



# HEATHER SCHREIBER'S SOCIAL SECURITY ADVISOR

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HAPPY 86<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY, SOCIAL SECURITY

## Social Security Planning for Retirement

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**Happy 86th Birthday, Social  
Security! Thanks for Giving Me  
Your Digits.**

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Planning Conversation**



## Social Security Outlook Cloudy After Firing of Top Executive

In July, President Biden fired Andrew Saul, who had been Commissioner of the SSA. The ouster of a former President Trump appointee led to Democratic support and Republican criticism. An acting commissioner already has been appointed, but the longer-term question is how these events will impact prospects for meaningful improvements to Social Security's financial strength.

### Down, Then Out

President Biden asked for the resignations of commissioner Andrew Saul and his deputy, David Black, early last month. Black complied but Saul refused to resign. On July 9, 2021, Saul was handed his walking papers.

Kilolo Kijakazi, deputy commissioner for retirement and disability policy, has been named the acting commissioner. Press reports indicate a search is underway for permanent replacements.

### Behind the Scenes

The shakeup described above was unusual. Social Security commissioners are approved by the Senate to serve a six-year term. Historically, they've remained in office after Presidential turnover, even if a new political party comes to the White House.

The move may have been unprecedented, but it was not totally unexpected. As early as last December, *The Washington Post* was reporting that advocates for disability claimants and federal unions wanted Saul removed.

Upon Saul's firing, a White House official stated that Saul has undermined and politicized Social Security disability benefits and terminated the agency's telework policy that was utilized by up to 25% of the agency's workforce. Officials also stated that he failed to repair the SSA's relationships with relevant federal employee unions (considering the context of COVID-19 workplace safety planning), reduced due process protections for benefits appeals hearings, and had taken other actions that run contrary to the mission of the agency and the President's policy agenda.

Saul, meanwhile, insisted that he remained the "duly confirmed Social Security commissioner." He was approved by a 77-16 Senate vote in 2019, so he still had four more years in office, according to Saul.

Republicans contended that the SSA had worked smoothly during the pandemic, despite management challenges, and termed Saul's firing a politicization of Social Security.

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