

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## President Obama Delivers State of the Union Address

During his State of the Union address on Wednesday, President **Obama** vocalized the critical need for a reduction in the federal deficit. Alliance Executive Director **Edward Coyle** agreed with the sentiment but cautioned, “We cannot balance the budget on the backs of America’s seniors. Vital programs such as Social Security and Medicare did not cause these large deficits.” He added, “The passage of a strong health care reform bill will not only improve our nation’s physical health, but its fiscal health as well, and therefore must remain a priority.” The day after the speech, the President traveled to Florida to speak at a Town Hall event in Florida at the University of Tampa. Alliance members **Bob Meeks** and **Tony Scelzo** were among those in attendance, along with Florida Alliance Field Organizer **Jenny Kenny**.

## Conrad-Gregg Task Force Defeated

On Tuesday, the Senate voted down the Conrad-Gregg debt task force, 53 to 46. The proposal did not collect the 60 votes required for it to pass, primarily failing due to concerns about cutting funds for Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, but also due to the severe limitations that it would have put on Congressional debate. Here is a link to the vote: <http://bit.ly/d0nB5F>. Before the 53-46 vote, the Senate added by 97-0 an amendment by Sen. **Max Baucus** (D-MT) to exempt Social Security from the deliberations of the task force. It is expected that President **Obama** will now create a bipartisan fiscal commission by executive order. “I’d like to thank our members and activists for sending more than 6,000 letters to their Senators urging them to vote against this wrongheaded plan. It was a great help and surely contributed to a victory in this round,” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance.

## Middle Class Task Force Recommendations Emerge

The White House Middle Class Task Force, led by Vice President **Joe Biden**, has released a preview of its recommendations for strengthening the middle class. The recommendations include a few core items for seniors, such as expanded funding for caregiving, respite care, promoting 401(k) transparency, and the availability of annuities. The respite care and expanded funding for the Department of Health and Human Services would help seniors maintain their independence and live in the community for as long as possible, as well as assist their family caregivers with essential elder care training. The Task Force will advocate automatic workplace IRAs with an opt-out option; a saver’s credit that would match workers’ retirement savings; an update of 401(k) regulations in order to ensure transparency; and increased availability of optional annuities as well as other forms of guaranteed lifetime income. The Alliance is also urging the White House to include a \$250 stimulus payment to Social Security recipients since there is no Cost of Living Adjustment in 2010. The President’s budget will be released on Monday. “Americans have seen their retirement savings plummet. It is important that the government renew their commitment to

all citizens,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. Next month, the committee will deliver its year-end report to the President, and it is expected that Congress will be pressed to create legislation supporting the Task Force’s suggestions.

### **The Next Step for Health Care**

President **Obama** spoke briefly on the imperiled health care reform bill during Wednesday’s State of the Union address, asking legislators of both parties to bring forward any plans or policies they feel would strengthen Medicare for seniors and cover all uninsured Americans. Democratic leaders have put forward two possible plans – they may start from scratch and keep only the most popular provisions, or they may have the House pass the Senate measure, and then use a budget reconciliation process in the Senate. Reconciliation would help Democrats avoid a GOP filibuster, since the process requires only a simple majority. Democratic leadership is expected to decide on a course by next week. On Tuesday, members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO), including the Alliance, sent a letter strongly urging House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** (D-CA) and Senate Majority Leader **Harry Reid** (D-NV) to continue working on health care reform. The letter stressed that reform could allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices, help older Americans remain independent in their homes, reduce out-of-pocket costs, and protect against elder abuse.

### **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, **Vivian Silbiger, Janice Ayres, Billy Feitlinger, Donna McGrath, Owen Humphress, John Pernorio, Beatrice Stratton, and Barbara Franklin** contributed to their state and local papers. If you have had a letter published recently, please email us at [letters@retiredamericans.org](mailto:letters@retiredamericans.org) so that we can recognize you and send you a “Write Stuff” pen.

### **Join the Alliance in Las Vegas to Build Retiree Power**

As a reminder, on April 5-8, 2010 in Las Vegas, the Alliance for Retired Americans will be holding its annual convention. The conference, *Building Retiree Power*, will offer educational and training opportunities to improve both grassroots activism techniques and leadership skills. Topics such as health care reform, Social Security, community organizing, fund-raising, and the use of popular on-line communication tools including Facebook will be addressed through informative speakers and workshops. For up-to-date information, or to sign-up for the convention, visit <http://bit.ly/1jIzz2> or call 1-888-373-6497.

### **Andy Barnes, Co-Founder of California Alliance for Retired Americans, Dies**

**Andy Barnes**, a retired machinist and much-loved retiree activist, has passed away after a struggle with cancer. Mr. Barnes retired in 1999 after serving as a Grand Lodge Representative for twenty years. He served as Treasurer and a regional chair for the National Council for Senior Citizens, and helped to found the California Alliance for Retired Americans in 2003. “He was an integral part of the retirees department, and will be missed very much,” said **Maria Cordone**, Retiree Director of the machinists union.