

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Massachusetts' Election of Scott Brown to U.S. Senate Threatens Health Reform

The election in Massachusetts of Republican **Scott Brown** to the U.S. Senate on Tuesday ended the Senate Democrats' supermajority in the chamber, and the first casualty of his victory could be the Democrats' health care overhaul. Brown defeated Massachusetts Attorney General **Martha Coakley** (D), 52%-47%, in the special election race to replace the late Sen. **Edward Kennedy** (D-MA). According to *The Washington Post*, one factor in the election may have been the fact that all but 3% of Massachusetts' residents already have health insurance. While many are describing the election as a referendum on national health care reform, Brown rode to victory on a message more nuanced than flat-out resistance to universal health coverage: Massachusetts residents, he said, already had insurance and should not have to pay for it elsewhere. "We have insurance here in Massachusetts," Brown said during a campaign debate. "I'm not going to be subsidizing for the next three, five years, pick a number, subsidizing what other states have failed to do." Republicans will now have 41 votes, the minimum number needed to mount a filibuster and delay legislative action.

Sensing they were on the verge of defeat in the special election, White House officials reportedly began to push for the House to take up and approve the Senate-passed health care reform bill. However, House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** (D-CA) said on Thursday that the Senate would have to amend its version of a reform bill before Democrats in her chamber would be willing to vote for it. The only way to keep the Senate bill alive, Pelosi said, would be for senators to initiate a package of fixes that would address House concerns about the bill. One provision of the Senate version that is particularly problematic for House members is the new excise tax on higher-cost policies, which would hit union households particularly hard. "U.S. House members know that union members often gave up other benefits in negotiations to secure their health care benefits," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. Hill aides said that the House would not act on the Senate bill until the fixes are made, shifting responsibility for completing the bill across the Capitol. However, the Senate has not agreed to move forward with such changes. Congressional leaders are considering starting from scratch on a new, scaled-back package.

Beware the Conrad-Gregg Debt Commission!

Alliance members and activists have sent more than 6,000 letters to their Senators urging them to vote against the creation of a "debt commission" proposed by Sens. **Kent Conrad** (D-N.D.) and **Judd Gregg** (R-N.H.). The commission would limit Congressional debate and allow fast-track cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. A vote is likely on it next week, but an alternative deal is now being struck between Conrad, House leadership and the White House (see more at <http://bit.ly/6sRFLI>). Under a pending agreement, President **Obama** would issue an executive order to create an 18-member panel and grant panel members authority to propose

changes in the tax code and in federal entitlement programs including Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. The commission would deliver recommendations after this fall's congressional elections. "I want to thank Alliance members for coming through this past week with their letters," said **Edward F. Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "Brace yourselves - it is highly likely that we will be making similar requests to preserve Social Security in the months ahead." If you have not sent a letter but would like to, go to <http://bit.ly/8tMzmD>.

Coming Soon: Corporate Dollars for Elections

Yesterday, the United States Supreme Court issued its decision in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission. In a 5-4 ruling, the Court invalidated laws banning corporations (and labor unions) from using treasury funds for campaign ads advocating the election or defeat of specific candidates. Parts of the decision overturn nearly 100 years of law. "The outcome would be that corporate funds could inundate the airwaves this year on behalf of candidates whom corporations support. The floodgates are now open for larger corporate funding in presidential and congressional races," said Mr. Coyle. "Alliance activists will have to work harder than ever to offset the influence of the big drug and insurance companies," he continued. The opinion did not change rules barring corporations from contributing directly to candidates and political parties, or from making expenditures that are "coordinated" with candidates and political parties. The court also overturned part of a different campaign finance law that excluded companies and unions from spending on political ads that refer to candidates in the closing days of election campaigns.

Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

Cervical cancer killed over 4,000 women last year, but can be prevented with the right steps. January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women has partnered in the "Pearl of Wisdom Campaign to Eliminate Cervical Cancer" to help raise awareness of this deadly disease. You can "Take the Pearl Pledge" and help prevent cervical cancer by going to www.pearlofwisdom.us/Pledge. "We are asking women to pledge to schedule their annual gynecological examination, tell five friends about their pledge, and wear a Pearl of Wisdom in support of cervical cancer prevention," said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. The Pearl of Wisdom campaign aims to secure 4,070 pledges – the same number of U.S. women who were projected to die of cervical cancer in 2009 – by Mother's Day.

Education and Training Opportunities at the 2010 National Alliance Convention

The theme for the 2010 Alliance National Convention, April 5-8 in Las Vegas, is "Building Retiree Power." With the privatizers still hard at work, one workshop being offered is, "Social Security and Entitlement Reforms: Barbarians at the Gate." Learn more about efforts to reform Social Security and other key programs and what you can do to protect them! Another workshop will be, "Organizing Strategies Around the 2010 Elections." In this breakout, you will learn more about the Retiree Zone Coordinator structure to educate and mobilize fellow retirees. Also offered: "Everything You Wanted to Know About Computers But Were Afraid to Ask." Our team of experts will answer any question you have about using e-mail or the Internet, signing up for Facebook, or sending and receiving photos. To register, go to <http://bit.ly/1jIzz2>.