

FRIDAY ALERT



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President's Budget Offers a Mixed Bag for Seniors

President **Obama** presented his Fiscal Year 2016 budget proposal on Monday, offering a mixed bag for seniors. The budget contains several changes to Medicare, including higher deductibles, new home health co-pays, and increased means testing. However, the budget also contains several positives, including a reallocation of payroll tax revenue from Social Security's old-age and survivors trust fund to the disability trust fund. This would keep the Social Security Disability Fund solvent past 2016. Go to <http://tinyurl.com/ohr34xb> to read the Alliance's full statement.

“The budget calls for Medicare rebates for prescription drugs,” **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance, said. “It would save at least \$116 billion in Medicare payments to drug companies for medications prescribed for low-income patients. The budget also closes the doughnut hole coverage gap for brand name prescription drugs in 2017 – even faster than the year 2020 that was in the Affordable Care Act.”

Fiesta added that the budget moves the country away from the mindless sequestration cuts that have been harmful to retirees. To read the White House fact sheet on the budget and seniors, go to <http://tinyurl.com/ouw3ghs>; for one on people with disabilities, go to <http://tinyurl.com/p9z9p9n>. For a general budget overview, go to <http://tinyurl.com/mqy79h4>.

Changing District Demographics May Have Powerful Effect on Medicare Coalition

A recent *National Journal* article showed that due to redistricting and an increase of support with working class whites, House Republicans now represent Congressional districts that contain a higher proportion of seniors than Democrats. Additionally, House Republicans hold a majority of Congressional seats in districts where average incomes are lower than the national average.

The findings are a surprise to some political observers, given polls showing that seniors oppose Medicare-cutting measures like the “Ryan Budget,” by large margins. As a result, Republicans are seen as vulnerable in many districts - though Democrats have been unable to capitalize on this vulnerability. House Republicans have used opposition to the Affordable Care Act to parry Medicare concerns, while also downplaying the effects of the Ryan Budget. Overall, House Republicans hold seats over a broad swath of income levels, particularly in “lo-lo” districts, areas with low diversity and lower levels of education. Read the full piece at <http://tinyurl.com/ljlpmcu>.

“There is an opportunity for Democrats if they can capitalize on seniors’ feelings about cuts to earned Social Security and Medicare benefits,” said Fiesta.

The House Tries to Repeal the Affordable Care Act: Take 56

The House of Representatives voted Tuesday for HR 596, a bill to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA). This is the 56th time the House of Representatives have voted to repeal it. Despite its

passage in the House, the Senate will likely not pass the bill, and it would face a presidential veto even if it did pass in both chambers. Only three Republicans, Reps. **Bob Dold** (IL), **Bruce Poliquin** (ME), and **John Katko** (NY) voted against the repeal. Unlike other ACA repeal efforts, this bill came with a clause to compel Congress to generate a replacement program for the ACA.

“This is another attempt by Congress to dismantle a program that has helped millions of seniors get preventive care and more affordable prescription drugs,” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. “Congress needs to stop passing meaningless legislation on the ACA – even if this week was Groundhog Day.” Read more from *The Huffington Post* here: <http://tinyurl.com/13t8q8n>. To see a tally of how each member of the House voted, visit: <http://tinyurl.com/p8z9buh>.

Heritage Foundation, Jim DeMint Make News Threatening Social Security

Over the past several weeks, **Jim DeMint**, former Senator from South Carolina and president of the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank, has been advocating for drastic cuts to Social Security. For example, DeMint called for improving the U.S. fiscal situation “...with entitlement reforms like Medicare premium support and Social Security benefit and eligibility changes, as well as cuts to domestic discretionary programs and military compensation reform.” (<http://tinyurl.com/lt3um49>)

Recent articles published by the Heritage Foundation call for the cuts under the guise of “improving the program for seniors.” DeMint spoke recently at the 2015 Iowa “Freedom Summit,” which featured speeches by a number of conservative Presidential hopefuls. He told an enthusiastic crowd that they must “change the welfare programs that are supposed to help the poor,” and bring them in line with conservative values. One way to do that: the Heritage Foundation would save \$12 billion by returning Supplemental Security Income (SSI) “to serve its originally intended population” (<http://tinyurl.com/of36h7e>).

“What Jim DeMint is proposing would weaken the economic standing of many seniors,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “Alliance members must continue to do our part to expand Social Security instead.”

Wisconsin Alliance to Celebrate its 10th Anniversary

The Wisconsin Alliance is celebrating their 10th Anniversary on Monday, March 2nd at the Concourse Hotel in Madison. Guest speakers include **Dean Baker** from the Center for Economic & Policy Research; **Ruth Conniff**, the Editor of *Progressive Magazine*; **Dr. Robert Kraig** of Citizen Action of Wisconsin; and Mr. Fiesta. The speakers will discuss retirement security, affordable health care, media strategies, and labor issues. More at <http://tinyurl.com/l8zwpqd>.

Medicare Turns 50: Staying Resolute in the Face of Continued Attacks

“For these long decades bill after bill has been introduced to help older citizens meet the often crushing and always rising costs of disease and crippling illness. Each time, until today, the battle has been lost. Each time the forces of compassion and justice have returned from defeat to begin the battle anew. And each time the force of increased public understanding has added to our strength.” - President **Lyndon Johnson**, April 8, 1965.