

## Warner Amendment (#2071) to S. 1789

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The largest-ever backlog of federal retirement and benefits claims has accumulated at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in recent years. In January of 2012, OPM's retiree backlog exceeded 62,000 cases. Retirees were routinely waiting for more than a year to receive earned benefits. The backlogs for processing death benefit claims stretched to almost two full years and other types of claims, such as court-ordered benefits, face similarly lengthy delays.

This year, OPM has begun to make limited progress in an effort to reverse the tide of backlogs. The agency has hired new adjudicators and customer service staff, and has begun to change some internal processes. Unfortunately, OPM is still intrinsically tied to a paper-based process for retirement and benefits claims and is unprepared for a massive influx of new claims.

More than 551,000 people work for the Postal Service and just over 31% are *currently* eligible to retire. If voluntary retirements are taken into account, the pool of prospective retirees will skyrocket to 283,000 people. Therefore, the Warner amendment focuses on three key reporting requirements.

### **Amendment Summary**

The amendment requires OPM to submit to Congress, the Government Accountability Office, and the public, monthly reports that:

- Evaluate the timeliness, completeness and accuracy of information submitted on behalf of retiring agency employees by the Postal Service in comparison with the performance of other federal agencies.
- Indicate the total number of retirement applications that are pending action by OPM and the number of months each application has been pending.

The amendment also requires OPM to provide a timetable for an ongoing retirement systems modernization project first initiated in 2008 which—once completed—will enable OPM to receive relevant personnel information electronically from agency payroll processing entities. The project involves the five major federal payroll processors, of which the U.S. Postal Service was the pilot agency and a key contributor. OPM has yet to establish a firm “go-live” date for this technology project. The Warner Amendment requires OPM to consider the milestones established by payroll processors participating in the retirement systems modernization project in its own formulation of a timetable for completion of its retirement systems modernization.

**It is critically important that Congress takes the opportunity to gather key data about the backlog before a deluge of retirees enters the system over the next few years.**