

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Barbara Easterling Elected President of the Alliance

Barbara J. Easterling was elected President of the Alliance on Thursday, succeeding **George J. Kourpias**. The vote took place at a meeting of the Alliance's Executive Committee. Easterling, the former Secretary-Treasurer of the Communications Workers of America, pledged that the Alliance would aggressively educate both retirees and lawmakers on ways to strengthen Medicare, lower prescription drug costs, and preserve Social Security for future generations. "It is a great honor and privilege to be elected President of the Alliance for Retired Americans. This is a critical time for our nation. Our economy is in crisis, and our health care system is in dire need of reform – it is more important than ever that we educate and mobilize retirees on these issues," Easterling said.

"Barbara Easterling has dedicated her life to the fight for social and economic justice. She believes deeply in the power of grassroots organizing and collective action. She will be a great Alliance president," said Kourpias, who had led the Alliance since its inception in 2001. Easterling was the first woman ever to serve in the Communications Workers' second highest office, Secretary-Treasurer. She had also served as Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO. She has been a longtime supporter of the **Elizabeth Glaser** Pediatric AIDS Foundation and has served for many years on the board of governors of the United Way of America. She began her labor career as a telephone operator in Akron, Ohio.

Why Retirees Should Care About the Employee Free Choice Act

As he hands the baton to Barbara Easterling, George Kourpias has a message for members regarding the Employee Free Choice Act. "There is no doubt in my mind that the fate of workers and retirees is undeniably linked. We cannot have a solid, stable retirement unless we have a solid, stable middle class," said Mr. Kourpias. By standing together, union workers fought for and won better wages, health care and pensions, and safety and respect on the job. However, Mr. Kourpias is concerned that a great deal of what unions have achieved is crumbling in today's troubled economy. According to the National Labor Relations Board, in 2007 nearly 30,000 workers faced illegal employer retaliation for trying to join a union – that is five times as many as in 1967. "Workers and retirees must fight together to pass the Employee Free Choice Act so we can finally crack down on companies that break the law and try to block a worker's freedom to join a union," Mr. Kourpias declared. He advises seniors to talk to their children and grandchildren; polls have shown that younger workers may not be as aware of the benefits of collective bargaining. Seniors are also urged to call their elected officials in Washington through the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 202/224-3121.

Stimulus Legislation is Signed - Offers Checks for Seniors, Help for Unemployed

After passing the Senate late last week with a 60-38 vote, H.R. 1, "The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009" was signed by **President Obama** in Denver on Tuesday. Results of the final vote on the \$787 billion stimulus package compromise are available at http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=111&session=1&vote=00064. Stimulus checks for Social Security recipients were set at \$250, and should arrive in the mail by June 4. One provision to help make health insurance premiums more affordable and accessible for the unemployed offers federal subsidies to assist with COBRA costs. The subsidies cover 65% of the cost of COBRA premiums for up to nine months for workers laid off between Sept. 1, 2008, and Dec. 31, 2009, and whose annual incomes do not exceed \$125,000 for individuals or \$250,000 for families. Another provision allows COBRA participants to choose less-expensive health plans offered by their former employers.

Retiree Health Care a "Sticking Point" in Auto Bailout Negotiations

According to the *Detroit Free Press*, a condition of the auto industry bailout requiring carmakers to ask United Auto Workers to accept company stock to pay for 50% of their responsibility to a retiree health care trust fund has "become a major sticking point" in negotiations. To receive the full amount of the bailout loans, General Motors and Chrysler Group must demonstrate to the new Presidential Task Force on Autos by March 31 that they can reduce costs and improve competitiveness. The voluntary employee beneficiary association (VEBA) agreement was a large part of the 2007 UAW contract negotiated with GM to ensure that hundreds of thousands of retired hourly workers and their surviving spouses would continue to receive health care, and the union is worried that too much stock might leave the fund without enough money to pay for benefits. The negotiations follow an announcement last week by GM that the company will no longer offer medical benefits for retirees and dependents younger than 65 who receive Medicare.

Alliance's Lobby Week is Pronounced a Success

The past five days, the Alliance held its 2009 Lobby Week, during which retirees have had nearly 70 meetings with their U.S. Representatives and Senators. Alliance members have urged their elected officials to lower drug costs, improve Medicare, and pass the Employee Free Choice Act. "Our members fanned out across the country to reach a large number of elected officials, and for that I want to thank them," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

Alliance News

Mary Kuhlman has retired from the Alliance. A longtime friend of seniors as the Executive Assistant to the Executive Director, Ms. Kuhlman was with the National Council of Senior Citizens since 1993, and had been with the Alliance since its 2001 launch. "Mary is a person of great personal warmth, integrity, and loyalty," said **Edward F. Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "I am happy that she will enjoy a retirement that results from her great work on behalf of retirees." Mr. Coyle will be at the White House on Monday for the Fiscal Responsibility Budget Summit with the President. He was in Miami on Monday through Wednesday this week for the Elderly Housing Development & Operations Corp. (EHDOC) board of directors meeting.