

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Senate May Vote to Offer Medicare to Those 55 - 64

President Obama hailed a tentative health care agreement announced in the Senate on Tuesday night, saying that he would support it, and majority leader **Harry Reid** (D-NV) sent the proposal to the Congressional Budget Office for cost analysis the next day. According to *The New York Times*, the deal would allow some people ages 55 to 64 to buy coverage through Medicare beginning in 2011. At first, they would pay full cost. Eventually, the legislation would allow them to obtain subsidies to help defray the cost. Senior advocates view the Medicare expansion as a major step for people nearing retirement who face some of the biggest obstacles to obtaining insurance and pay some of the highest prices. The agreement also calls for creating a menu of national insurance plans, modeled after those offered to federal workers, including members of Congress. The new, nonprofit insurance plans would be overseen by the Office of Personnel Management, which now runs the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. The deal maintains the public option as a fallback plan, to be “triggered” if private insurers do not step up to offer the new national plans.

Activists rallied outside the Senate on Thursday, pressing senators to drop a tax on higher-end insurance plans. At issue is a proposed 40% excise tax on health care plans costing more than \$8,500 annually for individuals and \$23,000 for families. Sen. **Bernie Sanders** (I-VT), who spoke at the event, has introduced an amendment with Sen. **Sherrod Brown** (D-OH) to strip out the insurance plan tax. “The House approach, which would raise income taxes on individuals making more than \$500,000 a year and couples making more than \$1 million, would not have the detrimental effect on coverage for retirees and older workers that the Senate’s excise tax would,” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. On the Senate floor on Thursday, Sens. **Byron Dorgan** (D-ND) and **John McCain** (R-AZ) pushed an amendment to allow U.S. pharmacies and drug wholesalers to import Food and Drug Administration-approved drugs from Canada, Europe and a few other countries. A vote is likely to occur on Monday – watch for a “Get Active” e-mail letter today from the Alliance to send your senators encouraging a “Yes” vote.

Alliance Runs Health Reform Ads in Maine Aimed at Two Key Senators

A television advertising campaign launched this week by the Alliance decries insurance industry scare tactics and outlines for seniors how health care reform would help them better afford to see a doctor and get a prescription filled. The 30-second spot, *Stick to the Facts: Reform Good for Seniors*, began a week-long heavy ad buy on local cable in Maine, home of the oldest population in the nation based on median age. Maine’s two U.S. Senators, Republicans **Olympia Snowe** and **Susan Collins**, are key votes in the health care debate currently on the Senate floor. Click on <http://bit.ly/6ePxpH> to view the ad. In it, a narrator cites some widely held misconceptions of health reform, saying they are, “just what the insurance lobbyists want you to think.”

Conrad-Gregg Entitlements Task Force Concerns Senior Activists

On Wednesday, Senators **Kent Conrad** (D-ND) and **Judd Gregg** (R-NH), chairman and ranking member, respectively, of the Senate Budget Committee, introduced new legislation to create a bipartisan fiscal task force to address the nation's long-term budget crisis. The bill establishes an 18-member task force comprised of ten Democrats and eight Republicans. The panel would consist entirely of currently-serving members of Congress selected by Democratic and Republican Congressional leaders, as well as the Treasury Secretary and one other administration official selected by the President. "This task force could be used to try to solve the fiscal crisis at the expense of seniors, by cutting retirees' Social Security benefits unnecessarily," cautioned **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations, a broad coalition of senior groups including the Alliance, sent a letter to the House and Senate on Tuesday objecting to the creation of a fast-track entitlements commission that could offer recommendations that are forced through Congress without amendments, under extremely short timelines, with no opportunity to debate individual issues or consult with constituents.

Holiday Greetings Reflect Urgency of Health Reform

This week kicked off a four-week Alliance holiday card campaign targeting House and Senate members on their health reform votes. The message is simple: "Give the gift of health care reform; please help us have a happier and healthier year in 2010." North Carolina was first to personally deliver their greeting to Rep. **Heath Shuler** (D) – other states nationwide will follow. Today, Friday, the New Mexico Alliance's 'Senior to Senior' event in Las Cruces wraps up with a visit and card-delivery to Rep. **Harry Teague's** (D) office. A total of 66 congressional offices will receive personal visits. To see photos from the events, click here: <http://bit.ly/8thfD0>.

New Alliance State Presidents Welcomed in West Virginia and Georgia

The Alliance welcomes two new state presidents: **Sterling Ball** in West Virginia and **Kenny Bradford** in Georgia. Mr. Ball has over 35 years of labor movement experience and says, "Retirees have a wealth of knowledge that we intend to utilize fully in West Virginia." **Kenny Bradford** became President of the Georgia Alliance last Saturday. "I have always been involved in politics, and am honored to have this role with the Alliance in passing health care reform," he said. A United Auto Workers retiree, Mr. Bradford worked for General Motors for 39 years.

Over 3,000 People Have Visited Our Blog – Have You?

The Alliance's new blog, <http://ara.typepad.com>, is a hotspot for information about national and state-specific Alliance actions and issues. The blog comes in addition to our website - with frequently updated content, comments from readers and photo/video features. We encourage you to "bookmark" the blog on your computer and check in periodically for news. Several Alliance activists also disseminate Alliance and retiree information on their personal or state blogs. Among them are **Shane Fox**, a Texas Community Action Network board member, at <http://psst-progressivesavvyseniorstexas.blogspot.com>; and **Terry Schleder**, New Mexico Alliance Field Coordinator, at <http://healthcarenownm.blogspot.com>.