



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Grassley Wins Committee Approval of Social Security Anti-Fraud Bill

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Committee on Finance, today won unanimous committee approval of legislation to rein in several sources of fraud, waste, and abuse of Social Security programs.

“Like any government program, Social Security attracts its share of con artists and scammers,” Grassley said. “Fugitive felons work the system so they get Social Security benefits on the lam. Some financial guardians of the disabled make off with the payments of those in their care. We have to plug these spigots of waste, fraud and abuse. Every penny down the drain doesn’t help a deserving person.”

Grassley received committee approval of the *Social Security Protection Act of 2003*, which he said gives the Social Security Administration important new tools to fight waste, fraud and abuse. Highlights include:

Greater protection of representative payees. Grassley said the Social Security Act authorizes the appointment of representative payees to receive and manage the Social Security benefits of individuals who cannot manage their own finances because of mental or physical impairments. A representative payee may be an individual or an organization, including non-profits and state or local government agencies. Over the years, there have been numerous reports that representative payees have misused the benefits entrusted to their care. As chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, Grassley held hearings on this issue and developed legislation to address this serious problem. The bill approved today includes the protections Grassley proposed in the last Congress. For example, the bill ensures that the government can replace the payments stolen from the beneficiary.

Fugitive felons. Grassley said the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* included a provision making fugitive felons ineligible to receive benefits under the Supplemental Security Income program. Since then, the Social Security Office of Inspector General and the General Accounting Office have raised concerns that fugitive felons remain eligible to receive benefits under the Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance program. Grassley co-sponsored legislation to address this disparity. However, some recently have raised concerns that in some cases law enforcement agencies have chosen not to pursue individuals

identified through the fugitive felon program. Such cases often involve minor offenses that are decades-old and will never be prosecuted. As a result, the only punishment imposed is the denial of Social Security benefits.

“I don’t believe the fugitive felon program was ever intended to deny benefits to those no longer sought by law enforcement,” Grassley said. “So the provision in this bill applies to those who are truly seeking to avoid arrest or prosecution. The government shouldn’t be helping felons in their run from the law.”

Grassley said a version of today’s bill passed both the House and Senate in the last Congress, but there was no time for final consideration before adjournment. Grassley said he hopes the bill will receive final approval this year.