

Social Security pulls personal records from Internet

■ **SITE:** Officials will hold a series of forums to discuss ways to increase security for the online service

By Alice Ann Love
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Accused of putting Americans' privacy at risk, the Social Security Administration on Wednesday suspended an Internet service that gave taxpayers access to their earnings and benefits records.

"The Internet is a new world, and we want to make sure we can provide the highest level of security for our beneficiaries and our workers," acting Social Security Commissioner John J. Callahan said.

He said the online service will be disabled for at least 60 days while he holds a series of forums across the country with privacy and computer security experts and the public about how to ease fears.

Advice also will be sought from banks that provide electronic financial services. "We want to get the benefit of their experience," Callahan said.

After that, the agency will consider whether new safeguards are needed for the Internet service, including options such as giving people personal access codes or allowing them to request that their individual records not be placed in the database.

Social Security's entire Internet site will be inaccessible for two or three days while the database is being disabled, but general information and documents about the nation's retirement program will be back online soon.

Taxpayers will still be able to request information about their personal records through electronic mail to the agency, but reports will be sent through regular mail, rather than via the Internet.

Callahan said requests from lawmakers earlier this week, questions raised by computer experts interviewed in news reports and phone calls from the public all convinced him to pull the service.

Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., and Sens. William Roth, R-Del., Daniel Patrick Moynihan, D-N.Y., and John Chafee, R-R.I., had sent a letter to the agency Tuesday saying the online service "may not afford sufficient protections against violations

of individual privacy."

Rep. Jim Bunning, R-Ky., chairman of the House's subcommittee on Social Security, also wrote to the agency's inspector general, asking for a security review and report to his panel by April 22.

And Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Pa., said he is introducing legislation to ban information about individuals' earnings, tax records and Social Security benefits on the Internet.

The Social Security Administration has offered people access to their earnings and benefits reports for more than a decade if they sign and mail in a paper request form. Between 3 million and 4 million Americans a year do so.

But using regular mail takes up to four to six weeks and costs the government millions of dollars in postage each year. Six months ago, the agency began accepting electronic mail requests and last month it made it possible for taxpayers to retrieve their records online.

After national news reports about the service earlier this week, the number of people using it jumped from 3,000 a day to about 8,500.

Critics say anyone with knowledge of an-

other person's Social Security number, their mother's maiden name and the state where they were born could access the records electronically to learn their job history, salary and other information.

Callahan said security experts were consulted and some safeguards were built into the system to maintain privacy. These include encryption of information as it goes back and forth between the requester and Social Security, so it can't be understood if intercepted.

However, the agency originally discarded other ideas, such as access codes, after weighing them against cost and user-friendliness concerns.

"It is important to note that ... we have received no allegations of individuals fraudulently accessing the Social Security Administration records," either online or by mail, he said.

The old-fashioned paper request forms require a signature, but the agency does not maintain signatures on file for matching requests, so it is not clear how the paper procedure is more secure than the electronic version.

University student charged with assaulting professor

■ **ATTACK:** Adjunct Professor Douglas Wilson was allegedly attacked by Will Childs in Gilbert Hall Tuesday, according to police reports

By Ryan Maughn
Community Reporter

A 24-year-old law student was charged with assault Tuesday when he allegedly attacked an adjunct professor of the business school over a personal dispute.

According to police reports, Will Childs ap-

proached Adjunct Professor Douglas Wilson at about 7:05 a.m. in Wilson's office in Gilbert Hall regarding a financial dispute. When the dispute could not be settled, Childs slapped Wilson across the face and put his other arm around Wilson's neck and choked him.

The professor was able to break free of the grasp, police reported, and fell back into a radiator. He then ran into the reception area of the office where Childs caught him and pushed his head into a desktop computer, injuring Wilson's forehead.

Childs left the scene shortly after the incident which was reported to police at 7:14 a.m. When the investigating officer from the Eugene police department arrived at the office Wilson received a call from Childs. The officer requested that Wilson ask Childs to return to the office, which he did.

Childs is presently the chief justice of the constitutional court at the university.

After an investigation Childs was arrested and charged with Assault IV. Neither individual would comment on the incident.

ET ALS

MISCELLANEOUS

The Multicultural Center is holding an open house today from noon to 4 p.m. in the MCC. For more information, call 346-4207.

Outdoor Program is sponsoring a workshop entitled "Intro to Whitewater Rafting" today at 7:30 p.m. in the EMU Outdoor Program Room. For more information, call 346-4365.

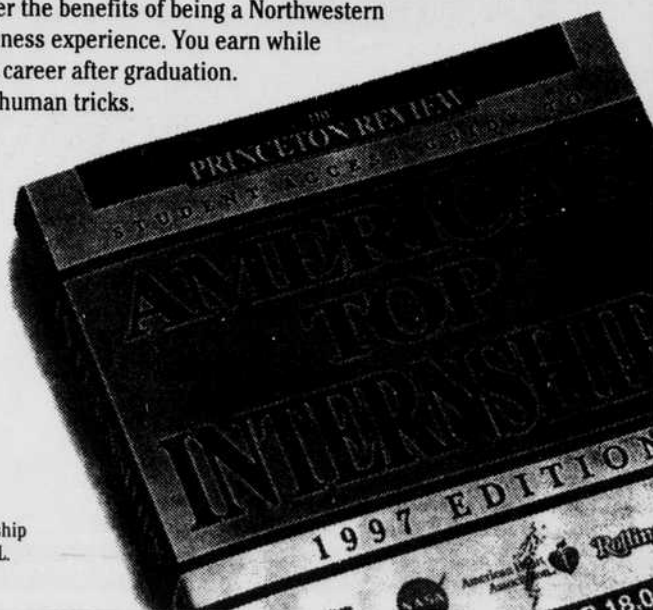
Ironie.
We're in
the top ten.
And
David
Letterman
needs to know.

We're pleased to announce that our College Agent Program has been named one of the ten best internships in the nation. The authors of America's Top Internships have ranked us above more than 2,000 other programs in the book including the "Late Show With David Letterman" internship. It's easy to understand why, when you consider the benefits of being a Northwestern Mutual life intern. You get real world business experience. You earn while you learn. You have an excellent shot at a career after graduation. And you don't have to perform any stupid human tricks.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
PLEASE CALL
VLASTA DUFFY
AT
(503) 223-7335

Northwestern
Mutual Life®
The Quiet Company®

For more information about a sales career or internship
with Northwestern Mutual Life, dial 1-800-CALL-NML.
<http://www.northwesternmutual.com>



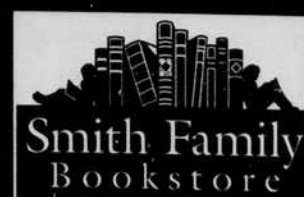
**Save \$\$\$
on
Textbooks!**

Bring your textbook
information to
Smith Family Bookstore

- Author
- Title
- Edition

We'll help you find
used copies that
will save you \$\$\$

Sell us those texts,
paperbacks & magazines
you no longer use.



One block from campus
(above Rainbow Optics)

768 E. 13th • (541) 345-1651

