

## Record number seek disability payments

*by UPI*

WASHINGTON -- There is a backlog of 745,000 people awaiting hearings with U.S. Social Security officials regarding disabilities claims. With a large increase in the number of people making disability claims, the wait for a hearing averaged a record 17 months through June, USA Today reported Monday. In some parts of the country, the wait for a hearing is 31 months, said Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue. "People have died waiting for a hearing," Astrue said, adding the backlog has doubled in six years and could reach 1 million by 2010. During the last six years, the U.S. Congress has provided nearly \$1 billion less for the Social Security Administration than U.S. President George Bush sought and field offices have lost more than 2,300 workers in less than two years, leaving the agency with its lowest staffing level since the early 1970s, Astrue said. "We don't have enough staff members to answer the phones," Richard Warsinskey, president of the National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc., which represents 3,500 field office managers, told USA Today. District offices handle 110 million calls and visitors a year and as the baby boomers age, Warsinskey predicted "almost a tsunami of additional people coming on to the rolls," the newspaper said.

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