

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Insurance Companies' Medicare Advantage Subsidies Begin to Disappear

The **Obama** administration's plan to rein in private Medicare drug plans began on Monday, when the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced cuts in payments for private Medicare Advantage plans in 2010. *The Wall Street Journal* reports that reimbursements to private insurers that administer Medicare Advantage plans would fall by 4% or more next year. About 10 million Medicare beneficiaries use the Medicare Advantage plan, and their health care costs the government an average of 12-19% more than other Medicare beneficiaries. President Obama proposes to use the savings from this move for health care reform, including Medicare reforms. Alliance President **Barbara Easterling** said, "President Obama is already producing results on his promise to make health care affordable. The Alliance applauds this step and is ready to help the administration reach the ultimate goal of universal health care for all."

AFL-CIO and Working America Offer Lifeline to America's Unemployed

On Tuesday, the AFL-CIO and Working America, its 2.5 million-member community affiliate, launched an online Unemployment LifeLine campaign to give America's unemployed workers more resources. At the site, www.unemploymentlifeline.com, people can enter their ZIP code and see a listing of available resources for workers in their area, such as where to go for unemployment insurance, nutritional assistance, heating subsidies, credit counseling, job training programs and much more. The site is the largest single online location where unemployed workers can find information nationwide.

Open Enrollment for Alliance's Retiree Health Plan

The Open Enrollment for the Alliance's Retiree Health Plan has been extended through April 30, 2009. If you need supplemental insurance to cover costs not covered by Medicare, do not wait! You still have time to enroll. During Open Enrollment, members of the Alliance and their spouses who are Medicare-eligible are guaranteed acceptance with no waiting periods regardless of pre-existing health conditions. Visit the web site www.araretireehealth.com for further details, or call 1-866-298-9117 to receive your Free Retiree Health Information Kit and your open enrollment application. No agent will call you - everything is handled through the mail.

Rep. Patrick Kennedy Secures Funding, Attends Rhode Island Alliance Health Fair

The Rhode Island Alliance, led by **John Pernorio**, hosted this year's HealthLink Wellness Health Fair on Tuesday in East Providence. Both Rep. **Patrick Kennedy** (D-RI), who has been key in securing funding for HealthLink Wellness, and **Edward Coyle**, **Executive Director** of the national Alliance, attended the event. After the fair, Rep. Kennedy left for Fenway Park in Boston, where he watched his father, Sen. **Edward Kennedy** (D-MA), throw out the first pitch of the Boston Red Sox opening game.

Do You Have a Quarter of a Million Dollars to Pay for Your Health Care?

Fidelity Investments, the mutual fund company, has calculated a retiree health care cost estimate annually since 2002. The estimate is for post-Medicare expenses for a 65-year old couple retiring this year without employer-provided retiree health care. *The Boston Globe* reports that this year's estimate, a staggering **\$240,000**, is a 6.7% increase from last year. Over-the-counter medications, long-term care and most dental services are not included in the estimate. "These numbers emphasize the importance of restructuring the current health care system," said Mr. Coyle. "Otherwise, an average couple will be too worried about medical bills to enjoy their retirement."

Oregon and Colorado Alliance Chapters Elect New Leaders

The Oregon and Colorado Alliances both recently elected new Presidents. With a theme of "Let's Do It!" the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans elected officers for two-year terms at their annual convention last month. **Gerald "Jerry" Morris**, a member of American Federation of Teachers (AFT)-Oregon Retirees, and a former AFT staff member, was elected President. The new Colorado President is **Vivian Stovall**. Two years ago, the Governor of Colorado appointed Ms. Stovall to the Blue Ribbon Panel for Transportation and Financing and the Colorado Commission on Aging. As an Aging Commissioner, she has visited numerous nursing facilities, senior high-rises and assisted living homes.

Grandfamilies Face Financial Pressure in Tough Economy

The Wall Street Journal this week highlighted additional strains faced by "grandfamilies," families where a grandparent is caring for children, in a recession. While being cared for by grandparents allows children to remain in families instead of foster care, older workers are facing additional challenges that make it hard to provide for their grandchildren. Despite a lower than average unemployment rate, older workers often have more trouble finding a new job and are out of work longer than younger workers. These troubles come at the same time the number of grandfamilies in America is growing – the Census Bureau estimated 4.7 million children, 6.5% of all kids in the U.S., lived in homes headed by a grandparent in 2007. Agencies working with grandparent caregivers have seen a recent increase in requests for emergency assistance to help pay for such basic necessities as rent, heat, and winter clothes. "Grandparents have such a unique place in children's lives," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "When those grandparents are actually raising their grandchildren, they deserve any help we can give them."

Reminder: 2009 Alliance Legislative Conference is June 15-18, 2009

The Alliance's 2009 Legislative Conference will be June 15-18, in Washington, DC at the Washington Hilton. Alliance members will have the opportunity to meet with Congressional representatives and Administration officials, organize grassroots activities to improve Medicare and strengthen retirement security, and voice their opinions in breakout sessions. To register, call 1-888-373-6497, go to www.unionvoice.org/retirees/events/conf_2009/details.tcl or e-mail **Joni Jones** at jjones@retiredamericans.org.