

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Senate Finance Committee Offers Options During Older Americans Month

May is Older Americans Month, and all month long Alliance members are focusing on the theme of “Retirees’ Stake in Health Care Reform.” The subject matter includes such items as allowing Americans 55-64 years old to buy into Medicare; improving the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit; and financing a public health care plan. Coinciding with this campaign, the Senate Finance Committee on Monday released its outline of the policy options on the table for financing health care reform. The Committee’s report served as the basis for a closed-door meeting of senators on Wednesday, when they debated how to pay for healthcare reform legislation that could carry a price tag of approximately \$1 trillion. The financing report includes many tax reforms and increases designed to raise revenue, as well as options for cutting spending on Medicare and Medicaid.

Many senior advocates have particular concerns about two of the options. One option, the taxation of health care benefits, is in the Committee’s proposal, but without specificity as to whether to tax the cost of the benefits or the income of the people receiving them. “We must ensure that tax code changes do not take away the incentive for employers to offers good health care benefits. Even limited taxation of health benefits could undermine employer coverage,” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance.

The second concern is a proposal to means-test Medicare Part D prescription drug premiums in the same way as Medicare Part B premiums. “There are savings to be had in Medicare Part D reform. Performing mandatory plan audits, for example, would save money, as would allowing Medicare to use its bulk purchasing power to negotiate for lower prices,” said **Edward F. Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “However, shifting the cost burden more to seniors with means testing is not the best answer.” During the final week of Older Americans Month, which comes while Congress has its Memorial Day recess, Alliance seniors are being asked to lobby their Members of Congress in their home districts. For talking points and background information to use at these meetings, please visit www.retiredamericans.org/ht/d/sp/i/12770/pid/12770. The Senate Finance and Health, Education, Labor and Pensions committees both plan to mark up legislation next month, as do their House counterparts.

Alliance Leadership Activity

On Wednesday, **Mr. Coyle** spoke at the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists convention in Atlanta. Also on Wednesday, the Alliance co-hosted a Capitol Hill congressional briefing with the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare. At the briefing, **Ms. Easterling** spoke of the need for Medicare reform to be a key part of the health care debate. On Friday, Ms. Easterling spoke at the Indiana Alliance’s annual convention in Indianapolis.

Study: Daytime Sleepiness in Seniors is Not a Normal Part of Aging

A new study suggests that seniors over 65 cope better with sleep loss than adults under the age of thirty. During the study, in which participants were kept awake for 26 consecutive hours, seniors were less impaired by sleep deprivation and had fewer unintentional sleep episodes. The study, published by the American Geriatrics Society, suggests that seniors who unintentionally fall asleep during the day or early evening should consult their doctor. "The sleepiness may be caused by undiagnosed sleep disorders, chronic medical conditions, or as a side effect of a medication," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

Write Stuff Winners

Congratulations and thanks to the following Alliance members who have recently had their letters to the editor published: **Helen Donovan, Joyce Hermanstorfer, James Hopkins, John Ingle, Gerald Lotierzo, Donna McGrath, Bruce Miller, Dorothy Seigel, Dorothea Stebbins, William Stevens, and Jean Stillwell**. If your letter has been published, please send us a copy and let us know at letters@retiredamericans.org. The Alliance sends a pen containing the words "The Write Stuff" to all those who have helped amplify our message with a letter.

Washington State to March for Universal Health Care on May 30

People throughout Washington State are answering **President Obama's** call to be part of the movement to enact health care for all in 2009. In Seattle, that response will come in the form of one of the state's largest marches for health care ever, drawing participants from all corners of the state, on Saturday, May 30. The event will include prominent community leaders, live music, and a march through the streets of Seattle. For more information, go to <http://may30march.org>.

Join Us for the Alliance Legislative Conference June 15-18, 2009

Less than four weeks remain until the Alliance's 2009 Legislative Conference, which will take place June 15-18 in Washington, DC at the Washington Hilton. Come and see your congressional representatives and share ideas with new Administration officials who are friendly on retiree issues! In seminars, sessions, and one-on-one meetings, you will be key in ensuring that seniors get the change we fought for in 2008. Scheduled speakers include Rep. **Jan Schakowsky** (D-IL); **Larry Cohen**, President of the Communications Workers of America; **James Hoffa**, General President, International Brotherhood of Teamsters; **Gerald McEntee**, International President, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; **R. Thomas Buffenbarger**, President, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers; and many others. To register, click on www.unionvoice.org/retirees/events/conf_2009/details.tcl, call 1-888-373-6497, or e-mail **Joni Jones** at jjones@retiredamericans.org.

Did You Know...

In 2007, about 30% of the 38 million, 55-and-older households in America lived in a community dedicated to people in their age group (*The Wall Street Journal*).