

FRIDAY ALERT



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January 27, 2017

Retirees a Key Part of Protest Marches

Retiree activists were a key part of the worldwide movement involved in Saturday's Women's Marches.

"The rallies were about making a commitment," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "We are going to hold all elected officials accountable for protecting and respecting American values. We are especially going to hold the current administration to their commitment to protect Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. We will defend our defined benefit pensions just as vigorously."



Connecticut Alliance members display an Alliance sign at the march in Hartford on Saturday.

As a follow-up to the rallies, the Alliance organized thousands of people to call the White House on Monday to demand accountability from the new President, only to have the White House disable its telephone comment line. In response, the Alliance connected activists to Congress and asked people to sign a petition to President Trump on our [home page](#).



Jim Rivers, Alliance Southern Region board member, represented the Texas Alliance at the march in Ft. Worth.

HHS and OMB Nominees Price, Mulvaney Tout Cuts to Social Security and Medicare

As confirmation hearings were held this week for Rep. **Tom Price** to be Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and Rep. **Mick Mulvaney** to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), retirees reacted with fear and dread. Rep. Price has earned a lifetime pro-retiree score of just 4% on the Alliance's [Congressional Voting Record](#), while Rep. Mulvaney has earned a lifetime score of just 6%.

Rep. Mulvaney's history includes voting in the South Carolina State Senate in May, 2009 for an amendment declaring Social Security and Medicaid unconstitutional. In May 2011, he said that Paul Ryan's plan needed to go farther because it did not cut Social Security and Medicare "rapidly enough." That same year, Mulvaney told MSNBC that Social Security was a "Ponzi scheme" that might not be able to provide assistance to people in the years to come.

He even failed to pay Social Security and Medicare withholding taxes for a domestic worker, violating the law everyone else must follow and disrespecting the very system he would oversee.

"On Tuesday, Rep. Mulvaney again pledged to push President Trump to raise the Social Security retirement age beyond 67," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "Both Mulvaney and Price have pledged to replace guaranteed earned Medicare benefits with a system of 'coupon-care' and vouchers that will cost retirees more out of pocket."

During his hearing, Rep. Price refused to commit to work on reducing prescription drug costs for Medicare beneficiaries, and said he remains an advocate for raising the Medicare eligibility age. Both nominees have positions in favor of Medicare and Social Security "reform" that are in direct conflict with President **Trump's** repeated promises not to cut Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

"These two nominees should not be confirmed," said Mr. Fiesta. "President Trump must keep his campaign promise and publicly vow to veto any bills that cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid and appoint people to his cabinet who will help him keep those commitments."

Trump's Budget Begins to Leak

Although **President Trump's first** budget is not scheduled to be released until April, details of his plans are beginning to emerge. According to *The Hill* and other media outlets, the budget will be based on a [plan](#) outlined by the conservative [Heritage Foundation](#).

The Heritage Foundation advocates raising the Medicare eligibility age to 68 and beyond while adding a "temporary" premium for Part A (hospital insurance). The right-wing think tank wants to increase premiums for Medicare Part B (services like lab tests, surgeries, and doctor visits as well as supplies like wheelchairs and walkers) and D (prescription drugs). It also wants to increase means-testing for seniors with higher incomes, shift additional costs to seniors, and begin transitioning to vouchers or "coupon care" quickly.

Social Security could also be slashed in the budget, with a potential move to a chained-CPI COLA formula, combined with a higher retirement age indexed to keep going up. In addition, Medicaid would be cut if the rumors come to fruition, as many in the GOP propose turning it into a block grant program to states.

"These would be drastic cuts that are leaking fly in the face of everything the new president promised the country during his campaign," said President Roach. "He was very explicit when he said over and over that Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are safe."

A hiring freeze for the federal government that the new president announced this week is an additional hit in a long line of cuts and reductions for the Social Security Administration (SSA). Its staffing is at its lowest level since 2013, despite more of beneficiaries. The hiring freeze will also further burden the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, reducing the number of doctors and nurses for the VA as an increasing number of the nation's 3 million veterans rely on it.

In Victory for Labor, the United States Leaves the TPP; NAFTA Changes Could Be Next

On Monday, the United States officially left the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The trade agreement initially seemed destined to become law, but thanks to extensive mobilization, a broad consensus against it was established. The Alliance played a major role in these efforts and produced a [factsheet](#) showing the detrimental effect the agreement would have on prescription drug prices.

In an [editorial](#) celebrating the victory, AFL-CIO President **Richard Trumka** reiterated that the TPP was a bad deal for Americans because it would have resulted in not only higher prescription drug costs but also market entry delays for generic drugs. It also would have allowed foreign pharmaceutical companies to sue the government for higher reimbursement, which would have raised program costs without benefiting seniors. Last month the AFL-CIO came out with a [blueprint](#) to improve NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"Any trade deal should be made with the best interests of American workers at heart, not multinational corporations," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "With NAFTA, it is essential that the importation of prescription drugs from Canada be addressed in a way that helps lower costs and improves access to life saving care."