

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

815 16th Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20006  
202.637.5399 • [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org) • [arafridayalert@retiredamericans.org](mailto:arafridayalert@retiredamericans.org)

**November 13, 2009**

## House Passes Historic Health Care Reform Bill

On Saturday, the U.S House voted to pass H.R. 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act, a bill that will help retirees and all Americans with their access to quality health care. The historic 220-215 vote was close - all except 39 Democrats voted for the bill, and all Republicans except Rep. **Anh “Joseph” Cao** of Louisiana voted against it. For a complete tally of the vote, click here: <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2009/roll887.xml>. The bill will help retirees right away. For example, in 2010, Medicare beneficiaries will no longer have to pay co-payments for screenings for cancer, diabetes, and osteoporosis. The Medicare Part D doughnut hole coverage gap will immediately close by \$500 and will be phased out. In addition, early retirees, who are not old enough for Medicare, will get help keeping or finding affordable health insurance. More than 500 Alliance members sent thank you notes to their Members of Congress who voted to pass the bill. Three videos on the Alliance’s YouTube station give more details about how the bill helps seniors: “Stick to the Facts: Reform Good for Seniors,” at <http://bit.ly/1eF8Y8>; “Facts: Health Care Reform & Seniors,” at <http://bit.ly/1IENy>; and “New Hope That Every American Will Have Decent, Quality Health Care,” at <http://bit.ly/1LUae3>. “The insurance and drug industries threw everything they had to stop the bill,” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. “I want to thank the 220 members of the House who voted to stand up for the seniors and all Americans across the nation who will benefit from reform.”

## Alliance Leaders Join First Lady as Part of Health Reform Effort

Several Alliance leaders are scheduled to be with First Lady **Michelle Obama** this afternoon at a White House health reform event focused on senior women. Ms. Easterling, Alliance Executive Vice President **Judy Cato** and Executive Board member **Barbara Matteson** of Tucson, Arizona, are planning to attend the event, which will shine a light on the difficulties older women face getting insurance and how health reform will help them.

## Senate Works to Pass Its Own Health Care Bill

The narrow margin in the House vote suggests enormous challenges in the Senate, where Majority Leader **Harry Reid** (D-NV) is struggling to hold on to all 58 Democrats and two independents in his caucus. Sen. Reid has merged two bills into one. The fine print is not public, but according to *The New York Times*, the broad outlines are known. Unlike the House bill, which pays to extend coverage by taxing individuals who earn more than \$500,000 a year and couples who earn more than \$1 million, the Senate bill would impose a tax on higher-end insurance policies, which could have a detrimental effect on coverage for retirees and older workers. And unlike the House bill, which includes a national public plan, the Senate measure would allow states to opt out. White House officials realize that the closer the final vote comes to the November 2010 midterm Congressional elections, the more difficult it will be to pass legislation. “Senators must remember

that many workers gave up other benefits in order to maintain their right to good health care benefits,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “To tax those workers’ health benefits now would be unfair.”

### **California and the Carolinas**

On Tuesday, the California Alliance (CARA) called on the health insurance industry giant Humana to stop scare tactics and misinformation aimed at seniors about health insurance reform. The rally and letter delivery at Humana’s Walnut Creek office (in the Bay area) came on the heels of Humana’s reporting a 65% jump in 3Q profits as soaring Medicare Advantage premiums and membership overcame the company’s slumping commercial business. CARA Vice President **Hene Kelly** said, “Seniors like myself know the truth about health insurance reform and are working hard to cut wasteful government subsidies to insurance companies and big business. Right now there’s too much profit and not enough care.” More here: <http://bit.ly/j6uiR>.

Yesterday’s roundtable discussion in South Carolina, titled “At Risk - the Health of South Carolina Seniors,” was a hit when seniors and community leaders came together to discuss health issues with a distinguished panel. The forum, sponsored by the South Carolina Alliance, hosted representatives from Doctors for America, the League of Women Voters, the South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control, the Coastal Conservation League and others. In addition to an update on health care legislation from Alliance national board member **Bill Cea**, presenters also discussed environmental and other quality of life issues. Today in North Carolina, Rep. **Virginia Foxx** (R-NC) attended a senior round table in West Pilot Mountain. The NC Alliance’s **Jack Marion** moderated the roundtable discussion with the 5th District Representative, focusing on Social Security, Medicare/Medicare Part D and her stance on health insurance reform. Stay tuned to <http://ara.typepad.com> for a full report of this event.

### **Alliance for Retired Americans on Facebook**

Are you on Facebook? The Alliance for Retired Americans now has a “fan page” on Facebook that allows retirees to see the latest news and action from across the country and to talk with other retirees about the issues that matter to them. During these critical health reform discussions, we need as many forums as possible to share information and build capacity in your respective states. Please join us on Facebook by first signing up (go to: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and set up an account - it’s free and easy!) and then by searching “Alliance for Retired Americans” and becoming a “fan” of our organization. Spread the word to your friends and neighbors, so that they can see the great work you are involved in.

### **Union Plus Offers \$1,000 Grants for Qualifying Large Medical Bills**

Did you know that Union Privilege, established by the AFL-CIO to provide consumer benefits to members and retirees of participating labor unions, provides Union Plus benefits to Alliance members? The Union Plus credit card program has dedicated \$150,000 to help those struggling with large hospital bills by offering \$1,000 grants. To learn more, go to [www.unionplus.org](http://www.unionplus.org). To see more about other benefits offered to Alliance members, go to <http://bit.ly/TgRmR>.