

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

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Senate Reveals New Health Care Bill; Still a Bad Deal for Older Americans

Senate GOP leaders unveiled new legislation to gut the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Thursday. Majority Leader **Mitch McConnell** said that a vote on the new version will be held next week, whether he has the necessary votes or not. He has little room for error and can only afford to lose two Republican senators. As of Friday morning, only Sen. **Susan Collins** (R-ME) has pledged to vote against the new bill.

The amended bill includes all of the deep cuts to Medicaid that were in previous versions and also includes many tax breaks for wealthy Americans and corporations. It also contains a provision offered by Senator **Ted Cruz** (R-TX) that would radically increase premiums for those with preexisting conditions by allowing healthier and sicker individuals to be separated into different plans. That would be particularly hard on older Americans, since [84%](#) of people aged 55-64 have at least one pre-existing condition.

All Alliance members are urged to continue calling their senators at 1-866-828-4162 and tell them to vote against the Senate's new health care bill.

"Make no mistake -- this will take health care away from millions of older and working Americans," said **Robert Roach Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "Like the first version, it is cruel."

"Several GOP Senators are trying to get their states' governors to buy in to what is clearly an inferior plan, so that they have cover," added President Roach. "Many are meeting with their governors today, so everyone should call their Governor."

The National Governors Association is meeting today in Providence, Rhode Island and the governors are discussing health care. If you live in these key states, in addition to calling your Senator, it is especially important to call your Governor's office and say, "Millions of Americans, especially seniors and people with disabilities, rely on Medicaid to cover essential health care costs. Governor, I urge you to speak up loudly and forcefully about the importance of Medicaid to our state's residents and oppose the dangerous proposals in the Senate health care bill."

- Governor **Doug Ducey** - Arizona, (602) 542-4331
- Governor **Brian Sandoval** - Nevada, (775) 684-5670
- Governor **Scott Walker** - Wisconsin, (608) 266-1212

A recent [report](#) by Justice in Aging stated that approximately 7 million low-income people, including 1.7 million older adults, are able to participate in Medicare only because the Medicaid program assists them with their Medicare premiums, deductibles, and co-pays. The Congressional Budget Office found that the original bill would cut Medicaid by \$772 billion, leaving many older adults and people with disabilities unable to afford Medicare.

Meanwhile, in the House, ten Democrats [released](#) a draft bill that would stabilize the ACA markets and reduce premiums. The bill includes a re-insurance fund, a Medicare buy-in, and expanded premium subsidies.

Medicare and Social Security Trustees Reports Confirm Programs' Strong Standing

The annual Social Security and Medicare Trustees reports were released on Thursday. The Social Security report reaffirmed that the program is in a strong position moving forward and will be able to cover all payouts and expenses until 2034; that is unchanged from last year. The Medicare Trust Fund for hospital care now has sufficient funds to cover its obligations until 2029, one year longer than projected last year.

The report projects a 2.2 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for Social Security beneficiaries in 2018, the largest increase in years.

"In fact, the Trustees found that the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) trust fund will be fully solvent until 2028, five years longer than last year's report," [said Richard Fiesta](#), Executive Director of the Alliance. "In light of this data, it makes no sense that the President's FY 2018 budget seeks to cut Social Security Disability Insurance funding by \$63 billion."

Despite the Trustees' strong report, improvements can be made that would benefit all workers and retirees. The Alliance supports safeguarding and expanding Social Security benefits, providing a more accurate formula for cost-of-living adjustments, and lifting the cap on earnings for the wealthiest Americans. As Social Security becomes a more important part of Americans' plans for retirement, the minimum benefit should be increased to keep retirees out of poverty.

Reining in the prices of prescription drugs would strengthen Medicare for the future and reduce costs to retirees.

Chicago Activists Speak Louder with Cross-Generational Allies

The Chicago Metro Chapter of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans, including Corresponding Secretary of the chapter **Bea Lumpkin**, recently launched INTERGEN, a coalition focusing on common issues and priorities. The spark for the partnership came in October 2016 when both Illinois Alliance members and young activists attended an Early Voting rally. Since then, the older and younger activists have teamed up for rallies and protests involving health care, the "Fight for 15" (\$15 per hour minimum wage), and Tuition Free Illinois.

Ms. Lumpkin will celebrate her 99th birthday in less than three weeks. Young activists include members of the labor movement, USW Next Gen (young steelworkers), Chicago Young Workers, and Chicago Student Action. The coalition members hope that their combined voice will be a

stronger barrier to anti-worker and anti-retiree policies seen both locally under Governor **Bruce Rauner** and nationally.

“Bea has gotten me involved and made sure that I stay engaged,” said **Earchiel Johnson**, 30, of Chicago Young Workers. “It can be hard to balance work and activism, but Bea makes sure I know when I am needed.”

The group's June 17 launch was videotaped to make a short documentary available to all.



Activists of all ages from Intergen in Chicago are fighting to Save Medicare.

Price for Senior National Parks Passes to Rise

The price of a lifetime America the Beautiful Senior Pass for **National Parks and Federal Recreation Lands** will increase significantly next month. Currently, the Senior passes cost \$10, as they have since 1994, but on August 28, the price will rise to \$80. The benefits of the pass will remain the same, granting lifetime access to any of the over 2,000 National Parks and federally-run recreation sites, including national forests and grasslands.

The increase comes as a result of the National Parks Service Centennial Act, passed in 2016, and raises the senior lifetime pass to the same cost as a regular annual pass. Seniors who already own an America the Beautiful Senior Pass will be able to continue to use their pass at all locations.

“Seniors interested in attending the parks should capitalize on the current price before it goes up,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “In offering this pass to older people, the National Parks Service is making it possible to see some of the most scenic and historic lands our country has to offer.”

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*