

FRIDAY ALERT



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January 13, 2017

Alliance Stands Up for Affordable Care Act with Allies in U.S. House

The president-elect demanded on Tuesday that Congress act immediately to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA), but details on a replacement bill are in short supply. On Thursday, Alliance Regional Board member **Jody Weinreich** responded, speaking alongside House Democratic Leader **Nancy Pelosi** (CA) and the Seniors Task Force co-chairs Reps. **Jan Schakowsky** (D-IL) and **Doris Matsui** (D-CA) at a press conference on Capitol Hill.



Jody Weinreich tells her story, surrounded by members of Congress, from left: Reps. Bobby Scott (VA), Carol Shea-Porter (NH, partly hidden), Gene Green (TX), Nancy Pelosi, Pramila Jayapal (WA), Jan Schakowsky, Suzanne Bonamici (OR), Joyce Beatty (OH), Charlie Crist (FL), Doris Matsui, Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA) and Michelle Lujan Grisham (NM).

Ms. Weinreich and other speakers reminded those in attendance that the passage of the ACA strengthened the Medicare Trust Fund, lowered prescription drug costs, offered subsidized insurance for many older workers and allowed free preventive services for all seniors. The House [voted](#) 227-198 today to approve the 2017 budget resolution that instructs committees to write legislation repealing the law. No Democrats voted for the resolution.

“How ironic that I am having my annual wellness visit, at no cost to myself, the day of the repeal vote tomorrow,” said Ms. Weinreich. “Repeal of the ACA is wrong and will put a lot of us in a terrible health and financial situation.”

“Keeping the benefits that seniors have relied on in the Affordable Care Act will require a united effort from constituents and our allies in Congress,” added **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. “We must continue to put pressure on those who are working to repeal it.”

First Affordable Care Act Repeal Steps are taken in Senate

Voting just after 1:30 a.m. on Thursday after hours of debate, the Senate [voted](#) in favor of a budget blueprint that would allow them to repeal the ACA without the threat of Democratic filibuster. The final, closely contested vote was [51 to 48](#). The budget blueprint instructs House and Senate committees to draft repeal legislation by January 27th.

Sen. **Bernie Sanders** (I-VT) proposed a budget amendment that would prevent any legislation that cuts Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid. The amendment [failed](#), with 49 Senators voting in favor of it and 49 in opposition. It needed 60 votes for consideration.

Another amendment, put forward by Sen. **Mazie Hirono** (D-HI), would have prevented legislation that cuts Medicare or Medicaid. Sen. Hirono’s amendment also failed to reach 60 votes for consideration, with the [final vote](#) being 49 yays and 47 nays.

“Tuesday’s votes tell us that we are well within striking distance of a victory on preventing cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “We must hold the incoming president to his promise when he said, ‘...We are not going to cut your Social Security and we’re not cutting your Medicare.’”

Save the Date: National Call the White House Day January 23

GOP leaders in Congress are preparing bills to dismantle or cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid for current and future retirees. **Donald Trump** promised repeatedly not to cut these earned benefits on the campaign trail. To help hold him accountable thousands of activists will call the White House on January 23 and tell Trump to veto any cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. You can RSVP for the call-in day [here](#). When you RSVP, we will send you a reminder on the 23rd and a script to use for your call.

Alliance Leaders Meet with Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation Management

On Wednesday President Roach, Alliance Executive Director **Richard Fiesta**, and Alliance Legislative Representative **Eva Dominguez** met with top leaders of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), an independent agency that protects workers’ and retirees’ private sector defined benefit plans. They discussed a wide range of issues related to protecting the retirement incomes of the workers and retirees in more than 23,000 private pension plans. In 2016, PBGC paid for monthly retirement benefits, up to a guaranteed maximum, for nearly 840,000 retirees in single-employer and multiemployer pension plans that cannot pay promised benefits.

The meeting was part of an initiative to teach labor representatives and employee activists about corporate bankruptcies that may result in pensions being terminated. The program would be

taught through the State University of New York (SUNY), the Pension Rights Center and affiliated unions.

Officials also offered an update on government programs for people who have lost their pensions and their health insurance and are not eligible for Medicare. The [Health Coverage Tax Credit](#), credits for individuals who lost their jobs through trade agreements, had previously expired but was reinstated until 2019. Participants must go directly to the IRS to obtain the credit. In addition, they discussed the ongoing funding problems of the PBGC.

“The Alliance is committed to working with affiliated unions to fight for proper funding of PBGC so they can continue their work of protecting 40 million American workers and retirees with private defined benefit pensions,” said President Roach. “We pledge to educate our members on programs that assist them with protecting their pensions.”

“We need to make sure that the PBGC has the right tools now and in the future to pay the benefits that retirees earned during their working lives,” he added.

The PBGC insures both single-employer and multi-employer pension plans. [Multi-employer plans](#) provide retirement security to more than 10 million people and their families and are portable: workers won't lose their benefits if they change jobs within the same industry. However, PBGC needs additional tools in order to protect multiemployer plans.

If a single-employer plan fails and PBGC becomes responsible for it, the agency directly pays benefits due to retirees (and future retirees) up to legal limits. PBGC does not directly pay the benefits of people in failed multiemployer plans. Instead, the agency provides financial assistance to the plans themselves, which continue to pay retirees. For more consumer info on PBGC, including the resources it provides, go to <http://www.pbgc.gov/about/factsheets/page/pbgc-facts.html>.

Social Security Administration Eliminating Paper Statements for Many

Due to budget cuts, the Social Security Administration (SSA) is stretched thin and the public is going to experience further [reductions](#) in services. The SSA announced on January 9th that it will now only send annual paper statements to people age 60 and over, who are not getting benefits and don't have a “My Social Security” account.

The SSA is already serving more people with less funding. Although the number of beneficiaries increased by 13% since 2010, the funds it receives is 10% lower than 2010 levels after adjusting for inflation. Despite the administrative costs of SSA being less than 1%, the elimination of the paper statements is just one part of a larger trend to hinder the SSA's work.

This latest reduction in service comes on the heels of a hiring freeze that will reduce SSA's staff to the lowest level since FY 2013. This shortage has led to extremely long delays in services; for example, over a million people are waiting for a hearing to see if they are eligible for disability benefits. With a new federal budget due by April 28th, SSA officials are bracing for even further cuts.

“Starving the Social Security Administration of its funding will inevitably lead to cuts in services to seniors and the disabled,” said Mr. Fiesta. “We must increase SSA's resources so that it can hire more staff, address backlogs and mail paper statements to all those who need them.”