

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

815 16th Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20006 • 202.637.5399

[www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org) • [aracommunications@retiredamericans.org](mailto:aracommunications@retiredamericans.org)

Spanish version: [www.alianzadejubilados.org](http://www.alianzadejubilados.org)

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## **Mitch McConnell Raises the Possibility of a Grand Bargain with President Obama**

In his first major speech since becoming the new Senate Majority Leader, **Mitch McConnell** (R-KY) challenged President **Obama** to work with him, hinting that he is interested in a “Grand Bargain.” McConnell outlined an ambitious plan that includes Social Security and Medicare reforms as well as steps to achieve a balanced budget. The last big effort at a major Social Security, Medicare, budget, and tax reform agreement came during secret talks between House Speaker **John Boehner** (R-OH) and President Obama in 2011. Boehner stepped away from the effort under pressure from his members after Obama tried to extract additional tax increases. In 2013, the Alliance fought Republican attempts to address the budget deficit by implementing the Chained CPI cut to earned Social Security benefits. More from *The Fiscal Times* at <http://tinyurl.com/nxh73z2>.

Boehner was re-elected as Speaker on Tuesday. He garnered 216 votes out of 408 cast, while 25 dissenting Republicans voted for candidates including Reps. **Daniel Webster** of Florida, **Jim Jordan** of Ohio, **Louie Gohmert** of Texas and **Jeff Duncan** of South Carolina, House Majority Leader **Kevin McCarthy** and even Sens. **Rand Paul** of Kentucky and **Jeff Sessions** of Alabama.

“We need our activists ready to mobilize now more than ever,” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. “It is extremely unlikely that a grand bargain which Mitch McConnell and John Boehner are crafting would be helpful for seniors.”

## **House Vote Damages Social Security Solvency, Makes Budget Analyses Biased**

On Tuesday, the U.S. House approved a rule that will critically damage efforts to keep all of Social Security solvent. The rule changes what has been a routine reallocation of Social Security payroll tax income from the old-age program to the disability program. The Alliance sent a letter to House Democratic Leader **Nancy Pelosi** (D-CA), urging her not to support the rule change. “Voting in support of this House rule constitutes a complete disregard for keeping the promise to hardworking Americans who have contributed to Social Security,” Ms. Easterling, Alliance Secretary-Treasurer **Ruben Burks**, and Alliance Executive Director **Richard Fiesta** wrote. To see the letter, go to <http://tinyurl.com/oj7qkoe>.

The same controversial rule also requires macroeconomic scoring on major legislation in the new Congress, and opponents say it will politicize impartial budget analyses. The provision, part of the rules package that the House considers at the start of every new Congress, passed largely along party lines by a vote of 234-172. According to *The Hill*, “So-called ‘dynamic scoring’ typically offers a more favorable view of cutting taxes, which is part of why Republicans support the method.” A tally of the vote is at <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2015/roll006.xml>.

## **Alliance, Reps. Schakowsky and Matsui Warn of More Danger around the Corner**

Reps. **Jan Schakowsky** (D-IL) and **Doris Matsui** (D-CA), co-chairs of the Congressional Task Force on Seniors, wrote to President Obama on Wednesday, asking him to reject any proposals that would cut Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid or shift costs to those who use the programs.

“Retirees will be watching the 114th Congress this year to see if it protects seniors or instead follows a radical right-wing agenda and enacts legislation that cuts seniors’ earned Social Security and Medicare benefits,” said Mr. Fiesta. To read the Alliance’s full press release on the matter, go to <http://tinyurl.com/olvz7yx>. To see the Schakowsky-Matsui letter, go to <http://tinyurl.com/oq74htr>.

## **AFL-CIO’s Wage Summit Kicks off at Gallaudet University**

On Wednesday, the AFL-CIO’s Wage Summit developed concrete steps for an expanded national campaign to raise wages for working people when it kicked off at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. AFL-CIO officials stated that the summit proved America is beginning to rise up, come together and reject the idea that nothing can be done about falling wages. In major speeches at the event, Sen. **Elizabeth Warren** (D-MA) and Secretary of Labor **Tom Perez** outlined the defining economic fact of the past generation: productivity has gone way up and wages have stayed flat. Concluding the summit, AFL-CIO President **Richard Trumka** noted the enormous progress, remaining challenges and real steps the labor movement plans to undertake in order to create an economy based on raising wages. State federations of labor will hold Raising Wages summits in the first four presidential primary states—Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire and South Carolina—beginning this spring. Video of the DC summit is available online at <http://tinyurl.com/k5r7y73>.

## **Alliance Joins Rally to Stop Fast Track Trade Authority**

A group of House Democrats teamed up with the Alliance, labor, environmental and religious groups as they rallied against fast-track trade authority for President Obama on Thursday. Rep. **Rosa DeLauro** (D-CT) was a leader of the effort. The Alliance opposes Fast Track, as it would help move trade bills, like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), that could increase pharmaceutical costs for seniors. Passage of Fast track would, in essence, provide a seal of approval for trade deals that were negotiated in secrecy and would tie the hands of Congress in making any changes to the agreement. “The American people and their representatives in Congress should have the right to influence the process to move trade bills forward,” said Mr. Fiesta.

"If Congress is not able to amend a trade bill, drastic changes to current policy could be implemented before the affected parties have had a chance to weigh in," added Mr. Burks.

## **2015 Social Security and Medicare Fact Sheet is Now Available**

The Alliance has updated key information and figures on Social Security and Medicare for 2015. To see the new fact sheet, go to <http://tinyurl.com/k3smxwt>.

## **“Story Warriors” Survey – Please Fill out if you Participated**

Please fill out a brief survey if you participated in the excellent "Story Warriors" media-skills training provided by Social Security Works and the Alliance for Retired Americans either at this year's national convention or at a state convention. Link: <http://tinyurl.com/oymjosg>.