

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Senate Finance Committee Debates Baucus' Health Care Reform Bill

As they consider chairman **Max Baucus'** (D-MT) health proposal this week, Senate Finance Committee Republicans and Democrats are debating costs, subsidies and the future of Medicare. Republicans outlined specific provisions they will seek to change or eliminate, and the discussions could stretch into next week as the committee debates hundreds of amendments. Democrats are seeking to assuage fears on middle class costs by expanding subsidies to help some buy insurance. Baucus released a modified bill on Tuesday that is designed to win votes. He made a series of concessions to Democrats who could have withheld their votes, and he accepted part or all of 10 amendments from Sen. **Olympia Snowe** (R-ME), a key swing vote. Among the revisions: making coverage more affordable for older people (who aren't yet 65 and Medicare-eligible) by limiting how much insurers can charge them, and ensuring that the federal government would pick up the tab for expanding Medicaid in states with the largest populations of people who are on Medicaid. One of the 564 amendments debated, the **Nelson-Rockefeller** Amendment to close the doughnut hole gap in prescription drug coverage, failed on Thursday by a vote of 13-10. Senators Baucus, **Thomas Carper** (D-DE), and **Robert Menendez** (D-NJ) joined ten Republicans in defeating the amendment, which the Alliance had pushed for vigorously. On short notice, Alliance members living in key states and who have Senators on the Finance Committee sent more than 400 targeted letters to those Senators encouraging support for the amendment. "I am so proud of our members," said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. "They know when their action matters the most."

Alliance Seniors Attend Town Hall with Vice President Biden in Maryland

Vice President **Joe Biden** and Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary **Kathleen Sebelius** hosted a town hall meeting with seniors on Wednesday in Silver Spring, MD and officially released the report, *Health Insurance Reform and Medicare: Making Medicare Stronger for America's Seniors*. The report, mentioned in a recent *Friday Alert* and available at www.HealthReform.gov, outlines how health insurance reform will help seniors and answers key questions about **President Obama's** health insurance reform plan. "Vice President Biden today made a clear and convincing case for why Americans of all ages would benefit from health care reform," said **Edward F. Coyle**, the Executive Director of the Alliance on Wednesday. "We must help seniors separate fact from fiction, so they see how health reform will help them more easily see a doctor, get a prescription filled, and obtain essential preventive screenings for cancer and other diseases." A special guest at Wednesday's event was Alliance member **Phil Feaster**, a retired truck driver from Fort Washington, MD who spends \$700 per month for his eight daily medicines. Feaster is one of 3.4 million retirees who fall into the Medicare "doughnut hole," in which they must pay both their monthly Medicare premiums and full price for their prescriptions.

Democrats Act to Prevent Medicare Fee Increase

On Thursday, the U.S. House passed a bill that would prevent Medicare premiums from rising sharply for about 11 million seniors. The vote was 406-18. The bill would freeze Medicare Part B premiums for the coming year, rather than risk probable cuts in Social Security checks. Without some sort of intervention by Congress, Medicare was scheduled to announce next month's increased Part B premiums, which are typically deducted from retirees' Social Security checks to help pay for physician services. To learn more, go to

<http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=cqmidday-000003209910&topic=health>.

Medicare Clamps Down on Insurance Companies After Misleading Mailings

On Monday, Medicare demanded that certain private insurance companies cease sending out potentially misleading mailings to beneficiaries regarding health care and insurance reform. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) specifically asked Humana, Inc. to end such mailings, and Humana has obliged. In their letters, Humana states that "millions of seniors and disabled individuals could lose many of the important benefits and services that make Medicare Advantage health plans so valuable" - a claim that many senior advocates strongly disagree with. "Deceitful rhetoric by insurance companies is especially worrisome when it is implemented to dupe seniors," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. Humana is the second-largest Medicare Advantage provider in the U.S., trailing only UnitedHealth Group. CMS will pursue what they deem to be an appropriate penalty against Humana following the investigation.

Check Out Photos from Pittsburgh!

Over 400 seniors from Pennsylvania and Ohio attended the Alliance Town Hall meeting on health reform in Pittsburgh last week. Check out spectacular photos of AFSCME, AFT, USW members and many other retirees at the town hall on our new Flickr photo-sharing station! To see the slide show, go here: www.flickr.com/photos/retiredamericans/sets/72157622433975272/show.

Many state Alliances and other events (such as V.P. Biden speaking to seniors in Maryland this Wednesday) are also featured on our flickr site - www.flickr.com/photos/retiredamericans/sets.

Alliance State Conventions: Illinois and Nebraska

Mr. Coyle spoke on Thursday at the Illinois Alliance Convention in Ottawa, Illinois, where members elected **Barbara Franklin** as their new President. "Outgoing President **Hal Gullett** hands over the reins having put the Illinois Alliance in a strong position to affect change both statewide and nationally. He did a wonderful job as leader, and the entire Alliance says thank you for his great work and dedication." Further west in the nation's heartland, the Nebraska Alliance is gathering in Kearney, Nebraska on Friday for their third annual convention. **Danielle Pere**, Alliance Director of Field Mobilization, is there to address members on health care reform.

Did You Know...

Health Insurers have denied policies to consumers due to pre-existing conditions that include acne and pregnancy (*The Washington Post*).

This message is being sent to you as a member of the Alliance for Retired Americans. The Alliance is a nationwide membership organization organized under Internal Revenue Code 501 (c) (4) and dedicated to educating all Americans about and advocating on behalf of retirees and seniors. The Alliance is responsible for the content and has paid all costs associated with the preparation and distribution of this message.