

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Alliance Hosts White House Conference on Aging Retiree Forums in Phoenix, Seattle, and 6 Other Cities

The White House Conference on Aging occurs every ten years to develop solutions to challenges that older Americans face. This year, the White House is holding a series of regional events leading up to the DC conference. While a limited number of Alliance members are able to attend these events, the Alliance has been holding companion forums in cities across America open to all. At these forums, retirees discuss issues related to retirement security and make recommendations to the White House. This week, the White House and the Alliance held forums in Phoenix on Tuesday and Seattle on Thursday. Alliance satellite events were held this week in San Francisco and Roseville, California; Dallas; Omaha; Boise; and Portland, Oregon.

Alliance member **Roman Ulman** was quoted on Phoenix's CBS affiliate regarding the conference there (<http://tinyurl.com/k85sxl4>). President of his AFSCME Retiree Chapter in Phoenix, he retired from the City of Detroit and has felt first-hand the effects of the city's bankruptcy and its impact on pensions. "We built this country..we defended this country," Ulman said. "We earned the respect and support of our community and we ought to get it." Pictures from some of the forums are on Facebook at: <http://tinyurl.com/pu4n2nb>.

Beneficiaries Projected to Pay More under Medicare "Doc Fix"

On Wednesday, Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) officials said that, barring Congressional action, it would not begin processing a 21% cut to physician reimbursements under Medicare's sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula until April 15. The House last week voted 392-37 to approve legislation (H.R. 2) to permanently replace the SGR, the formula for setting Medicare payment rates for physicians. This legislation will expand means testing for seniors, limit availability for first-dollar coverage on some Medigap plans for seniors with higher incomes, and expand the Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) for two years.

According to *California Healthline* (<http://tinyurl.com/omomznh>), the SGR replacement measure would cost \$213 billion overall. The deal would offset about \$70 billion of the projected costs. Roughly half of the possible deal's offsets would come from cuts to hospitals, insurers and acute-care providers. The other half of the offsets would come from cuts to Medicare beneficiaries, such as additional means testing for high-income beneficiaries. The bill also includes funding for community health centers, which serve low-income individuals in every state. The Senate is not scheduled to consider the measure until it returns from recess on April 13.

"While the bill fixes some long term issues with the structure of Medicare, we will keep fighting in the Senate for a better deal. We need to avoid shifting costs to seniors," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. More from Huffington Post at <http://tinyurl.com/nqktrz7>.

Reps. Delaney, Cole File Legislation to Create Social Security Commission

Congressman **John Delaney** (D-MD) and Congressman **Tom Cole** (R-OK) have filed legislation that would create a bipartisan commission to ensure the long term solvency of Social Security. This 13 member commission that would consist of 12 members appointed by the Congressional leadership of both parties and one member appointed by the President. The commission would have to provide recommendations to Congress within one year of its creation and would need to be approved by a minimum of nine votes.

“We don’t need a new commission,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “We should just expand Social Security instead.” More at: <http://tinyurl.com/n3hqwhx>.

Response to Robert Samuelson *Washington Post* Column

Columnist **Robert Samuelson** is advocating for the Republican proposal to save money by cutting Social Security and Medicare budgets, claiming that their budget saves \$2 trillion over the next decade (<http://tinyurl.com/pno4h5k>). This is not quite accurate, though. According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), the Republican proposal repeals the spending in the program, but leaves most of the revenue that paid for the spending in place. Samuelson wants to raise the retirement age to 69 or 70 over 15 years, which could also be thought of as cutting benefits for these seniors by over 20% over the 15-year time period.

To better see how drastic this change would be, compare it to when the retirement age was raised from 65 to 67 over a 40-year period in 1983. The increase from age 66 to 67 is being phased in over the years 2016-2022, so Samuelson's rise would overlap with this rise. Samuelson also wants to raise the Medicare eligibility age to 69 or 70, increasing health care costs to those ages 65 to 70 during those crucial years.

“Cutting Social Security and Medicare would be disastrous for our seniors,” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. “It would be forcing many of them into bankruptcy. This is not the answer to saving money.” More from CEPR at <http://tinyurl.com/more42p>.

Obituary: Duane Adkinson, “Vice President Emeritus” of the North Carolina Alliance

The Alliance would like to express its deepest condolences to the family and friends of **Duane “Swampy” Adkinson**, who passed away this week. Duane was a tireless activist for the North Carolina Alliance and for labor. The North Carolina Alliance honored Duane this past February by awarding him the title, “Vice-President Emeritus,” and saying, “Time after time you have been on the battlefield, campaigning for the needs and rights of Seniors and Labor. Brother Adkinson, your calling to serve and to serve well is richly documented. You are a true leader in the Movement and a true Trade Unionist.” Read his full obituary here: <http://tinyurl.com/k3armgk>

Medicare Turns 50: Labor’s Role

“It was the labor movement that helped secure so much of what we take for granted today. The 40-hour work week, the minimum wage, family leave, health insurance, Social Security, Medicare, retirement plans. The cornerstones of the middle-class security all bear the union label.” - President **Barack Obama**