

# FRIDAY ALERT



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## House Health Care Vote Appalls Retirees and Older Americans

May is Older Americans month, and Republicans spent the first week taking away health care. In a highly controversial and hurried vote, the American Health Care Act (AHCA), designed to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA), [passed](#) the House on Thursday afternoon and moved to the Senate for further consideration. The contested bill was narrowly approved, [217-213](#), and received no support from Democratic lawmakers. Twenty Republicans voted against the bill.



The bill contained many provisions that are harmful to both seniors' health and retirement security. It allows massive tax cuts on the wealthy that will severely weaken the Medicare Trust Fund and will cut Medicaid's funding by more than \$800 billion. Under the bill, those with pre-existing conditions would no longer be guaranteed coverage without discrimination, as they are currently under the ACA. Among people ages 55 to 64, [84 percent](#) had at least one pre-existing condition in 2014.

After the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office determined that a previous version of the bill would leave 24 million Americans uninsured in ten years, House leaders did not wait for a new CBO score for the amended AHCA and pushed ahead with a vote immediately.

"Trumpcare is a billionaires tax cut again disguised as a health care bill," said House Democratic Leader **Nancy Pelosi** on the House floor Thursday, adding, "It's one of the largest transfers of wealth from working families to the rich in our country."

The legislation now advances to a much more closely divided Senate, where its prospects are unknown. Many Senate Republicans are skeptical of the AHCA and find many of its provisions problematic.

"This bill is appalling for all Americans, but particularly for older Americans," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "We will fight this bill's dangerous and discriminatory aspects in the Senate, and we will not forget it when we go to the polls in 2018."

In a statement to the press, Alliance Executive Director **Rich Fiesta** stated, "Retirees and older Americans who are not yet eligible for Medicare are simply appalled... [i]t is difficult to say what the cruelest aspect of this vote is, but raiding Medicare and cutting Medicaid surely remain at the top of the list."

"The \$8 billion that the GOP added to their plan at the last minute is a mere drop in the bucket compared to their cuts," Fiesta said, referring to the more than \$800 billion the bill cuts from Medicaid.

### **Poll Shows Broad Agreement: Lowering the Cost of Prescription Drugs Should be a Top Priority**

A new [poll](#) released by the **Kaiser Family Foundation** revealed that 6 in 10 Americans believe that lowering the cost of prescription drugs should be a top priority for President **Trump** and Congress. Majorities of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans surveyed all agree, despite their differences on many other issues.

Of those who support lowering prescription drug prices, most believed that the government should use policy actions to achieve this goal. There was overwhelming support for allowing Medicare to negotiate with drug companies to get a lower price for medications; allowing generic drugs to come to market more easily; and requiring drug companies to make public their price-setting procedures.

"This poll reinforces the reasons that the Alliance has been fighting for more affordable prescription drugs the last 17 years," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "Americans pay among the highest price for prescription drugs in the world, and they will no longer accept lawmakers surrendering to the demands of pharmaceutical company executives."

Led by Sen. **Al Franken** (D-Minn.), 16 senators have [introduced](#) S. 771, the *Improving Access to Affordable Prescription Drug Act* to address runaway drug prices. Key provisions of the bill 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.

## **Budget Deal Addresses Coal Miners' Health, Increases Support for NIH**

Congress passed a bi-partisan budget agreement on May 3 that funds the federal government through the end of the fiscal year in September. The agreement permanently extends expiring health insurance benefits for coal miners and their families, who have earned this coverage after years of hard work in often dangerous conditions.

In a sharp rebuke of President **Trump**, many proposals that were included in the President's budget proposal were not included in the final agreement passed by Congress. While the President called for a \$1.2 billion cut from the National Institute of Health's (NIH) budget this year, the agreement actually increased funding by an additional \$2 billion. The NIH provides valuable lifesaving medical research for seniors, including its Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center program. The budget agreement provided an additional \$400 million to research Alzheimer's disease.

"We give Democrats in Congress special credit for ensuring that there is appropriate funding for Alzheimer's research in this year's budget agreement, given the turbulent political climate in Washington," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "The President has still called for slashing the NIH's funding by \$5.8 billion in 2018, and we must remain vigilant that its lifesaving programs remain funded."

### **Did You Know...**

A 2016 survey found that 77% of both Republicans and Democrats have spouses of the same party. (Source: Pew Research Center)

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The Alliance for Retired Americans is a national organization that advocates for the rights and well-being of over 4.4 million retirees and their families.