

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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U.S. House Moves Forward on Health Care Reform

Three committee chairmen in the U.S. House have agreed to work together to pass similar health care reform legislation in their committees before the recess in August. According to *CQ Today*, **Charlie Rangel** (D-NY), Chair of the Committee on Ways and Means, **Henry Waxman** (D-CA) Chair of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and **George Miller**, (D-CA) Chair of the Committee on Education and Labor, made the agreement. These committees have overlapping jurisdiction over health care, and the chairmen hope that their coordinated efforts to pass similar legislation will ensure success with reform efforts. The Senate probably will not be able to move as quickly as the House. Senate Majority Leader **Harry Reid** (D-NV) will have to schedule more time for debate in his chamber than Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** (D-CA) will in the House. Senate Finance Committee Chairman **Max Baucus** (D-MT) said last week that he wants his committee to vote on an overhaul in June. A health overhaul in the Senate will have to be approved by Baucus' panel and by the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, chaired by Sen. **Ted Kennedy** (D-MA). Sen. Kennedy is recuperating from brain cancer treatment in Florida and has not announced a timetable for his committee to vote on a bill. "Health care reform should come as soon as possible, and it should provide early retirees the option to purchase Medicare coverage. Many of the 5.1 million Americans between 55-64 who lack health insurance are victims of mass layoffs," said **Barbara Easterling**, President of the Alliance.

Taxation of Employer-Provided Health Benefits is on the Table

The New York Times reported on Saturday that the **Obama** administration and Senator Baucus have indicated that they are open to the idea of taxing employee health benefits to offset the costs of health care reform. Eliminating "employer exclusion" would represent a tax increase for working families and retirees with employer provided insurance, and many policy analysts believe that this proposal would hurt efforts to expand access to quality, affordable health care for all Americans. The proposal would also undermine health care coverage by causing employers to discontinue the higher cost employee and retiree health care plans, disrupting health insurance for those who have coverage they like. "The Alliance opposes taxing employee health benefits because it would give employers an incentive to walk away," Alliance Secretary-Treasurer **Ruben Burks** said. "Americans bargained for these benefits, and have every right to expect to move forward and not backward."

Connecticut and Florida Alliance Chapters Take Action on Health Care, Housing

On Tuesday, Connecticut Alliance President and national Alliance Board Member **Kevin Lynch** attended a 400 person White House Regional Forum on Health Care in Burlington, Vermont. "Improving Medicare must be at the center of our nation's health care reform," said Lynch. At the forum, Lynch promoted President Obama's proposal to reduce wasteful taxpayer subsidies to

Medicare Advantage, and he stated his disapproval for proposals such as means-testing Medicare benefits and taxing employer-provided health benefits. The forum also drew 200 protesters, who rallied outside for single-payer health care. Lynch encourages all Alliance members to make their views known at www.healthreform.gov.

The Florida Alliance for Retired Americans (FLARA) kicked off its Legislative Conference with a press conference on Thursday. The event brought together senior activists and state legislators to promote retiree self-sufficiency through universal health care and affordable housing.

Medicare Advantage Fraud Becoming More Prominent in the World of Blogging

On Monday, *The Huffington Post* blog added its voice to the chorus of advocates declaring that seniors are being tricked into signing up for private Medicare Advantage plans rather than traditional Medicare. Companies that sell Medicare Advantage plans often tell seniors that their plans are better because they contain something the beneficiary does not currently have; however, they frequently fail to mention that the plans might have a much smaller network of providers and other holes that can lead to massive uncovered expenses. President Obama's budget proposal would trim Medicare Advantage funding by about \$177 billion over 10 years, which the administration plans to reinvest in universal health care.

Job Hunt Tips for Older Workers

With the economic downturn, retirees are increasingly finding themselves in financial trouble and needing to re-enter the workforce. The percentage of workers ages 65 and older in the labor force climbed to 17.3 percent in 2008 from 12 percent a decade ago, according to *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Retirees can begin receiving Social Security benefits at age 62, but see benefits rise by 8 percent each year retirement is delayed up until age 70. Several federal bills introduced in February are designed to make it easier for older Americans to either re-enter or remain in the workforce and provide tax incentives for companies that hire older workers. When searching for employment, older job seekers are urged to dismiss age-discrimination thoughts and instead focus on connecting with their interviewers. Other tips include: emphasizing capabilities rather than the duration of experience; acquiring basic computer skills and showing technology savvy; avoiding the placement of graduation dates on one's resume; practicing for interviews by preparing for questions such as, "Do you believe you are overqualified for this job?"; seeking out age-friendly employers; and using networking tools such as the web site LinkedIn.com.

Listen to Radio Interview with Edward Coyle Online

Alliance Executive Director **Edward Coyle** appeared on the radio program "The Union Edge" on Tuesday. Hear the podcast of the interview at <http://theunionedge.com/march-17%2C-2009-show>.

Did You Know...

A hospital may have a dozen or more rates for one procedure, depending on whether Medicare, Medicaid or a private insurer is paying the bill, said **Ruth Levin**, a senior V.P. for managed care of Continuum Health Partners, a nonprofit hospital system in New York (*The New York Times*).