

# A Day in the Life of a Government Executive

---

*"A Day in the life of a Government Executive" was written for OASIS, a publication of the Social Security Administration. Its ironies may be unconscious, but they are devastating nonetheless—and provide the truest picture of life in the upper levels of bureaucracy we have ever encountered.*

---

As Commissioner of Social Security, James Bruce Cardwell administers a program that touches the life of virtually every American and handles one out of every \$4 spent in the government.

What follows is a typical day.

## Rockville, Maryland

The Commissioner's day begins at 5:45 a.m., more than an hour before his chauffeur will arrive to take him into the District. In suburban Maryland there is near-quiet at this time of day. The Commissioner takes advantage of the silence to enjoy a leisurely cup of coffee with his wife and to scan the morning papers.

At 6:50 the Commissioner's chauffeur, Willie Falcon, arrives in a small government sedan. Commissioner Cardwell climbs into the car with a pair of worn leather briefcases at his

side. Each briefcase is stuffed with the inevitable governmental memoranda which have been a part of his life for the last 30 years.

As the sedan edges onto Interstate 70 and heads toward the Washington Beltway, Commissioner Cardwell's workday has already begun. He uses the half- to three-quarter-hour travel time for reading Social Security Administration staff reports and memoranda submitted the previous day.

## 7:30 a. m.

The Commissioner arrives at HEW, North. He will spend the morning here before going on to the Woodlawn Social Security complex near Baltimore. The Washington office maintains liaison with other HEW components and congressional commit-

tees. While Woodlawn is only 30-some miles distant, it is nevertheless too far from the seat of government.

He takes the elevator to his fourth floor space and greets Mary Grabarek, the office secretary.

The Commissioner's private office at HEW is attractive but utilitarian—a massive walnut desk, beige carpet, a few pieces of darkwood furniture with vinyl upholstery. Opening off the Commissioner's office is a small library. Handsomely bound government volumes line bookshelves along the wall, and a conference table sits in the center of the room.

In his office, Commissioner Cardwell begins work by scanning press reports on items of interest to Social Security. He then turns his attention to the more time-consuming task of reading and signing correspondence prepared by his staff.

8:00 a. m.

Deputy Commissioner Arthur Hess

arrives. The previous day was the Deputy Commissioner's birthday and the Commissioner asks about his evening dinner party in Annapolis. They then turn their attention to an item in the morning press reports about a Dartmouth University student who has had his social security benefits terminated on a legal technicality. It is decided that the Office of the General Counsel should look into the case. Another item discussed is a call the Commissioner made to the Office of Management and Budget to check on the status of SSA's request to build two new headquarters buildings—one at the present complex in Woodlawn and the other in downtown Baltimore.

8:15 a. m.

Commissioner Cardwell briefly outlined for *OASIS* an upcoming presentation in the Secretary's Chart Room. "Usually I'll meet with the Secretary. . . well, every morning that

he's in town. His staff and the agency heads are always present at those sessions. Wednesdays are a little different, however. These meetings are opened up—more staffers—and there is usually a presentation of some sort. For instance, the HEW. Comptroller recently gave a presentation on cash flow analysis. Today, the Secretary has requested that we give a general presentation on the status of the social security program.”

8:20 a. m.

Commissioner Cardwell and Deputy Commissioner Hess leave the Commissioner's office for the Secretary's Chart Room. They meet SSA's Deputy Chief Actuary, Francisco Bayo, on the way. Bayo has just arrived at HEW, North, and will be available for long-range actuarial projections, if needed, during the morning's presentation.

8:30 a. m.

Secretary Caspar Weinberger, Under Secretary Frank Carlucci, and 20 to 25 other top Department executives enter the Chart Room and take designated seats around the room's long oval table. Five minutes elapse while coffee is served from an adjoining anteroom and materials related to the SSA presentation are sent around the table.

Secretary Weinberger then opens the meeting and immediately gives the floor to Commissioner Cardwell. The Commissioner outlines the morning's program, saying that the presentation would be in three parts: 1) a review of basic social security program data; 2) a report on current problems confronting Social Security; and 3) a period for questions and answers.

Deputy Commissioner Hess gives a comprehensive, 20-minute chart presentation of basic social security data—extent of coverage, number of people receiving benefits, benefit amounts related to average monthly earnings, etc.

Commissioner Cardwell then outlines the problem areas. He says

throughout its history there has been tugging and pulling about the basic purpose of social security. Originally designed as a means of replacing part of family income lost due to age or death, social security has grown to include other programs, other benefits. That growth has been accompanied by a public uncertainty about what social security now promises—and about its ability to deliver on those promises.

The Commissioner cited a series of articles on social security which were printed in *Chicago Today* and distributed nationwide via *The New York Times* News Service. The articles are very critical; they charge that social security is a rip-off and assert that retirement plans available through private companies would yield bigger dividends for smaller investments.

“The press tends to focus on sensational aspects of the program,” the Commissioner says. “And while there are legitimate issues raised in these articles there are also serious misstatements.”

The Commissioner then reviews what he considers legitimate issues regarding social security. Is social security adequate? Are social security contributions regressive? Does social security treat men and women, rich and poor, minority and majority, equally? Will low population growth and an increasing number of retirees mean an unfair financial burden for future workers? Is there a necessity for the social security retirement test?

The Commissioner says these questions, together with proposals for general fund financing and negative income tax, are being studied by the Social Security Board of Trustees and the Advisory Council on Social Security.

“The Advisory Council began work on May 3 and will finish by the end of the year. The Council seems especially capable of dealing with these issues,” the Commissioner says, “and we can expect some proposals from them deserving of consideration.”

During the question-and-answer

period, the Secretary focuses on what is being done—on what can be done—about the bad publicity.

Commissioner Cardwell replies that a response to the *Chicago Today* series has been written by Professor Richard E. Johnson of the University of Georgia. Dr. Johnson is a nationally recognized authority on insurance and is a former executive of two leading private insurance firms. SSA's Office of Public Affairs is negotiating with the *New York Times* News Service, the Commissioner says, to distribute the Johnson article. The Commissioner also notes that former HEW Secretary Wilbur Cohen is writing a rebuttal which will be available later in the month.

9:40 a. m.

Meeting adjourned, Commissioner Cardwell speaks privately with the Secretary for a few minutes before leaving the Chart Room.

9:45 a. m.

Commissioner Cardwell and Deputy Commissioner Hess meet briefly in the hallway outside the Chart Room with Lew Helm, Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. Helm tells the Commissioner that his office would be available to lend assistance to SSA in rebutting the *Chicago Today* series of articles criticizing the Social Security program.

9:50 a. m.

Stanley Thomas, Assistant Secretary for Human Development, catches the Commissioner just as he is preparing to leave the building and requests a brief meeting. Commissioner Cardwell, Deputy Commissioner Hess, and Thomas duck into a small anteroom nearby. Thomas says he met the day before with the National Council on Children and Youth and that this organization would like SSA to undertake a program to locate an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 disabled children who are eligible for, but not enrolled in, the SSI program.

"You're saying a . . . well, a sort of

# The Screwing of the Average Man

by David Hapgood

A Washington Monthly book  
published by Doubleday.

"The best account I have seen of how the system is rigged from maternity ward to beyond the grave to keep us broke so the rich can go on getting richer."

—Russell Baker

"The Establishment will rate this one X, but, the general reading public, or, 'screwees,' should find the book an eye-opening pleasure."

—Publisher's Weekly

"Hapgood is right on target. . . . This book is in the great tradition of The Washington Monthly and that means it's 'must reading.' "

—Herbert Denenberg

former Commissioner of Insurance  
State of Pennsylvania

David Hapgood's program "The Screwing of the Average Man" can be heard on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" Thursdays and Saturdays.

SSI alert for children. Right?" the Commissioner asks Thomas.

"Yeah, it would be something like that."

Commissioner Cardwell asks how they want to proceed. Thomas replies that, tentatively, a feasibility study for a pilot program would be conducted first. Maybe five states. The Commissioner says he will have his people look into it and get back to Thomas.

"They want a rush on this," Thomas says.

"So what else is new?"

**10:05 a. m.**

Commissioner Cardwell and Deputy Commissioner Hess leave HEW, North, for SSA headquarters in suburban Baltimore. During the hour-long journey, the discussion covers the morning's session with the Secretary, the remainder of the day's agenda, and an upcoming meeting with Mayor Donald Schaefer of Baltimore on the new downtown building.

**11:20 a. m.**

Arrival at SSA headquarters.

The Commissioner's Woodlawn office on the ninth floor of the Altmeyer Building is a near replica of the one he has just left in Washington but has a few more personal touches.

**11:30 a. m.**

A closed luncheon meeting with several members of the executive staff is held and runs until 12:50.

Doris Conley, the Commissioner's secretary at Woodlawn, told *OASIS* that working luncheons are more often the rule than the exception. "The travel time between Washington and Baltimore breaks up the rhythm of the work day," Doris explained. "With the Commissioner's tight schedule, that hour lost in travel is very important. We often find it necessary to schedule meetings through the lunch hour."

**1:00 p. m.**

This is the Commissioner's regular

Wednesday meeting with all bureau directors and assistant commissioners.

Commissioner Cardwell opens the meeting by briefly reporting items of interest discussed in his meetings with Secretary Weinberger and other HEW officials during the past week.

One item the Commissioner talks about is a growing consensus among HEW staffers to lobby for restricting the use of the social security number as a general identification number. Their thinking, the Commissioner reports, is that such restriction would help protect public privacy and prevent a monolithic computer filing of citizens' records and activities.

"I think the privacy issue is one of legitimate concern," the Commissioner says, "but I'm not sure we want to support this particular move. I think the emphasis is wrong. It should be on the proliferation of the data itself—on the actual need of this or that institution to have information and not on their means of... well, filing or classifying it. They can always adopt their own numbering systems.

"What I'm saying is this. By concentrating on restricting the use of a social security number as an identification number, we sidestep more basic issues of individual privacy. [Pause] Am I right on this?"

After a brief discussion, the bureau and office heads are asked to prepare memos on their positions.

The Commissioner also reports Secretary Weinberger's concern about the recent "bad press" given social security and outlines the steps taken to rebut printed misstatements.

Another item reported is an agreement reached with the Treasury Department to issue SSI replacement checks without waiting to see if the original check was negotiated.

"A small victory—but a victory," the Commissioner says.

He then turns the discussion to the new Federal Labor Standards Act and its effect on SSA operations. The new Act *requires* that clerical and many

technical employees be paid for any overtime work rather than be given the option of compensatory time off. There is a general consensus that the Act could detrimentally affect SSA operations.

A quick around-the-table check with each bureau and office follows. Are there any problems? Is there anything to report? Any comments?

Input is sparse this week. Within 10 minutes, everyone present has either spoken or declined to speak and the last half hour is turned over to an Office of Research and Statistics committee studying proposed changes in the disability program.

2:45 p. m.

Bureau of District Office Operations Director Robert Bynum has asked for a brief meeting with the Commissioner. The schedule does not indicate what will be discussed.

Commissioner Cardwell and Bynum seat themselves at a small office sidetable over coffee. After a few comments on the weather, the Commissioner says he is planning a meeting sometime later with bureau directors and assistant commissioners to frankly discuss problems and accomplishments of the past year. The meeting, like an earlier one in May, would be held informally, outside SSA, and probably last two days.

"I think that's a good idea," Bynum says. "It's . . . it's a good way to open communications channels among our offices."

"Yes, we can look at what we've done thus far, look at any problems, look at any mistakes we've made," the Commissioner said. "The kind of organizations which worry me the most are those that close ranks and are not ready to admit mistakes."

Bynum and the Commissioner then turn to a discussion of administrative entanglements plaguing the SSI leads program and to the rationale for a zero-base analysis of BDOO operations.

The latter topic is of special concern. It involves a far-reaching

analysis of the present work force and operating systems within BDOO. Such an analysis begins at a "zero-base" with no assumptions and proceeds to evaluate what resources and operations are necessary to achieve organizational goals. Bynum expresses concern that the analysis will interfere with processing of field office workloads. The Commissioner says the task force for the analysis will be as unobtrusive as possible and that other bureaus are also slated to undergo the same thing.

They then discuss an invitation from the National Council of Social Security Management Associations to speak at their convention in San Francisco this October. Bynum says he will accept the invitation to speak and Commissioner Cardwell says he can make no commitment at this time but will note it on his calendar as a possibility.

3:30 p. m.

A meeting with Texas business executive Mitchell Hart has been scheduled and *OASIS* given permission to sit in. However, Hart requests a private session with Commissioner Cardwell to talk about his data processing firm's problems in obtaining subcontracts from carriers which process Medicare claims.

4:30 p. m.

Commissioner Cardwell is slated to meet with BHI Director Thomas Tierney and Tierney's committee on National Health Insurance. However, the meeting with Hart runs longer than expected. At 5 o'clock, with the Hart meeting still in session, Commissioner Cardwell asks Deputy Commissioner Hess to chair the National Health Insurance meeting.

"It isn't uncommon for the Deputy Commissioner to take over for me when there are schedule conflicts," Commissioner Cardwell says. "He is an exceptional administrator. . . a fine person. I believe Art Hess reflects the kind of leadership we want to develop here."

Hess apologizes to the committee for the delay, says he realizes the time is inadequate but that another meeting can be arranged later. He then asks for a report on committee problem areas and asks if any assistance from the Commissioner's office is needed.

Deputy Commissioner Hess has the same directness, the same decisiveness in these sessions as the Commissioner. Yet there is a difference in their manner, which may be traced to their professional backgrounds. Hess approaches a problem with the probing exactness of a lawyer (which he is), and the Commissioner brings to a problem the analytical detachment of an ex-budget officer (which he is).

#### 5:10 p. m.

The Commissioner's meeting with Mitchell Hart ends; since Deputy Commissioner Hess has taken the meeting with the NHI committee, the Commissioner decides to squeeze another meeting into the day's calendar.

On any given day, there are more people waiting to see the Commissioner than can be scheduled. Many appointments must be postponed or fitted into breaks in the schedule. Doris Conley earlier notified an inter-bureau committee studying SSI provisions for drug addicts and alcoholics that they would be "on hold" that afternoon. She now calls them in.

During the few minutes it takes the committee members to make their way through the maze of corridors and up the elevator to the ninth floor of the Altmeyer Building, Commissioner Cardwell calls his wife. He assures her that he will be on time for his son's birthday celebration at seven.

The major thrust of the discussion with the new committee is toward resolution of a misunderstanding between SSA and New York City officials. NYC officials erroneously believed that SSI would pick up drug addicts and alcoholics disabled by their addiction alone.

Deputy Commissioner Art Hess spoke with OASIS earlier about the

demands made upon the Commissioner by the schedule he keeps. "As you can see, one meeting often runs into another. And the day's itinerary is subject to change at a moment's notice. Handling this sort of workload calls for a quick transition of thought and a refocusing of attention upon a completely different—but equally complex—set of data. It's a helluva job."

#### 6:10 p. m.

Meeting ends; Commissioner Cardwell asks that Doris have Willie bring the car around to begin the 45-mile drive home.

Because today is his son's birthday, he is able to gracefully bow out of a Washington engagement he would otherwise be expected to attend. The missed engagement is a dinner at the Washington Sheraton-Carlton Hotel where Wilbur Cohen, former HEW Secretary and an old friend of the Commissioner's, will be the evening speaker.

"I do regret not attending the dinner this evening. But not that much, I guess. One of the toughest parts of this job is separating family obligations from work obligations. I don't like to take the work home. . . to have it intrude on all facets of my life. I like a few hours of leisure away from it all."

At home, the Commissioner usually sequesters himself in his den with a new best-seller or joins Mary Louise for a few hands of bridge with neighborhood friends. During the fall and winter months, he follows the fate of the Capital city's football team, the Washington Redskins.

Much of his free time is spent with his family. Two of his four sons—David Bryan, 18, and John Richard, 10—live at home and the two elder sons, James, Jr., 26, and Mark Edward, 24, are married and live in other areas. Vacations for the Commissioner and his family are rare and therefore highly valued. Recently the Cardwell family managed to break away for a four-day vacation. ■

# P-38, Where Are You?

by William D. White

In the years since the introduction of the volunteer army and the consequent rise in military salaries, manpower costs have been a frequent target for complaint among critics of the defense budget. This, with the still-high spending on strategic nuclear forces, has attracted more attention than all other defense items combined. In this setting, the time may have come for a fresh look at our tactical air power—the fighter planes and bombers which are designed for uses other than a full-scale nuclear war with the Russians.

No other nation counts so heavily on air power for its conventional military strength or spends so much on its tactical air forces as the United States. By conservative estimate, the direct costs of operating, maintaining, and modernizing U. S. tactical air forces will amount to more than \$17 billion in fiscal 1975. Including an apportioned share of non-mission support costs and general military overhead, tactical air power will consume fully one-fourth of the 1975 defense budget. If the present trend continues, through 1980 direct spending on U. S. tactical air forces is projected to exceed \$100 billion (in constant fiscal year 1975 dollars), and indirect costs related to these elements of the mission forces will add another \$40 billion or more.

Such impressive figures have been

*William D. White is a former Defense Department official. This article is adapted from his book, U. S. Tactical Air Power: Missions, Forces, and Costs, to be published this month by The Brookings Institution.*

achieved by a consistent adherence to what might be described as a strategy of “maximum technological substitution”—the notion that each new bit of technology should be incorporated in a weapon and distributed to the armed forces with the least possible delay. These soaring costs for military hardware have, however, led many to suspect that this philosophy has been carried too far.

Since World War II the unit cost of producing a first-line U. S. tactical combat aircraft has doubled, on the average, once every four years. Part of this growth has been caused by inflation, but most is attributable to the growing size and technical complexity of the aircraft themselves, and to the declining rate of production that has followed the rise in unit costs.

As the newest generation of fighter aircraft emerges, the problem of rising unit costs is reaching proportions that demand a basic change in our military posture, simply because we will not be able to maintain the same number of planes without either severely curtailing their customary rate of modernization or dramatically increasing the \$5 billion we spend annually on major weapons investment to as much as double its current level.

Beyond this, the course of present policy on tactical air power is clear for only the next two or three years. The current projection is for roughly constant budgets and force levels through fiscal year 1978; during that time, the pace of modernization will