

ALLIANCE FOR RETIRED AMERICANS

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Retiree Leader Rebuts RNC's False Health Care Claims

Seniors Outreach Contradicts Summer of Scare Tactics

The following statement was issued today by Edward F. Coyle, Executive Director of the Alliance for Retired Americans, in response to Republican National Committee chair Michael Steele unveiling a so-called "Seniors' Health Care Bill of Rights."

"Today's insurance industry-backed public relations move by the RNC is galling not only for its gross distortions of public policy issues, but also for its hypocrisy on the heels of high-profile GOP efforts to scare and confuse American seniors about the health care debate.

"A 'Bill of Rights' for seniors should include the right to be told the truth. The truth is retirees have a lot to gain from leading Democratic proposals that would make it easier for them to see a doctor, get a prescription filled, and afford long-term care.

"The Republicans' newfound interest in protecting Medicare – after years of voting to cut benefits and privatize the program – is to rein in health care costs in a way proposed by President Obama. Curiously silent from Chairman Steele's support for the Medicare Advantage programs is the fact that every Medicare beneficiary must pay an additional \$3 per month in premiums to support egregious overpayments to private insurance companies who use taxpayer subsidies to run these programs at a cost 20 percent higher than if Medicare directly provided these services.

"Also missing is how Democratic health care reform would help millions of retirees better afford their prescription drug coverage. In addition to providing greater assistance for low-income seniors, it would begin closing the "doughnut hole" in Medicare Part D. Under this coverage gap, Michael Steele's friends in the insurance industry keep getting their monthly premiums even when they are not giving seniors any benefits. Nor does Steele mention how health insurance reform is a chance to finally allow Medicare to negotiate for volume discounts with the drug companies. Savvy seniors know you should pay less when you buy in bulk.

"A true Bill of Rights for retirees would include an opportunity for early retirees to buy-in to Medicare. Right now, there are over five million Americans age 55-64 who do not have health insurance. Many of them are out of work, and private insurance is outrageously expensive for people in that age bracket. This is a critical period for early detection and treatment of chronic, costly conditions such as diabetes. Moreover, Democratic health care reform would eliminate co-pays for retirees who wisely choose to have preventive tests such as cancer screenings.

“Chairman Steele goes silent on why exactly his party and the insurance industry do not support the CLASS Act provisions of health care reform, an affordable public insurance program that will provide up to \$100 a day in long-term care benefits.

“Today’s publicity stunt by the RNC belies weeks of leading Republicans trying to scare seniors, and mislead them with lies and predictions of doom. These scare tactics are false, but not enough people know this, thanks to millions of dollars in television advertising and disruptive behavior at town hall meetings. Just weeks after resigning from public service, Sarah Palin wrote of “death panels” when there clearly are none in these bills. Republican Representative Ginny-Brown Waite, whose Florida district includes more Medicare beneficiaries than any other, said that Washington’s message to seniors was “Drop Dead.” Former party leader-turned lobbyist Dick Armey made the ridiculous claim that it is “tyranny” that seniors are forced to be in Medicare to receive benefits that would dramatically improve their health and economic well-being.

“Not only is the Republican Party trying to use its falsely-named Bill of Rights to enhance its scare tactics campaign, but they also ignore the fact that seniors care about more than just their own generation. Retirees are deeply concerned about their children and grandchildren in these difficult times. They worry that at a time of sky-high premiums and unfair rules against pre-existing conditions imposed by the insurance industry, they would be unable to afford health coverage.”

Alliance activists in 30 states are available for interview by contacting Michael Buckley at 202/637-5190 or Mbuckley@retiredamericans.org

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The Alliance for Retired Americans is a national organization that advocates for the rights and well being of over 3.5 million retirees and their families.