

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## **State Regulators Seek Greater Authority to Oversee Medicare Advantage Plans**

The *New York Times* reported on Monday that state officials will soon ask Congress for more power to regulate the marketing of private Medicare insurance plans to seniors. The changes are being requested because state officials are still receiving complaints of high-pressure sales tactics that have led some beneficiaries to sign up for unsuitable policies. In the draft of a report prepared by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, state officials say they have received large numbers of complaints but, often cannot provide direct assistance to beneficiaries or hold insurers accountable because they have not been given the authority. States can regulate the activities of insurance agents and brokers who sell Medicare Advantage (MA) plans, but they generally cannot regulate the insurance companies that offer such plans. The officials propose setting common standards for marketing the private plans, which could then be enforced by states that adopt them. State insurance regulators and consumer groups feel very strongly that offering sales agents bonuses and commissions has resulted in significant misconduct, ranging from inappropriate sales to outright fraud. Recommendations made in the draft report include that insurers should avoid the use of confusing product names like “gold,” “silver” and “value,” which have no standard definition, and that when beneficiaries ask for information on a drug plan, they should not be pressed to buy a comprehensive MA plan. “Medicare Advantage plans already cost 13% more than traditional Medicare, and that’s legal,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “When you add fraud, the money being wasted is astounding.”

## **Older Voters Turning Out in Twice the Numbers as Those Under 30**

While organizers and the media have made much of record turnout among young voters in recent months, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reports that older Americans remain the most reliable and consistent group of voters. According to exit polls, at least one-third of all voters in most of the 2008 Presidential primaries have been over age 60, with the number rising to over 40% in states like Massachusetts, Ohio and California. Senior voters have generally turned out in twice the numbers as people under 30. Candidates recognize the importance of the “grey vote” and are expected to campaign hard for this demographic in part because young people have not yet established voting as a habit. Those under 30 are also more likely to face problems with residency requirements when they do go to fill out a ballot – they move much more frequently than seniors and may not have properly updated registration information, and college students must frequently vote by mail when they attend universities out of state. “These exit polls show just how important our votes will be come November,” said **Edward Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance.

## **Alliance Member Josephine Powe Speaks at U.S. Capitol to Fight High Gas Prices**

**Josephine Powe**, 87, an Alliance member from Suitland, Maryland, spoke of her struggle with the high cost of fuel, along with the sacrifices she has had to make to offset rising prices at the pump,

at a press conference on Thursday at the U.S. Capitol. Ms. Powe, joining Senators **Carl Levin** (D-MI), **Jack Reed** (D-RI), and **Amy Klobuchar** (D-MN), thanked Senate leaders for introducing the Consumer-First Energy Act of 2008 to address the root causes of high energy prices. The bill would lower prices by placing a 25% windfall profit tax on any energy company that does not invest in new energy sources, and ending \$17 billion in tax breaks for corporations. In addition, it would prevent the Department of Energy from adding to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve until the price of crude oil averaged under \$75 for 90 days, and allow the U.S. Attorney General to bring enforcement action against any country or company colluding to set oil prices. "I am extremely proud of Josephine for sharing her experience with our leaders in Congress and with the world," said **George J. Kourpias**, President of the Alliance for Retired Americans. "Unfortunately, Jo represents millions of seniors around the country who are on a tight budget, and who have been straining even more than usual lately to make ends meet due to the high cost of energy."

### **Voter Identification Law Prevents Nuns from Voting in Indiana**

According to *The Detroit News*, about 12 Indiana nuns were turned away on Tuesday from a polling place by a fellow sister because they did not have state or federal identification bearing a photograph. Sister **Julie McGuire** said she was forced to turn away her fellow members of Saint Mary's Convent in South Bend, across the street from the University of Notre Dame, because they had been told earlier that they would need such an ID to vote. The nuns, all in their 80s or 90s, did not get one but came to the precinct anyway. One was 98. Some showed up with outdated passports, and they do not drive, so they did not have drivers' licenses. They were not given provisional ballots because it would be impossible to get them to a motor vehicle branch and back within the 10 days allotted by the law. The convent plans to make a "very concerted effort" to get proper identification for the nuns in time for the general election. Many elections experts had voiced their fears that the U.S. Supreme Court's recent refusal to strike down Indiana's controversial photo ID law would keep legal voters from exercising their right to cast a ballot.

### **Maine Event Educates Voters Before June 10 Congressional Primary**

The Maine Council of Senior Citizens/Alliance for Retired Americans invited all eight candidates vying to represent Maine's 1st Congressional District in Congress to a forum in Augusta this past Tuesday. All attended, and the six Democratic and two Republican candidates spoke to around 30 people about such topics as retiree issues, health care, and the economy.

### **Southern Regional Meeting is Next Month**

The Alliance will hold its fourth and final regional meeting, the Southern Regional Meeting, on June 4-5, 2008 in Orlando, Florida. The conference will provide a forum for activists to work together and prepare for November's Presidential election. Attendees will learn how to get seniors and other retirees registered and voting, increase grassroots advocacy, and educate federal, state and local legislators on issues such as Medicare, Social Security, prescription drugs, and retirement security. For copies of the official registration form, call 1-888-373-6497, email **Joni Jones** at [jjones@retiredamericans.org](mailto:jjones@retiredamericans.org), or visit our website at [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org).