. In retrospect, the funny part was that it actually came as a surprise to anyone. And that should not happen. Not if the right questions are asked early on and not if the decision-makers listen." This made a lasting impression on Phil. In 2000 Phil was involved in transitioning *MASS Media* away from printing to an emailed newsletter. This evolved into the online version called *FrontLine*. As editor of *FrontLine* from 2000 through 2007 he did most of the editing and writing. He produced nineteen issues during that time. As Phil so eloquently stated, "What I attempted to do as editor of *MASS Media*, then *FrontLine*, was to ask questions that were like the proverbial elephant in the room that everyone saw but seemed to be unwilling to discuss. We must ask the questions that need to be asked. No one else will do it." Please join NCSSMA in congratulating Phil Walton on this well deserved award.

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## National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc. Why You Should Join

The Management Association is a professional organization that strives to further the goals of SSA from a management perspective by having an open dialogue with regional and national leaders. Many current agency leaders are former members of our association. We are not a union. The Management Association serves as a voice for field and TSC management with the primary purpose of improving service to the public. Members can share input on many issues through their regional associations. We have been instrumental in advocating for higher budgets for SSA; increasing the rate of overtime pay for managers and supervisors; influencing policy changes; streamlining procedures within the agency; and gaining improvements in automation and other systems enhancements that are needed for greater efficiency. Here are 10 reasons why you should join your regional management association:

1. The Management Association is a respected organization that represents your interests in a positive and professional manner. You will be joining an active and vibrant organization of your peers. We provide an unfiltered voice for communications between field offices, TSCs and other SSA components.
2. You can make a difference. You can raise issues and make suggestions for changes that can improve our service to the public, policies and procedures and our overall work environment. Our organization gives members the opportunity to express concerns, problems and views through a collective voice.
3. Membership provides networking opportunities for you to meet coworkers across your region and the nation. It provides a forum for sharing information and ideas.
4. You can participate in regional and national association committees and workgroups.
5. You can participate in regional and national agency workgroups.
6. You will be kept informed of happenings inside the agency and the organization that you might not otherwise hear about. Our organization serves as a channel of communications both to and from Regional and Central Office.
7. If you get actively involved, you can develop your leadership skills and improve your communication skills.
8. For career advancement, it provides an excellent opportunity for exposure. Attending regional annual meetings offers the chance to meet regional and national executives. If you become a member of your Executive Committee you will interact with regional executives and possibly national executives on a regular basis.
9. Attending your Regional Association's Annual Meetings is informative and a lot of fun!
10. Actively participating in your Regional Association is fun, rewarding and great for relieving stress when the job gets tough! You are not alone!

**Disclaimer**

*The views expressed in FrontLine by contributors, e.g. letters to the editor, guest editorials, etc., represent solely the views of the respective contributors. Staff editorials reflect the views of the editors, and should not be assumed to reflect the formal positions or views of the National Council or the Social Security Administration.*

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