

FRIDAY ALERT



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Congress to Create a Commission to “Fix” Social Security

Reps. **Tom Cole** (R-OK) and **John Delaney** (D-MD) will introduce a bill this Congress to establish a commission that will propose changes to Social Security. These changes will likely include cuts to the program: raising the retirement age, reducing benefits for some individuals, using the chained CPI, and introducing means testing for beneficiaries. A similar commission proposed last year did not make it out of committee - but many in the Capitol believe that this year’s bill has a higher likelihood of passage due to the recent changes in House rules requiring long-term alterations to the Social Security program. Cole is Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. More from Talking Points Memo is at <http://tinyurl.com/lrxw96n>.

“We’re interested in finding real solutions to keep Social Security strong, but cutting earned benefits for hardworking Americans is not the answer,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance.

King v. Burwell Could Undo Health Care Coverage, Cost Taxpayers \$340 Billion

The U.S. Supreme Court plans to hear *King v. Burwell* in March, and the decision will determine whether the wording of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) means people can only get tax credits to lower their health premiums if they live in one of the states running its own insurance exchange. In this case, opponents of the law claim that tax credits should not be available for health plans sold through a marketplace—or “exchange”—run by the federal government via the HealthCare.gov website. If the court strikes down this portion of the ACA, over 8 million Americans will lose their insurance coverage and insurance costs will likely increase by over 35%. The Congressional Budget Office also predicts that any congressional solution to the ACA’s removal would cost taxpayers an additional \$340 billion over the next ten years. As a result, it is nearly impossible that Congress would fund legislation that could give the same level of coverage that the ACA currently provides.

“It is highly unlikely that Congressional Republicans would support any other plan for long-term health care reform that would result in substantive and easily accessible coverage,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. More from the Center for American Progress is at <http://tinyurl.com/mch276k>.

U.S. Supreme Court Ruling is a Setback for Retirees

In a 9-0 ruling on Monday in the case of *M&G Polymers USA, LLC v. Tackett*, the U.S. Supreme Court vacated the 6th Circuit’s decision to allow union retirees to receive lifetime health benefits - unless explicitly stated in their contract. This case, which returns to the 6th Circuit, will change how collective bargaining negotiations are completed in the future, as retiree health care plans must now be explicitly negotiated into contracts. Nearly 500 plaintiffs from Ohio who had worked at the M&G polyester plant in Apple Grove, West Virginia, sued in 2006 when the company said retirees

would be required to contribute to their health care costs. The plaintiffs, backed by the United Steelworkers union, argued that the collective bargaining agreement guaranteed them health benefits without contributions. More from *Modern Healthcare* is at <http://tinyurl.com/lekg7bt>.

“Courts should not construe ambiguous writings to create lifetime promises,” Justice **Clarence Thomas** wrote for the court in this case, adding that “retiree health care benefits are not a form of deferred compensation.”

“This is a sad situation for many retirees. Promises made should be promises kept,” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. “This is another example of what conservative courts have done to working Americans and retirees.”

Alliance Takes Part in House Democratic Caucus Retreat

Mr. Fiesta and **Eva Dominguez**, Legislative Representative for the Alliance, were in Philadelphia on Thursday to give a presentation on seniors’ issues at the U.S. House of Representatives’ Democratic Caucus Retreat.

Virginia Alliance Holds its Convention

Activists and members from across the state were in Richmond on Tuesday for the Virginia Alliance’s Fourth Annual Convention. **Ron Thompson** was re-elected as State President; **Dolores Trevino-Gerber** was re-elected Vice President; and **Brenda Kennedy** was re-elected Treasurer.

There are Five People Born in the 1800’s who are Still Alive

There are still five people alive — all of them women — who saw the dawn of the 20th century. And three of them are Americans. Several others also claim to hail from the 19th century — one Mexican woman even says she is 127 — but lack the records to prove it. **Gertrude Weaver**, 116, is America’s oldest person and the second-oldest person in the world. The daughter of sharecroppers who witnessed the Civil War, Ms. Weaver was born in Arkansas and was married in 1915. She and her husband had four children, all of whom have died except for a son, now in his 90s. Read about the others in *USA Today* at <http://tinyurl.com/k3h7mw5>.

Medicare Turns 50: LBJ’s “War on Poverty” Rescued Millions

Medicare Turns 50 on July 30, 2015, and the Alliance will celebrate the occasion throughout the country. President **Lyndon Johnson**’s “War on Poverty” throughout the 1960’s brought badly needed economic security to seniors and American families. Amendments to the Social Security Act created Medicare and Medicaid - the two landmark programs that allow seniors and low-income individuals access to health care. Because of these efforts, the poverty rate for the elderly dropped from 30 percent to 9 percent between 1967 and 2012. These programs also helped end segregation, as segregated hospitals were not allowed access to Medicare and Medicaid funding. Fifty years since its inception, the War on Poverty has elevated America’s quality of life and continues to grant people dignity and independence. More from MassLive is at <http://tinyurl.com/occdwpw>.

To quote President Johnson in 1966, “We are never going to stop trying to find new ways to make Medicare sensitive to what our people need, and make it sensitive to what we ought to do to lift the quality of life in this land and in this world.”