

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## **Budget Vote-O-Rama Forces Senators to Take a Stance on Retirement Security, Minimum Wage**

Members of the U.S. Senate voted on dozens of amendments to the Fiscal Year 2016 Budget on Wednesday. This marathon “Vote-O-Rama” session forced many Senators, including 2016 GOP Presidential hopefuls, to take definitive positions on issues such as raising the minimum wage, preserving Medicare and Social Security earned benefits, and protecting against Medicaid cuts.

On Friday, Democratic Senators **Elizabeth Warren** (MA), **Joe Manchin** (WV), **Patty Murray** (WA), **Sherrod Brown** (OH), and **Brian Schatz** (HI) offered an amendment to expand Social Security. The amendment lost on almost a completely straight party-line vote: every Democrat but **Heidi Heitkamp** (ND) and **Tom Carper** (DE) voted for it, with **Dianne Feinstein** (D) and **Barbara Mikulski** (D) not voting. Every Republican voted against it.

The Senate passed the full budget, 52-46, soon after that vote. It would slash \$5.1 trillion in spending over 10 years. The Senate proposal slashes \$431 billion from Medicare over a decade but does not provide many specifics on how those savings would be achieved. Instead, the plan tasks individual Senate committees with jurisdiction over Medicare to find such savings. A tally of the full budget vote is at <http://tinyurl.com/q3blcqj>.

The House budget would pare \$148 billion from Medicare and convert it into a voucher-like program for future beneficiaries, a step the Senate shunned. Passed by a vote of 228-199 (<http://tinyurl.com/od5gp2y>), the House budget cuts \$5.5 trillion overall, drastically reducing funding for Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) while increasing defense spending. The chambers will start hammering out a final budget deal in the coming weeks.

“Both the House and Senate version of the budget hurts seniors and puts retirement security at risk. The Alliance fiercely opposes both budgets and will work vigorously to prevent them from becoming law,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Make no mistake,” he added, “these budgets are radically anti-retiree.” More at: <http://tinyurl.com/p9bznlb> and <http://tinyurl.com/pfhtrn>.

## **Senators Harry Reid, Dan Coats Will Not Run for Re-Election**

U.S. Senate Minority Leader **Harry Reid** (D-NV) announced on Friday that he will not seek re-election in 2016. Reid has a 95% lifetime score on the Alliance’s voting record and was the recipient of the Leadership Award at the Alliance’s 2010 convention in Las Vegas. Sen. **Dan Coats** (R-IN) will also retire after the current term.

“Harry Reid has been a champion for retirees for his entire career in the House and Senate. His work as the Senate Democratic Leader enabled the Affordable Care Act to pass; he stopped **George**

**W. Bush's** effort to privatize Social Security; and he always fought hard to protect Social Security and Medicare from benefit cuts. The entire Alliance thanks him for his service and wishes him the best during his own retirement,” said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance.

### **House of Representatives Passes Legislation to Replace Sustainable Growth Rate**

The House of Representatives voted Wednesday to replace the “Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR),” a formula that determines how doctors are paid through Medicare. This legislation will replace the SGR with a system that will tie payment and bonuses to doctors’ performance scores from the government. This bill will also expand means testing for seniors, limit availability for first-dollar coverage on some Medigap plans for seniors with higher incomes, and expand the Children’s Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) for two years. The Senate has not voted on the SGR bill.

“While parts of this bill solve serious issues in how Medicare operates, we believe that retirees deserve a better deal. We would also like to see the CHIP program extended for four years, not two, and are concerned that some of the cost shifts to retirees will lead to greater beneficiary cuts in the future,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. More at <http://tinyurl.com/q7ub96t>

### **White House Conference on Aging Events are in the West Next Week**

The White House Conference on Aging (WHCOA) occurs every ten years so that seniors and White House officials can discuss issues facing retirees. While only a limited number of Alliance members can attend the official WHCOA events, the Alliance is also holding a series of forums coinciding with the WHCOA events that are open to all. Participants in these forums will discuss retirement security issues and draft messages to send to the White House for inclusion in the final recommendations. The Alliance is hosting six open events this coming week; click on the links for more information and to RSVP.

Roseville, California: <http://tinyurl.com/qxfhh47>

Boise, Idaho: <http://tinyurl.com/q5g34bl>

San Francisco, California: <http://tinyurl.com/q3kdvg9>

Portland, Oregon: <http://tinyurl.com/osrxtdt>

Omaha, Nebraska: <http://tinyurl.com/oan35xl>

Dallas, Texas: <http://tinyurl.com/oqswgom>

### **Florida Alliance Holds Annual Conference in Tallahassee**

The Florida Alliance for Retired Americans (FLARA) held their annual legislative conference in Tallahassee on Tuesday and Wednesday this week. A number of Florida legislators were present, including Reps. **Mark Pafford** and **Lori Bermann**, as well as State Senators **Jeff Clemens** and **Joseph Abruzzo**. Attending retirees discussed a number of local and national issues, including affordable housing legislation in Florida, problems with the coming Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, and concerns about the federal budget.

### **Medicare Turns 50: Continuing the Fight into the 2016 Election**

This week, Senator **Ted Cruz** (R-TX) announced his candidacy for President. In 2013, Cruz said: *“The House holds the purse strings. As much as we are going to withhold funding from Obamacare, we can just as easily withhold monies from Medicare investigations. Medicare is an entitlement program that needs to be eliminated. No amount of investigations will absolve this administration from the fact that running the lives of retired Americans is unconstitutional and flies in the face of freedom.”*

The Alliance will press Senator Cruz to explain why he believes that seniors do not deserve the benefits they have worked for their entire lives.