

MEDICARE FINANCES IMPERILED

Program insolvent in 8 years, says government report

The Associated Press

Medicare will run out of money sooner than expected, and Social Security's financial problems can't be ignored either, the government said Tuesday in a sobering checkup on programs vital to the middle class.

The report from program trustees says Medicare will become insolvent in 2026 — three years earlier than previously forecast. Its giant trust fund for inpatient care won't be able to fully cover projected medical bills starting at that point.

The report says Social Security will become insolvent in 2034 — no change from the projection last year.

The warning serves as a reminder of major issues left to languish while Washington plunges deeper into partisan strife. Because of the deterioration in Medicare's finances, officials said the Trump administration will be required by law to send Congress a plan next year to address the problems, after the president's budget is submitted.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a statement that there's time to fix the problems.

"The programs remain secure," he said. Medicare "is on track to meet its obligations to beneficiaries well into the next decade."

"However, certain long-term issues persist," the statement added. "Lackluster economic growth in previous years, coupled with an aging population, has contributed to the projected shortages for both Social Security and Medicare."

Social Security recipients are likely to see a cost-of-living increase of about 2.4 percent next year, working out to roughly \$31 a month, government experts said.

At the same time, the monthly Medicare "Part B" premium for outpatient care paid by most beneficiaries is projected to rise by about \$1.50, to \$135.50.

Both the cost-of-living increase and the Medicare outpatient premium are not officially determined until later in the year, and the initial projections can change.

More than 62 million retirees, disabled workers, spouses and surviving children receive Social Security benefits. The average monthly payment is \$1,294 for all beneficiaries. Medicare provides health insurance for about 60 million people, most of whom are 65 or older.

Together the two programs

have been credited with dramatically reducing poverty among older people and extending life expectancy for Americans. Financed with payroll taxes collected from workers and employers, Social Security and Medicare account for about 40 percent of government spending, excluding interest on the federal debt.

But demands on both programs are increasing as America ages.

Unless lawmakers act, both programs face the prospect of being unable to cover the full cost of promised benefits. With Social Security that could mean sharply reduced payments for some retirees, many of whom are already on tight budgets. For Medicare, it could mean that hospitals, nursing homes and other providers of medical care would be paid only part of their agreed-upon fees.

New top cops for village

BY STEFANIE DAZIO
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The Hempstead Village board of trustees voted Tuesday to appoint two lieutenants to serve as the police department's top brass in the wake of three retirements.

Former Chief Michael McGowan, Assistant Chief Joseph Sortino and Deputy Chief Mark Matthews retired May 31.

The board voted unanimously to appoint Lt. Paul Johnson as acting chief and Lt. Richard Holland as acting deputy chief.

However, Lt. Patrick Cooke's appointment to a middle position — acting assistant chief — was voted down 4-1. Only Mayor Don Ryan voted in favor of it.

Trustee Jeffery Daniels declined to comment on Cooke's vote, because he said it is a personnel issue.

Deputy Mayor Charles Renfroe had asked if the board could table votes on Cooke and Holland but Trustee LaMont Johnson — whose brother Lonnie is a lieutenant in the department — said he disagreed and wanted to vote on them Tuesday.

The resolutions were added to the agenda Tuesday as addendum items. Only Holland, wearing plain clothes, appeared to be present at the meeting.

Johnson and Holland were hired in 1997, according to Newsday payroll records. Cooke was hired in 1989.

They will be sworn in Thursday, Ryan said.

The department has been in turmoil in recent months following the arrest of Officer Randy Stith, allegations of racism in the promotions process and the decision not to renew the contracts of Sortino and Matthews, which would have brought them back down to the Civil Service rank of lieutenant if they had not retired.

The promotions on Tuesday could trigger a ripple effect across the department if their positions are back-filled.

SINI: TWO NASSAU OFFICERS ARRESTED

Two Nassau police officers have been arrested following a grand jury investigation, Suffolk County District Attorney Timothy Sini said in a news release Tuesday.

Sini, in a statement, said his office "has initiated a grand jury investigation, which has resulted in the arrest of two Nassau County Police officers."

He declined to elaborate and did not name the officers, saying only his probe is ongoing and Nassau police are cooperating.

The attorney for one officer, Mark Alter, of Garden City, said in a statement his client "will enter a not guilty plea at his arraignment and he looks forward to being vindicated through the court process."

The other officer's lawyer, Brian Griffin, of Garden City, said his client is a "well-regarded and highly respected police officer having served and protected the residents of both New York City and Nassau."

Griffin said the officer "will enter a not guilty plea and we will vigorously litigate this matter."

Det. Lt. Richard LeBrun, a police spokesman, declined to comment, as did Nassau Police Benevolent Association President James McDermott.

— NICOLE FULLER AND MICHAEL O'KEEFFE



Remembering Robert Kennedy

Fifty years have passed since the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.), seen here during a Feb. 1, 1968, news conference at the Overseas Press Club in Manhattan.

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