



News Release

SOCIAL SECURITY

Commissioner Astrue Returning to Massachusetts

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, today informed his employees that he will be leaving the agency next month to return to his home in Massachusetts. Commissioner Astrue has completed a six-year term and has been serving under the holdover provisions of the agency's authorizing statute. He has served longer than any Republican Commissioner and longer than any Commissioners except Arthur J. Altmeyer (1946-53) and Robert M. Ball (1962-73).

"I consider it a great privilege to have led this remarkable agency for six years," Commissioner Astrue said.

Commissioner Astrue overhauled the agency's complex operations to improve its efficiency and the quality of its services. During his tenure, the agency:

--Adopted fast-track procedures for the 6% of the disability claimants who are most obviously disabled;

--Reduced the time to a disability hearing from about 540 days to about 360 days in an era of rapidly rising claims and dwindling budgets;

--Replaced the fraying data center with a state-of-the-art facility due to open next year and built a second co-processing center that can continue operations in the event of a disaster;

--Developed a suite of electronic services that are rated the best in government;

--Developed the federal government's first interactive suite of Spanish services;

--Updated most of the agency's medical listings and entered into a partnership with the Bureau of Labor Statistics to replace the antiquated vocational tool used for disability determinations;

--Created the online Retirement Estimator, which allows Americans to better plan for retirement by obtaining personalized information about their projected retirement payments;

--Improved the quality of disability decision-making through better staffing, training, and software support; and

--Spearheaded “plain language” efforts for the annual reports on the financial status of the Medicare and Social Security programs.

Commissioner Astrue’s previous federal service includes time at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Legislation, Counselor to the Commissioner of Social Security, and General Counsel. As General Counsel, he was an architect of the Food and Drug Administration’s expedited drug approval plan, successfully argued the first federal patient dumping enforcement case, and successfully tried the first federal HIV discrimination enforcement suit. He also served as Associate Counsel to Presidents Reagan and Bush, including service as White House Ethics Officer.

Commissioner Astrue began his work in the biotechnology industry as General Counsel of Biogen. As CEO of Transkaryotic Therapies, he led a highly successful turnaround of that company. He served as Chairman of the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council, Vice Chairman of the Massachusetts High Technology Council, and as a member of many corporate and non-profit boards. He also taught biotechnology law and policy at Boston University and poetry at Emerson College.

Commissioner Astrue has received many awards, including the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the Alzheimer’s Association, the Public Health Leadership Award from the National Organization of Rare Disorders, the President’s Award from the ARC, and the VIDA Award from the National Alliance for Hispanic Health.

Commissioner Astrue, who is 56, married a Yale classmate who is a language teacher. They have a son who is a software developer and Maryland Army National Guard officer, as well as a daughter who served in Teach for America and teaches in Tennessee.

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