

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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August 28, 2009

Retirees Mourn the Loss of Senator Ted Kennedy

In a rare joint statement, Alliance President **Barbara J. Easterling**, Secretary-Treasurer **Ruben Burks**, and Executive Director **Edward F. Coyle** commented Wednesday on the death of Senator **Edward M. Kennedy**. “Senator Kennedy was one of the greatest champions of older Americans in our nation’s history. Senior citizens are deeply indebted to him for his lifetime of achievements and leadership, from the beginning of his Senate career until the end,” the Alliance leaders said. They continued, “Senator Kennedy began his career in public service by helping launch Medicare, a true American success story that has reduced senior poverty by two-thirds. We will forever remember his courageous return to the Senate Floor in 2008, against medical advice, to keep Medicare from being slashed. From Medicare through debates on issues such as Social Security, fair and affordable housing, civil and economic rights, and most recently health care, Senator Kennedy’s voice was a guiding light, pointing the way toward the right and decent way our nation should treat its citizens.” Sen. Kennedy was also the first recipient of the Alliance’s Leadership Award, which recognizes the achievements of legislators on behalf of older Americans. Alliance members are invited to share their memories of Sen. Kennedy at araletters@retiredamericans.org, and the submissions will be posted on the Alliance web site.

New Report Shows Seniors to Benefit from Health Insurance Reform

A new report, “America’s Seniors and Health Insurance Reform: Protecting Coverage and Strengthening Medicare,” was issued Thursday by the Department of Health and Human Services. The report, available at <http://healthreform.gov/reports/seniors/index.html>, shines a light on what retirees have to gain from health reform, as well as the wholly unacceptable medical and financial consequences of inaction. According to the study, if no action is taken, Medicare premiums and out-of-pocket costs will soon eat up more than one-third of a retiree’s Social Security benefits. A typical older couple would need to save \$300,000 for medical bills not covered by Medicare. Said Mr. Coyle, “Health reform is an opportunity to close the Medicare Part D ‘doughnut hole,’ lower prescription drug costs, help early retirees afford health care coverage, and assist middle-class families with the costs of long-term care. A strong public plan option will hold insurance companies accountable and keep their premiums and business practices in check.” The report also shows how health reform can both expand Medicare’s benefits for seniors and strengthen Medicare’s finances by eliminating wasteful taxpayer subsidies to big insurance companies.

Alliance Rebuts RNC’s False Health Care Claims

Mr. Coyle issued a statement on Monday responding to Republican National Committee Chair **Michael Steele**’s unveiling of a so-called “Seniors’ Health Care Bill of Rights.” “Today’s insurance industry-backed public relations move by the RNC is galling not only for its gross distortions of public policy issues, but also for its hypocrisy on the heels of high-profile GOP

efforts to scare and confuse American seniors about the health care debate,” Mr. Coyle stated, noting a pattern of deception. He continued, “These scare tactics are false, but not enough people know this, thanks to millions of dollars in television advertising and disruptive behavior at town hall meetings. Just weeks after resigning from public service, **Sarah Palin** wrote of ‘death panels’ when there clearly are none in these bills. Republican Representative **Ginny-Brown Waite**, whose Florida district includes more Medicare beneficiaries than any other, said that Washington’s message to seniors was ‘Drop Dead.’ Former party leader-turned lobbyist **Dick Armey** made the ridiculous claim that it is ‘tyranny’ that seniors are forced to be in Medicare to receive benefits that would dramatically improve their health and economic well-being.” In truth, leading Democratic proposals would make it easier for retirees to see a doctor, get a prescription filled, and afford long-term care.

Sen. Sanders Set to Save Cost of Living Increase for Social Security Recipients

Due to the economic recession, Social Security trustees have projected that there will be no cost of living allowance (COLA) increase, which is tied to an inflation index, for 2010 and 2011. For many recipients, the lack of an adjustment will mean that their monthly checks will actually go down, because Medicare prescription drug payments deducted from Social Security are scheduled to increase next year. “Faced with these realities, it would simply be unacceptable for seniors on fixed incomes to not receive additional income in the coming year, something that hasn’t happened in over three decades,” Sen. **Bernie Sanders** (I-VT) said in a statement. “As soon as Congress gets back in session, I will be introducing emergency legislation that will provide seniors with financial support during this coming year.” The last time there was no Social Security COLA was in 1975.

Alliance Activity

Ms. Easterling traveled to Altoona, Iowa on Thursday for the Iowa Federation of Labor Convention. This week, Alliance members across the U.S. took part in approximately forty events in an effort to reform health insurance. The events included town halls and office visits with Senators and Members of Congress; protests at the offices of insurance companies; rallies to counter the presence of “Tea Party” opponents of health reform; and other forms of action.

Bipartisan Efforts of “Gang of Six” Weaken

Despite growing pessimism in compromising on a health bill, the Senate Finance Committee’s “Gang of Six”, which includes three Democrats and three Republicans, has remained the frontrunner in bipartisanship. However, several Members of Congress have become increasingly disillusioned with bipartisan efforts. This cynicism was exacerbated following a statement by “Gang of Six” member **Mike Enzi** (R-WY) at a town hall meeting on Monday, in which he bluntly admitted that he had no plans to compromise with the Democrats, and his presence in their talks was to delay health reform. In response, “Gang of Six” member **Jeff Bingaman** (D-NM) signaled his readiness to produce a bill using budget reconciliation if it becomes clear Republicans are not serious on compromising. “Reconciliation would allow Democrats to pass budget-related items with 51 votes, and would facilitate creating the public option,” explained Mr. Burks.