

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Social Security Birthday Events are Both Celebrations and Reminders of Challenges Ahead

Social Security's 82nd anniversary is Monday August 14, and Alliance chapters have already been celebrating with events marking Social Security's birthday and the recent 52nd anniversary of Medicare and Medicaid.

The North Carolina Alliance had celebrations in North Pittsboro and Raleigh this week, while the Texas Alliance held events in [Beaumont](#) with former Rep. **Nick Lampson** and in Corpus Christi. Arizona Alliance members held their fourth Medicare anniversary event of the summer on Saturday in Phoenix. Members of the [California Alliance](#) held a rally in support of Medicare at the office of Rep. **Dana Rohrabacher** (R), celebrating the program's anniversary and expressing concerns over proposals to turn it into a voucher system.



North Carolina Alliance members celebrated the birthdays of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid in Raleigh on Wednesday.

At a time when more Americans are reliant on Social Security for a larger portion of their retirement income, [Government Executive](#) magazine obtained a memo detailing the **Trump** administration move to offer thousands of its employees an early-retirement buyout, which would strain the agency's ability to deliver effective service to beneficiaries. SSA is opening up separation incentives to nearly every job category across its workforce, with about one in four employees eligible to leave. SSA has already closed more than 60 field offices and 500 mobile offices since 2010, increasing wait times for services at existing offices.

"We need to expand our earned Social Security benefits, not cut them or the SSA budget," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "The Alliance's anniversary events are a celebration, but they are also an important reminder that the guaranteed benefits that Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid offer to millions of seniors are in constant danger of privatization schemes and cuts from misguided politicians in Washington. The House budget introduced in July would cut all the programs we are celebrating this summer."

Rights of Nursing Home Residents are under Attack by Trump Administration

In an apparent attack on the rights of nursing home residents, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced the agency's intention to remove an **Obama**-era rule banning nursing homes receiving Medicaid funding from forcing residents to sign mandatory-arbitration agreements. Before the rule was put into place, nursing homes could compel residents to sign away their right to sue in case of abuse, forcing them to go into arbitration instead. Many nursing home executives argue that this was to avoid expensive litigation, but arbitration tends to be friendlier to businesses, decreasing the chances that victims of abuse and their families can gain justice.

In June, the CMS announced their plan to remove the rule, and the fight over this plan is [reaching a boiling point](#). Public statements about the rule were due Monday, and a number of different advocacy groups made their opposition to the rule clear. The Alliance has [opposed](#) the rule change since it was first suggested, given that it strips nursing home residents of their right to seek justice through the courts.

"The proposed rule change by the CMS is a classic example of the powerful taking advantage of the most vulnerable Americans," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "Nursing home residents and their families must have the right to sue if the care they receive is inadequate or even abusive. Instead of taking power away from the victims, the government should be doing all it can to ensure that nursing home residents are given the safe, quality care they deserve."

One of Four Older Workers Are Not Covered by Employer Health Plans

According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for older Americans (over 55) is 3.2%. Although this is relatively low, it doesn't tell the whole story, including information about job quality and benefits, which paints a different picture.

The Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis at the New School [reported](#) that only 76% of workers aged 55-64 were covered by health insurance from their own employment or through their spouse's. The other 24% had to purchase their own insurance, often with high premiums or less coverage; were eligible for means-tested Medicaid; or went uninsured. This can be quite dangerous for older workers, as the high premiums and deductibles that come with private

insurance for them can cut deeply into retirement savings. For the uninsured, medical cases can become catastrophic and destroy chances of saving for the future.

Researchers at the New School suggested a number of policies that would help ensure that older workers can have their health care needs met. Two ideas are strengthening the Affordable Care Act and expanding Social Security in order to make the path to retirement smoother.

“Workers in the 55-64 age range are especially vulnerable when it comes to their health care needs,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “It is essential that we find a way to get these individuals covered so that all workers can enjoy a healthy and stable retirement.”

Justice Department Changes Position on Voting Rights Case

In another reversal of Obama-era policy, the Trump Administration’s Department of Justice has [announced its support](#) of the state of Ohio in an upcoming case before the U.S. Supreme Court. The Department of Justice filed an amicus briefing Monday stating the reversal of its position. After the change of administrations, the federal lawyers wrote, the Department now believes Ohio is within its rights to remove registered voters from voting lists for being inactive.

Ohio’s procedure allows the state to purge a voter who has not cast a ballot in two years after the person has been sent a notice asking them to confirm their registration. If the voter does not respond and does not cast a ballot over the next four years, the person is removed from the rolls.

Voting rights activists consider these purges to be a form of voter suppression, which overwhelmingly affects minorities and the elderly. They see the Justice Department’s reversal of position as an example of the Trump Administration’s attack on voting rights. The President’s Commission on Election Integrity, founded earlier this year, requested voter information from all fifty states, and received severe backlash from those who say its purpose is to suppress the vote. Efforts at voter suppression disproportionately affect the elderly and minorities, who are less likely to have a state ID and often lack the necessary documents or financial ability to obtain one.

The Supreme Court will likely hear the case, *Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Institute*, in November. The suit was brought forth by the ACLU of Ohio and the think tank Demos, a progressive group that focuses extensively on voting rights.

Alliance Publishes Fact Sheet on House Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Proposal

A new Alliance [fact sheet](#) spells out how the GOP House budget for fiscal year 2018 threatens Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Republicans would raise the Medicare eligibility age from 65 to 67; voucherize it; and raise income related premiums while gutting Medicaid. The budget cuts Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) by \$5.4 billion, penalizing disabled individuals who attempt to work part-time in order to supplement their income, but -- through no fault of their own -- lose their jobs.

Virginia Alliance Convention Marks their 5-Year Anniversary

Virginia Alliance members held their [convention](#) on Thursday in Williamsburg, celebrating their own five-year anniversary and the birthdays of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid with [three](#)

[cakes](#). Newly elected officers include **Cliff Carlton**, President; **Margie Brotherton**, Treasurer, and **Marguerite O'Connor**, Secretary.

Doris Crouse-Mays, Virginia AFL-CIO President, **Nancy Olumekor**, Retiree Director of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), and Executive Director Fiesta spoke about national and state retiree issues.

Delegates from all across Virginia included retirees from APWU, the Communications Workers of America (CWA), the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the Industrial Division of the Communications Workers of America (IUE-CWA), and the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART), as well as members of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) and other guests.

"Welcome to all the new officers, and a special thank you to **Ron Thompson** for his service, dedication, and leadership in not only getting the Virginia Alliance started but also passing along such a strong foundation to build on," said Mr. Fiesta.



Rich Fiesta swears in Virginia Alliance board members, left to right: Marguerite O'Connor, Secretary; Ron Thompson, Vice President; Marjorie Brotherton, Treasurer; Cliff Carlton, President; Brenda Kennedy, Vice President; and Barry Weinstein, Vice President