

America's Leaders

Farewell To A Great Bureaucrat



By Jeffrey R. Lewis

(NAPSA)—Quiet but effective, Jo Anne B. Barnhart, the retiring commissioner of Social Security, did a common thing uncommonly well.

In an era when generating political spin points, trumping the opposition and seeking ideological achievement have become the principal determinants of leadership, her commitment to being a reserved, focused and dedicated manager and leader is a remarkable accomplishment. Her work and legacy should not be ignored.

Her agency, the Social Security Administration, has more than 1,300 offices and 65,000 employees nationwide. Each month it must get out more than 53 million benefit checks and each year take nearly 5 million new applications for benefits.

Jo Anne Barnhart has led the agency with grace and has earned the admiration of many who worked with and for her. Not allowing herself to be caught by the swirling congressional and White House Social Security debate, she concentrated on running the agency.

At Social Security, she developed a service delivery plan immediately after arriving at the agency and used it to drive her budget requests—and the president and Congress have, in large part, supported them.

In addition, she made the bud-

get process as transparent as possible. Her budgets were performance based and the claims she made on treasury resources were repeatedly pegged to results that sped up processing times, reduced backlogs and created procedures that would pay large dividends in the future by making administrative sense of a morass of complicated program rules.

Although many think of Social Security as a retirement program, most of the agency's administrative resources—more than half—are spent on disability cases. And it is here where Ms. Barnhart made her greatest mark.

For decades, administration of the disability part of Social Security strangled the agency's resources. Commissioner Barnhart made it modern, modifying a monolithic decision process that caused people to wait for up to two or three years to receive a benefit award.

On her watch, more than 25 million people became entitled to benefits; one-sixth of the population received more than 600 million benefit checks annually.

Over the past five years, Ms. Barnhart has turned a bureaucracy into one of the most effective federal agencies serving the elderly and disabled. She leaves a legacy of extraordinary service and dedication to all Americans.

Jeffrey R. Lewis is the president of the Heinz Family Philanthropies (jlewis@heinzoffice.org)