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the experience to lead the agency.

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By Jamie Feldman, Kiplinger Consumer News Service (TNS)

Former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley told senators last week that if he is confirmed as the new commissioner of the Social Security Administration (SSA) he would be able to lead it through its ongoing “customer service crisis.”

For 88 years, “without ever missing a single benefit payment, Social Security has strived to provide the right amount, to the right person, at the right time. And for the

long arc of its history, Social Security has done so with a high degree of accuracy,”

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minutes, and someone in need of disability benefits will wait 220 days for an initial decision and possibly as long as two years for an appeal, O'Malley said, adding that this is unacceptable.

His nomination comes amid ongoing concern about the agency's long-term solvency as well as a more recent fallout over the agency's attempt to recoup more than \$20 billion in overpayments that it mistakenly made to beneficiaries, a matter that Congress is also studying.

“I believe [President Biden nominated me](#) for this position because I have the leadership skills, the management skills and the experience—needed at this moment—to lead this organization forward,” O'Malley said.

At the hearing, Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden (D-OR) further laid out some of the challenges [facing the agency](#), including long lines stretched around field offices, telephone systems crashing, outdated technology and systems as well as low staff morale. But Congress controls the purse strings of the agency and needs to take responsibility for its performance, which “is inextricably linked to the tools and resources we provide the agency,” Wyden said.

Senators at the hearing questioned O'Malley about his plans to [lessen those wait times](#). When asked by Ranking Member Mike Crapo (R-ID) what he would do to make sure SSA performs at peak level for customer service, O'Malley emphasized the need to work together and bring in experts from both the federal government and private sector.

Time for a rapid assessment of systems

“I need to do a rapid assessment of systems, and the alignment of those systems,” he said. “In doing so there are two people in mind: The customer, how is the customer

being served and, directly related, what is the experience of the frontline worker?”

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response, he cited a depletion of staff and morale, and he vowed to work toward improving conditions for workers in an effort to improve conditions for beneficiaries.

O'Malley, who has also served two terms as mayor of Baltimore, said that he implemented the city's first 311 system, and has a track record of engaging with new technology to move a system—especially one as outdated as the Social Security SSA—toward more modern, user-friendly processes.

Wyden told the senators that all written questions for O'Malley are to be submitted by November 7. He also said that he strongly supports O'Malley's nomination and thinks he will do “a superb job.”

A video of the hearing is available at the [C-Span website](#).

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