

retirement security benefits of pensions. Second, the House of Representatives passed important technical corrections to the Pension Protection Act of 2006.

The three-hour hearing garnered attention from key lawmakers, including JEC Chair, **Senator Chuck Schumer** (D-NY). "Senator Casey is right to point out that strong public pension plans benefit more than just the workers they are designed to serve," he said.

Schumer also noted that "these plans help fuel the economy by driving investment to venture capital funds that play a critical role in nurturing American innovation and breakthroughs across the technological spectrum — including life saving advances in health care. So, it is critical that we in Congress do all we can to ensure that public defined benefit pension plans are protected."

In his opening remarks, Senator Casey highlighted the role of pensions in providing retirement security, recruiting workers, stimulating the economy and providing investment capital. He also stated his concerns that "moving billions of dollars of retirement assets from defined benefit plans to defined contribution plans adds substantially to the risk we are asking ordinary Americans to take."

As reported in *Pensions and Investments*, Senator Casey also remarked that "at a minimum, we should ensure that the circumstances that led to the decline of defined benefit

plans in the corporate world are not repeated in the public or Taft-Hartley sectors."

Also in attendance were **Rep. Kevin Brady** (R-TX), **Senator Amy Klobuchar** (D-MN), and **Representative Elijah Cummings** (D-MD). Committee members probed a wide range of issues related to pensions, and remarked that economic security issues are top-of-mind for their constituents.

Testifying at the hearing were: **Mr. Sherrill Neff**, Partner, Quaker BioVenture; **Dr. Christian Weller**, Associate Professor at the University of Massachusetts and Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress; **Mr. Will Pryor**, a firefighter and Chair of the Los Angeles County Employees Retirement Association; and **Barbara Bovjberg**, Director, Education Workforce, and Income Security with the Government Accountability Office.

At the conclusion of the three-hour long session, Senator Casey asked the panelists for their recommendations on what Congress can do with respect to pensions. The panelists agreed that public pensions do not require new Federal attention, but that work is needed to restore retirement security for private sector workers and to address the national healthcare crisis.

The headline of the *Bureau of National Affairs* July 11th article sums up the hearing: "Public Pension Plans Getting It Right, Speakers Tell Senate Committee Hearing."

DOJ Releases Hometown Heroes Guide

The Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) just released the *Attorney General's Guide to the Hometown Heroes Survivors' Benefits Act*, which can be found at www.psob.gov. This guide is a useful tool for any agency or organization that is assisting survivors with the process of applying for survivor death benefits through the Hometown Heroes Act.

President Bush signed the Hometown Heroes Act into law in December 2003. The provisions of the Hometown Heroes Act were finally put into practice in September 2006, almost three years later. Although it took an extraordinary amount of time to execute the Act, NAPO was pleased to see that the BJA had incorporated many of NAPO's suggestions in the final regulations for implementation of the Hometown Heroes Act.

Over the past two years, however, NAPO has been frustrated with the BJA's implementation of the Act. In July

of last year, four years after the passage of the law, approximately 200 claims had been filed by families under the Hometown Heroes Act. Out of those 200 claims, the BJA had only completely reviewed fifty cases and only six of those cases had been approved to receive benefits under the Act.

On June 24, after a year of calling on the BJA to act more quickly on determining grieving survivors' claims, NAPO was pleased to hear from the Director of the BJA, **Domingo Herraiz**, that his office and the PSOB office had made substantial improvements in claim reviews and claim turn around time. By June, the PSOB office had determined 238 claims and had only 69 cases pending. NAPO continues to work closely with the BJA to ensure that survivors get the help and benefits they deserve in a fair and timely manner.

If you have any questions regarding the Hometown Heroes Act or the PSOB program, please feel free to contact the NAPO office at (800) 322-NAPO.

Congress Passes Bill Expanding Emergency 911 Infrastructure

On July 14, Congress passed legislation that grants internet phone companies the legal right to access the nation's existing emergency 911 infrastructure. The bill, H.R. 3403, applies to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) providers such as Vonage, Skype or Lingo. Currently, many customers of such VoIP services can dial 911 in case of emergency; however, not all VoIP users have access to enhanced 911 services that transmit a caller's physical location and other important information to law enforcement.

The bill requires the Federal Communications Commission to issue regulations granting VoIP companies access to the nation's traditional 911 infrastructure, which

is handled by Bell telephone companies. Landline calls and wireless calls are already connected to this infrastructure, which makes it relatively easy for 911 operators to trace calls or route the calls to the nearest public safety personnel. H.R. 3403 amends the Wireless Communications and Public Safety Act of 1999 to give this same access to VoIP services.

The bill would also give state and local entities the authority to impose and collect 911-related fees from VoIP providers.

The President is expected to sign the bill into public law. ●

A defendant in a lawsuit involving large sums of money was talking to his lawyer. "If I lose this case, I'll be ruined."

"It's in the judge's hands now," said the lawyer.

"Would it help if I sent the judge a box of cigars?"

"Oh no! This judge is a stickler for ethical behavior. A stunt like that would prejudice him against you. He might even hold you in contempt of court. In fact, you shouldn't even smile at the judge."

Within the course of time, the judge rendered a decision in favor of the defendant. As the defendant left the courthouse, he said to his lawyer, "Thanks for the tip about the cigars. It worked!"

"I'm sure we would have lost the case if you'd sent them."

"But, I did send them."

"What? You did?" said the lawyer, incredulously.

"Yes. That's how we won the case."

"I don't understand," said the lawyer.

"It's easy. I sent the cigars to the judge, but enclosed the plaintiff's business card."



The growing problem of employee theft.

A young executive was leaving the office late one evening when he found the CEO standing in front of a shredder with a piece of paper in his hand.

"Listen," said the CEO, "this is a very sensitive and important document here, and my secretary has gone for the night. Can you make this thing work for me?"

"Certainly," said the young executive. He turned the machine on, inserted the paper, and pressed the start button.

"Excellent, excellent!" said the CEO, as his paper disappeared inside the machine. "I just need one copy..."

PBA CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Have you moved recently, or are in the process of moving? If so, we need your new address! Please notify the PBA office of your change of address so that you won't miss any important mailings.

Name: _____ Social Security Number: _____
(Your SSN helps us identify you correctly in case of similar names.)

New Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____

Phone Number: (Home) _____ (Work) _____ (Cell) _____

E-mail address: _____

Return to: Attn: Membership Secretaries, Florida PBA, 300 E. Brevard Street, Tallahassee, FL 32301

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