

IDENTIFYING BENEFICIARIES

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the inspector general of the Social Security Administration recently issued a report taking the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to task for its failure to take steps to implement the inspector general's recommendation that the agency stop using Social Security numbers as a beneficiary identifier. I support the inspector general's efforts and would like to bring this issue to the attention of my colleagues.

Social Security numbers were originally created to administer the Social Security Program. Over time, the public and private sectors began to use Social Security numbers for a variety of other purposes.

Use of Social Security numbers is a convenient method to identify individuals. But wide-spread use of Social Security numbers also increases the risk of identity theft and fraud. In 2006, the Federal Trade Commission reported that more than 8 million Americans were victims of identity theft in the prior year.

Identity thieves can obtain an individual's personal information by stealing mail or a wallet or rummaging through your trash. That personal information can be used to obtain a credit card in your name, write bad checks from a bank account created in your name, or authorize the electronic transfer of funds from your bank account to a different account.

A Social Security number is a key piece of information used in identity thefts. Recognizing this threat, many public and private entities have taken steps to limit the use and display of Social Security numbers.

Last year, the Office of Management and Budget called on Federal agencies to safeguard personally identifiable information. It required agencies to establish plans to eliminate unnecessary collection and use of Social Security numbers and to explore alternatives to Social Security numbers.

A number of Federal agencies are reducing the use of Social Security numbers. The Department of Veterans Affairs no longer displays Social Security numbers on new veteran identification cards. The Department of Defense is issuing health cards that no longer display Social Security numbers. And the Office of Personnel Management has directed health insurers participating in the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program to eliminate Social Security numbers from insurance cards.

Unfortunately, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services continues to display Social Security numbers on Medicare identification cards. Consumers Union and others have noted this practice needlessly places Medicare beneficiaries at risk for identity theft.

The Social Security Administration urges people not to carry their Social Security cards with them in order to protect against theft. But Medicare beneficiaries are instructed to carry

their Medicare identification cards with them—cards with the very same Social Security number on them. Why would CMS increase senior citizens' vulnerability to identity theft?

I first raised this concern in 2005 and successfully offered an amendment to the Senate version of the fiscal year 2006 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill to require CMS to provide a report to Congress outlining a plan to move away from using Social Security numbers on Medicare identification cards.

CMS prepared a report and provided estimates of the cost and time it would take to switch to an identification system other than Social Security numbers. But it has failed to implement that plan.

Last month, the inspector general of the Social Security Administration issued a report that examined how CMS is responding to an IG recommendation in 2006 to remove Social Security numbers from Medicare cards. The inspector general found that CMS has not done anything beyond preparing the report to Congress.

The inspector general made his position clear. The report states:

Given the millions of individuals at risk for identity theft and OMB's directive to eliminate unnecessary uses of [Social Security numbers], we believe immediate action is needed to address this significant vulnerability.

The report also declares:

We do not believe a Federal agency should place more value on convenience than the security of its beneficiaries' personal information.

It is very disappointing that CMS is not taking recommended steps to protect Medicare beneficiaries from identity theft.

Private health insurers have moved away from using Social Security numbers. Other Federal agencies have too. It is time for CMS to do the same.

TRIBUTE TO DR. BOBBY R. HIMES

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise to note with sadness the passing of Dr. Bobby R. Himes, a retired Campbellsville University professor and star Kentuckian who will be greatly missed. After over four decades of service to his students, his community and the Commonwealth of Kentucky, he leaves behind many loved ones and a great legacy of accomplishment. He was 76 years old.

Known to students and colleagues as "Mr. Campbellsville University," Dr. Himes taught 7,940 students over his long career, according to grade books he kept in his possession. He first came to Campbellsville University in 1961 at the age of 29 and retired in 2001 as a history and political science professor. More than 4,000 Campbellsville students took his popular class "United States History Since 1877," which began in 1961.

Dr. Himes grew up in Hartford, KY, and always remained proud of his

hometown. In his recent book "Life in the Shadows of Hartford College and Campbellsville University," he wrote, "I could not have grown up in a better place or time. Nowhere could there have been better people to nurture a young boy, a young man and now an old man."

Dr. Himes graduated from Hartford High School in 1950 and earned his bachelor's degree in history and political science from Kentucky Wesleyan College in 1959. He earned a master's degree in social science from Appalachian State University in 1961, did other graduate work at Western Kentucky University, and did his doctoral studies at Vanderbilt University. He also wore our country's uniform for 4 years in the U.S. Air Force, serving in the Korean War.

Dr. Himes's renown as a teacher was legendary. Several years ago I was on a plane from Kentucky to Washington, DC, when a young woman introduced herself to me as one of his former students. She had only the highest praise for him. I made sure to tell Dr. Himes about that afterwards. The impact he had on this young woman's life, and thousands of young people's lives, cannot be understated.

Let me point out that my wife, Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, was a big fan of Dr. Himes as well. When she first met him she was new to Kentucky and just getting to know people. Dr. Himes was so friendly and helpful, they soon became fast friends. He was a great guide to the people and places in Kentucky.

Dr. Himes was always actively engaged with the world around him, and so it is no surprise he was involved in political campaigning and public service as well. His first campaign experience came when he was in the third grade at Wayland Alexander Elementary School he supported Wendell L. Willkie in the 1940 Presidential election.

Luckily, that first loss did not deter him from politics completely. Moving to Taylor County, KY, in 1961, Dr. Himes went on to serve in leadership posts for local campaigns. He then became chairman of the Taylor County Republican Party in 1982, a position he held for 10 years.

Dr. Himes was twice named the Campbellsville/Taylor County Chamber of Commerce Educator of the Year. He was also named the 2001 Business and Professional Women's Club Man of the Year and the 2004 Central Kentucky News-Journal Man of the Year. He received the Outstanding Social Studies Teacher Award from the Kentucky Council for the Social Studies in 1982.

Dr. Himes was a member of Campbellsville Baptist Church, and he belonged to the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels. He was perhaps the biggest fan of Lady Tiger Basketball at Campbellsville University, and the team recognized his support by creating the Bobby Himes Award, which honors dedication, determination and loyalty.