

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

815 16th Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20006 • 202.637.5399

www.retiredamericans.org • aracommunications@retiredamericans.org

Spanish version: www.alianzadejubilados.org

April 24, 2015

Senate Finance Committee Approves “Fast Track” Trade Promotion Authority Bill

The Senate Finance Committee [voted](#) 20-6 on Wednesday to approve the Trade Promotion Authority Bill (“fast track”) that would allow the President greater powers to negotiate the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). With these expanded negotiation powers, **President Obama’s** deal would only be subject to an up-or-down vote in the Senate, without the possibility to make amendments or open and full debate.

A companion bill in the House Ways and Means Committee also passed yesterday. Prior to the votes, the Alliance sent [letters](#) to members of the Ways and Means and Finance Committees urging them to oppose the deal.

The TPA Bill will face major scrutiny on the Senate and House floors, as both Congressional Democrats and Republicans are split on the fast track bill and the coming TPP. If passed, the TPP will likely decrease the availability of certain generic drugs and limit the ability of the federal government to secure discounted pricing for drugs under the Medicare and Medicare programs.

Richard Fiesta, Executive Director of the Alliance, said “We will continue trying to make inroads with Senators and House members to ultimately stop this bill from becoming law and raising prescription drug prices.”

Senator Nelson and Rep. Castor Introduce Medicare Drug Rebate Legislation

Sen. **Bill Nelson** (D-FL) and Rep. **Kathy Castor** (D-FL) introduced legislation into both chambers of Congress yesterday that would require drug manufacturers to provide rebates for low-income individuals who receive medications through the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit Program. The Senate version of the bill, [S.1083](#), was referred to the Finance Committee, while the House bill, [H.R. 2005](#), was referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the Ways and Means Committee.

Mr. Fiesta expressed hope that the bills would be brought up by the various Congressional Committees, saying, “This legislation would greatly improve the lives and well-being of lower-income seniors; it’s essential that it makes it to the House and Senate floor.”

Republicans Split on Changes to Medicare

The Fiscal Year 2016 House budget includes a proposal to turn Medicare into a voucher system, a position long advocated by Rep. **Paul Ryan** (R-WI). Such a proposal would likely involve significant cuts to Medicare beneficiaries.

While many Republicans have long sought to “reform” Medicare by privatizing it or slashing it in other ways such as raising the eligibility age, [many, particularly in the Senate, are concerned that this may put their seats at risk in the 2016 elections.](#)

Barbara J. Easterling, President of the Alliance, said, “Members of Congress are right to worry about privatizing or cutting Medicare. Millions of seniors rely on those benefits in order to make ends meet, and they vote!”

SGR Bill Includes Provisions to Remove Social Security Numbers from Medicare Cards

As part of the “Sustainable Growth Rate” (SGR, the formula used to calculate how doctors are paid by Medicare) bill passed by Congress week, Social Security numbers will no longer be included on Medicare cards. [These changes](#) were praised by consumer and privacy advocates who have long been concerned that seniors’ identities are put at risk every time they present their Medicare card. Due to the complexity of replacing Social Security numbers with a different identification number, Medicare officials have up to 4 years to implement this change.

Ruben Burks, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance, said, “Although the SGR bill overall is a mixed bag for seniors, this particular provision will help keep older Americans’ identities secure.”

Connecticut Alliance Hosts Awards Luncheon

This week, Mr. Fiesta spoke to 100 guests on Monday at the Connecticut Alliance for Retired Americans Awards Luncheon in Southington, CT. Lieutenant Governor **Nancy Wyman**, received the **Charlene Block** Award and **Paul Venti** of the Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 777 received the **Kevin Lynch** Award.

Fiesta also spoke at the Machinists Union Political Training and Education Seminar in Placid Harbor, Maryland on Wednesday.

Medicare Turns 50: Never a Voucher

I will never turn Medicare into a voucher. No American should ever have to spend their golden years at the mercy of insurance companies. They should retire with the care and dignity they have earned. – President Barack Obama, September 2012