

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## **Unsuccessful So Far, Efforts to Repeal and Replace Obamacare Continue**

Although Speaker **Paul Ryan** stated the Affordable Care Act (ACA) will stay for “the foreseeable future,” negotiations between the White House and Republicans in Congress to try to repeal it have [restarted](#). Congressional sources said that Republican members of the ultra-conservative Freedom Caucus and more moderate Tuesday Group have begun talks with administration officials to settle disputes over the American Health Care Act (AHCA). The AHCA had extremely low disapproval ratings across the country before being pulled from the House floor.

Although Congressional Republicans and White House officials are still attempting to resolve differences in proposed changes to the GOP’s AHCA, little progress has been made. Speaker Ryan is adamantly opposed to working with Congressional Democrats on health care, something that President **Trump** has suggested, making gridlock likely. Meanwhile, Senator **Bernie Sanders** (I-VT) has stated that he plans to introduce legislation that creates a single-payer health system, or “Medicare for All.”

Over 7 million people who didn’t have health insurance before the ACA are now covered by Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Despite the offer of federal funding for Medicaid expansion, 19 states refused it, often for political reasons. Some elected officials in those states have since come to see the benefits of expansion and are reconsidering their plans.

On Wednesday, the Kansas Senate [passed](#) a bill for Medicaid expansion, but Governor **Sam Brownback** (R) vetoed it. Unlike Kansas, which has a legislature that wants the funds but a reluctant Governor, Virginia Governor **Terry McAuliffe** (D) [faces a tough road](#) in his state to fulfill a longstanding priority of his administration and expand Medicaid there. Additionally, Maine and North Carolina are soon expected to take up legislation that would bring additional coverage to hundreds of thousands through Medicaid.

“By expanding Medicare and Medicaid, we can provide affordable healthcare to millions more retirees and workers,” said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance.

## **Trump Cutting Domestic Programs for Seniors to Build the Wall and Increase Defense**

The agreement that sets current federal spending levels will expire at the end of April and President Trump is trying to increase military spending and begin construction on the Southern Border Wall. His plans would be funded by slashing \$18 billion from domestic programs, including several that benefit seniors.

Some of the lowlights of the drastic reductions include a 94% cut to Medicare State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIP), state counseling services that help seniors understand their Medicare, Medicare Advantage, Medigap (Medicare Supplemental Insurance) and Medicaid

benefits. SHIP also helps guide enrollment in new plans and is the funding mechanism for 1-800-MEDICARE.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), which provide states money for public facilities, housing assistance and other programs for seniors like Meals on Wheels, would be cut in half. The administration proposes completely eliminating the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), which over the last 50 years has helped over a million seniors find work that benefits themselves and their communities.

LIHEAP, a program that helps pay heating and cooling bills for nearly 7 million Americans, faces a cut of 11%. The proposed cutting of over \$7 billion from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) was resoundingly [criticized](#) by Republicans and Democrats in a Congressional hearing on Wednesday.

“It is clear that the President’s priorities do not align with those of most Americans,” said Alliance Secretary-Treasurer **Joseph Peters, Jr.** “The disregard for what these programs do is apparent in the administration’s ‘justifications,’ which ignore the real people who benefit directly from these critical programs.”

### Senators Introduce Landmark Bill to Address Skyrocketing Drug Prices

After the defeat of the AHCA last week, several lawmakers quickly focused on improving Obamacare by bringing down drug prices. Led by Senator **Al Franken** (D-Minn.), 16 senators have [introduced](#) the *Improving Access to Affordable Prescription Drug Act*.



Sen. Franken questioned Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch last week about workers' rights.

The landmark proposal would tackle prescription drug costs by increasing transparency and accountability, boosting access and affordability of key drugs, spurring innovation, and increasing choice and competition. The legislation has been co-sponsored by Senators Sanders, **Sheldon Whitehouse** (D-R.I.), **Sherrod Brown** (D-OH), **Amy Klobuchar** (D-Minn.), **Elizabeth Warren** (D-

Mass.), **Tammy Baldwin** (D-Wis.), **Jack Reed** (D-R.I.), **Kirsten Gillibrand** (D-N.Y.), **Maggie Hassan** (D-N.H.), **Dick Durbin** (D-Ill.), **Chris Van Hollen** (D-Md.), **Jeff Merkley** (Ore.), **Tom Udall** (D-N. Mex.), **Richard Blumenthal** (D-Conn.), and **Cory Booker** (D-N.J.).

With prescription drug prices in the United States among the most [expensive](#) in the world, an overwhelming majority of Americans support lowering them. Key provisions include allowing Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices; increasing competition by preserving access to affordable generics; requiring drug manufacturers to provide drug rebates for drugs dispensed to low-income individuals; and legalizing the importation of affordable prescription drugs from Canada.

Importation from 34 other Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries that meet standards comparable to those in the United States would be allowed after two years.

Multiple medical advocacy groups, including the American Medical Student Association, Doctors for America, and the Center for Medicare Advocacy are among the organizations in favor of the legislation.

“The Alliance supports this legislation because it combines many of the things we’ve been trumpeting for years: letting Medicare negotiate fair prices, allowing safe importation from other countries; and reining in the unfettered power of drug companies to charge outrageous prices,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance.

### **Florida Alliance for Retired Americans Holds Legislative Conference**

Retirees attended the Florida Alliance’s Legislative Conference in Tallahassee this week, hearing from a variety of speakers before lobbying their elected officials on economic, health and other retiree issues. State Senator **Jeff Clemens** and Representatives **Amy Mercado** and **Emily Slosberg** provided legislative updates. **Karen Woodall**, Executive Director of the Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy, spoke about Medicaid. She explained that Governor **Rick Scott** has requested a waiver from the federal government that would transform Medicare into a block grant program, which would end the program's guaranteed coverage and place limits on benefits in the state.

**Rich Templin**, Legislative & Political Director of the Florida AFL-CIO, gave an update on the Florida Legislature, emphasizing the budget and taxes, and FLARA President **Bill Sauers** gave a very personal story about the importance of Social Security for families. **Eva Dominguez**, Legislative Representative for the Alliance, spoke about health care "repeal and replace" developments, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.