

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Americans Willing to Pay More in Taxes if it means Keeping Social Security Benefits

Americans support Social Security and are willing to pay more to preserve and even improve benefits, according to a new survey released on Thursday by the nonpartisan National Academy of Social Insurance (NASI). The study, *Strengthening Social Security: What Do Americans Want?*, finds a sharp contrast between what Americans say they want and changes being discussed in Washington, such as cutting benefits by using a “chained” Consumer Price Index to determine Social Security’s cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). In fact, large majorities of Americans, both Republicans and Democrats, agree on ways to strengthen Social Security — without cutting benefits. Fully 74% of Republicans and 88% of Democrats agree that “it is critical to preserve Social Security even if it means increasing Social Security taxes paid by working Americans.” To see the full results of the survey, go to <http://tinyurl.com/bkrckgy>. For a Reuters article about the survey, go to <http://tinyurl.com/a4w27b9>.

“This study shows that we do not need to be cutting Social Security benefits, that we have better options in front of us,” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. “For instance, Americans much prefer eliminating the cap on earnings taxed for Social Security.”

58% of those Surveyed Don’t Want Medicare Cuts, Either

Americans do not want Medicare cuts, either. Fifty-eight percent of those surveyed oppose any spending cuts to Medicare and 46 percent oppose any cuts in Medicaid, according to a poll released by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health. To see *Politico’s* write-up of the poll, go to <http://tinyurl.com/bxstvmz>.

Despite that, Rep. **Kevin Brady** (R-TX), the new Health Subcommittee chairman for the Ways and Means Committee, says he’ll return to some Medicare ideas that Democrats have rejected outright — including the voucher model that Rep. **Paul Ryan** (R-Wis.) has advocated. *Politico’s* story on Rep. Brady is at <http://tinyurl.com/acqpzuz>.

“We do not need to cut Medicare benefits. Savings can be achieved by allowing Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices with pharmaceutical companies. We could also require drug companies to provide discounts for low-income Medicare beneficiaries, like they do under Medicaid,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

January 30 Day of Action Includes Rallies, 4400 Letters to Congress

Alliance members sent more than 4,400 letters to Congress as part of a Day of Action on Wednesday, relaying the message that, “We need jobs - not cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid!” The day also included several live Alliance events around the country featuring a similar message. For example, the Missouri Alliance held rallies outside the Kansas City office of Sen. **Roy Blunt** (R) and the Ballwin office of Rep. **Ann Wagner** (R). Video from an event with Pennsylvania Alliance members in the town of Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania is at <http://youtu.be/tNM7gSHZIXQ>.

All Eyes on Virginia as State Attorney General Cuccinelli Mimics Mitt Romney

The Virginia Alliance held its 2nd annual convention this Tuesday in Richmond. Forty-five active Alliance leaders in Virginia attended, re-electing **Ron Thompson** as President. **Roger Wood** was re-elected as Treasurer and **Myrtle Fitzgerald** was newly –elected as Secretary. Leaders and members of the Virginia Alliance were joined by special guests **Doris Crouse-Mays**, Virginia AFL-CIO President; **Terry McAuliffe**, Democratic candidate for Virginia Governor; and **Kathy May**, Virginia Consumer Voices for Health Care Director. Ms. May's well-received presentation on how the health reform law affects Virginians is at <http://bit.ly/14AzJKW>. Go to <http://bit.ly/XsKglQ> for a presentation from the Alliance's Department of Government and Political Affairs on the Budget Showdown. For photos, go to <http://bit.ly/14wuQCz> (set) or <http://bit.ly/VXHR39> (slideshow). Said Mr. Thompson, "All eyes are going to be on Virginia this year, and we are going to be engaged. We're going to be like Bell, we're going to reach out and touch people in this state."

Also in Virginia: State Attorney General **Ken Cuccinelli**, who is running for Governor in 2013, has a forthcoming book that was profiled by *The Washington Post* this week. In it, Cuccinelli makes comments very similar to those made last year by **Mitt Romney**. Romney had suggested that 47% of the electorate was so dependent on government hand-outs that they would never vote for him.

Criticizing politicians who expand government services, Cuccinelli writes, "One of their favorite ways to increase their power is by creating programs that dispense subsidized government benefits, such as Medicare, Social Security, and outright welfare (Medicaid, food stamps, subsidized housing, and the like). These programs make people dependent on government. And once people are dependent, they feel they can't afford to have the programs taken away, no matter how inefficient, poorly run, or costly to the rest of society." For more, go to <http://tinyurl.com/af28rhs>.

Social Security Commissioner to Leave this Month

Social Security Commissioner **Michael J. Astrue** said on Monday that he will step down in February, after completing his six-year term. Astrue's departure gives President **Barack Obama** the opportunity to name a new head to the federal government's largest program.

Changes in the Senate: Harkin & Chambliss Retiring, Kerry to State Department

The U.S. Senate will have a new member soon – and at least a few more after the 2014 elections. Sens. **Tom Harkin** (D-IA) and **Saxby Chambliss** (R-GA) both announced this week that they will not seek re-election next year. Also, Sen. **John Kerry** (D-MA) was confirmed by the Senate on Tuesday as U.S. Secretary of State; on Wednesday, Massachusetts Governor **Deval Patrick** therefore appointed **William Cowan**, a Boston lawyer, longtime friend and former aide, to serve as an interim U.S. senator until voters choose a successor in a special election set for June 25.

"I would like to thank Sen. Kerry and Sen. Harkin for all they have done for seniors," said **Edward F. Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "Senator Kerry's 95% lifetime voting record with the Alliance, and Sen. Harkin's 99% voting record, show that they have been friends to retirees. They have both had seniors' best interests at heart over many decades of service." In contrast, Sen. Chambliss has a lifetime voting record with the Alliance of 7%.