

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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In Group Letter, Alliance State Presidents Urge President Obama to Protect Seniors

Congressional Republicans are taking the economy hostage again — threatening to blow it up unless vital services for seniors are cut. On Thursday, President **Obama** warned that Republicans would seek to replace the sequester (automatic cuts currently scheduled to take effect) with cuts to programs such as Social Security and Medicare, while refusing to raise new tax revenue. The Alliance is sending a letter from all of the State Presidents to President Obama today, urging him to remain strong and protect seniors. In the letter, available at <http://tinyurl.com/b4prwog>, the state Alliance leaders say, “We are concerned, Mr. President, that many in Washington will try to take advantage of the nation’s current fiscal situation and cause permanent damage to the Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid programs. We strongly urge you to resist such efforts.”

The Alliance also weighed in on two other issues important to seniors during the last week, sending a letter supporting Sen. **Amy Klobuchar’s** (D-MN) bill, S. 117, to require Medicare Part D drug negotiation. The Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003, which created the Medicare Part D prescription drug program, explicitly forbids the government from negotiating lower prices for Medicare beneficiaries. Sen. Klobuchar’s legislation amends that law to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate lower prices, saving American taxpayers billions of dollars. To see the letter that was sent, go to <http://tinyurl.com/cmxyta>.

On Wednesday, the Alliance sent a letter to all members of the U.S. House, urging them to vote against an amendment to the “Require a PLAN Act,” H.R. 444. “The amendment supports using the recommendations of the **Ersine Bowles** and **Alan Simpson** plan as a basis for achieving budget requirements,” said **Ruben Burks**, Alliance Secretary-Treasurer. Go to <http://tinyurl.com/d3d3xvc> to see the letter. The amendment failed, 348-75; for a vote tally, go to <http://tinyurl.com/a544776>.

On February 14th, Valentine’s Day, Tell Congress to Have a Heart!

Next Thursday, Valentine’s Day, is a call-in day on Capitol Hill. “Alliance members are urged to call Congress at 888-659-9401 and tell Members to, ‘Have a heart: oppose benefit cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and close loopholes for Wall Street and the richest 2% of Americans!’” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. For a flyer with what you should say on February 14, go to <http://bit.ly/WVupeW>. On Facebook: <http://on.fb.me/XrDCwx>.

If a Hospital Classifies Your Visit as an “Observation Stay,” You May Get a Big Bill

Medicare recipients who need more time to recuperate after leaving the hospital could be hit with unexpected expenses, if they don't qualify for the standard 20-day stay in a nursing home. This is often because their hospitalization was billed as an outpatient “observation,” instead of an inpatient admission. Medicare has recently changed its policies to classify many hospital stays previously constituted as inpatient stays as outpatient stays. These include some hospital stays that involve major bone fractures and the patient remaining in the hospital for several days. Under normal

circumstances, Medicare recipients who require additional care after a hospital visit are entitled to a 20-day stay in a nursing home, as long as their hospitalization lasted at least 3 days. However, if their hospital stay was classified as outpatient rather than inpatient, Medicare does not pay for the nursing home stay, which can cost hundreds of dollars a day. To see the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's* write up of the story, go to <http://tinyurl.com/atrcwzb>. If you have been affected by a high "observation status" bill, please let the Alliance know at aracomms@retiredamericans.org.

Saturday Postal Delivery to End in August - to the Detriment of Seniors and Others

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) announced on Wednesday that it plans to stop delivering mail on Saturdays starting the week of Aug. 5, but will continue delivering packages. One of the biggest fears related to the change is that it would jeopardize low-cost delivery of medicines and medical supplies to seniors. But it isn't a switch to online mail that's causing the postal demise — it's Congress. According to the blog thinkprogress.org, under the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, Congress has for years forced the USPS to pre-fund 75 years' worth of pensions for its employees. The USPS doesn't actually receive money from the government, but needs Congressional approval to make any changes to its structure. Last year, the Postal Service defaulted on a pension fund payment for the first two times in its history, and political infighting stopped Congress from bringing any remedy to the floor. The result was the cut in Saturday service.

"The Union Edge" Radio Show Reaches beyond the Labor Community

If you live in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Washington State, or the Washington, DC metro area, you may have heard "The Union Edge – Labor's Talk Radio" show in your car or at home. **Charles Showalter** is the host of the program, which features a variety of guests. Some of the guests are from the Alliance for Retired Americans, and **Edward F. Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance, is frequently on at 2:00 PM Eastern Time on Fridays. Mr. Showalter is fighting to give labor a stronger voice on the radio. "I call it labor communicating with not-yet-labor," Showalter said. "It's vital that we get our message out beyond the union movement."

The 50-year-old Pittsburgh union man has been at the mike for five years. He belongs to the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Radio and Television Artists. Showalter's program is on a half dozen stations: WPWC 1480 AM, Washington, D.C.; WPRR 1680 AM and 95.3 FM, Grand Rapids, Mich.; WKFB 770 AM, Pittsburgh; KGH1 91.5 FM, Westport, Wash.; KGHE 89.1 FM, Elma, Wash.; and WXPI 88.5 FM, Williamsport, Pa. "We are live three hours a day, Monday through Friday," Showalter said. "You can also go to www.WFRNLive.com and click "Listen Live" or "Podcasts" any time." In addition, programs may be accessed at <http://theunionedge.com>.

Affordable Senior Health Insurance to Supplement Medicare

Affordable insurance supplemental to Medicare is available through the Retiree Health Plan endorsed by the Alliance for union retirees. The Open Enrollment period is currently in effect through February 28, 2013! During this period, these Medicare-eligible retirees and their spouses are guaranteed acceptance with no waiting periods, regardless of preexisting health conditions. If you have questions or would like to enroll in the program, please call 1-866-298-9117. You can also visit www.araretireehealth.com to get more information.