

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

815 16th Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20006
202.637.5399 • www.retiredamericans.org • arafridayalert@retiredamericans.org

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Health Reform Will Not Include Medicare Buy-in for Those 55-64

A week ago, a compromise Senate deal on health reform nixed a public insurance option and replaced it with provisions letting those 55 or older buy into Medicare and allowing nationwide nonprofit private plans overseen by the federal Office of Personnel Management. Sen. **Joseph Lieberman** (I-CT), who opposes the public option, seemed to be in agreement. By last Sunday, however, Lieberman had changed his mind. According to *The Boston Globe*, the Medicare buy-in became as objectionable to him as the public option. His explanation for the flip-flop is that expanding Medicare would add to the federal deficit, but he came to this conclusion before the Congressional Budget Office had done its analysis. Senate Democratic leaders have now laid out an ambitious timetable for passing the health care bill on Christmas Eve. To be successful, the plan assumes Majority Leader **Harry Reid** (D-NV) will have three key elements before the weekend: the bill's cost estimate from the Congressional Budget Office; the legislation completely written and available to the public; and assurance from all 60 members of his caucus that they will vote for the package. "There will be good things for seniors in the Senate bill. However, the House bill is far superior, and we will work tirelessly to include specific pieces from the House, like the public option, and to exclude the Senate's excise tax on higher-cost insurance plans, when the bill gets to conference committee," said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. She continued, "The Senate bill includes some relief for plans with early retirees as well as delivery system reforms that may lead to lower costs in the long run. And Senate leaders have made a commitment to close the Medicare prescription drug doughnut hole, which is so important to seniors. The Alliance continues to insist that employers pay their fair share, and that genuine health care reform must bring down health costs, hold insurance companies accountable, and assure that Americans can get the health care they need."

On Tuesday, the U.S. Senate voted against an amendment to loosen prescription drug importation rules as part of the health care bill. The measure had been sponsored by a bipartisan group of lawmakers led by **Byron Dorgan** (D-ND) and **Olympia Snowe** (R-ME). However, it fell short of the 60 votes needed for approval – the final tally was 51 in favor, 48 opposed. Click on <http://bit.ly/91ulsQ> for the complete results of the vote. Dorgan criticized an alternative amendment, sponsored by senators **Frank Lautenberg** and **Robert Menendez**, both New Jersey Democrats, and Sen. **Thomas Carper** (D-DE), as inadequate, because it would only allow the importation of drugs if the federal government's health secretary certified they were safe and lowered costs. This amendment also fell short of the 60 votes needed for approval; the vote was 56 in favor, 43 opposed. Those results are available at <http://bit.ly/7TU0Ut>. Since last Friday, Alliance members had sent more than 3500 letters to all Senators urging them to vote in favor of the Dorgan-Snowe amendment.

Retirees with the Write Stuff: Write Letter, Win Pen

“Retirees with the Write Stuff” is an Alliance project recognizing retirees whose letters to the editor are published. Most recently, **Graham Dewsbury, Mary Elia, Gary Gaines, Norman Kaiser, John Mendolusky, Catherine Porter, Martin Walsh, and Norm Wernet** contributed to their state and local papers. If you have had a letter published recently, please send us an email at letters@retiredamericans.org so that we can recognize you and send you a “Write Stuff” pen. Also, New Hampshire Alliance President **Charles Balban** described the benefits of health reform to retirees in a notable *Nashua Telegraph* op-ed, available at <http://bit.ly/656Kid>.

Sign Up Now for the Alliance’s National Convention in Las Vegas

Mark your calendars for April 5-8, 2010 to attend the Alliance’s National Convention in Las Vegas, where we will kick off our grassroots efforts for the 2010 elections. Details about the conference are posted on the Alliance’s home web page, www.retiredamericans.org; to learn more, simply click on “2010 National Convention” or go to <http://bit.ly/1jIzz2>. Register for the convention directly from that page or by calling 1-888-373-6497. We will have workshops and training sessions to strengthen our organizing and advocacy skills, and will hear from leading experts in public policy, health care and aging, and the media. Alliance members will elect a president and secretary-treasurer, and community members will elect six community-based board members. Hotel reservations must be made by contacting Bally's Las Vegas directly at 1-800-358-8777.

Profile in Courage: Fern Osborne

Fern Osborne, Executive Vice President of the Colorado Alliance since its founding, passed away this week. Fern’s dedication to activism around senior issues and advocacy on behalf of her community was an inspiration. In a 2007 news profile, she said about her tireless activism: "I'm working so that by the time you become my age, you won't have to go through this." News highlights are available here: <http://bit.ly/6TQeFi>. Colorado Alliance President **Vivian Stovall** said, “Fern has been *the* senior advocate here. We thought that she would outlive all of us.” Ms. Stovall added, “She is absolutely irreplaceable.” This Monday, December 21st, Colorado Governor **Bill Ritter** and the Colorado legislature will issue proclamations in honor of Fern Osborne, to be followed by a memorial reception with family and friends.

Did You Know...

The Alliance is a member of Seniors to Seniors, a coalition of senior citizen advocacy organizations committed to educating seniors about what the current health care reform legislation means for them once it is implemented. The coalition’s goal is to help filter through the clutter and hype to educate seniors about how health care reform will help keep doctors in Medicare, stop physician payment cuts, improve long-term care choices, keep Medicare affordable, and close the prescription drug “doughnut hole.” To learn more, go to <http://seniorstoseniors.org>.

EDITOR’S NOTE: THE NEXT FRIDAY ALERT WILL BE PUBLISHED ON JANUARY 8, 2010. HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FROM THE ALLIANCE!

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.