

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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President Roach: Congress Must Not Forget Mine Workers as Next Budget Deadline Looms

On Monday President **Trump** signed a three-week stopgap funding measure into law, ending the three-day government shutdown. The Continuing Resolution funds the government through February 8, 2018.

The timeline leaves a window for Congress to address the pension rights of thousands of United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) retirees, covered by the 1974 Pension Plan, when they vote on the budget for the rest of the fiscal year.

Since 1946, the United States government has lived up to the promise it made to retired miners: 'If you will bring out the coal that provides the foundation for the American economy, then the government will make sure you have a secure retirement.' Legislation is now the only option that will prevent insolvency and preserve benefits for these retired mine workers.

"They earned their pensions by risking their lives in a dangerous line of work to meet the country's energy requirements," said **Robert Roach Jr.**, President of the Alliance of the retired mine workers. "Their average pension is just \$586 per month. Many pension recipients are widows who depend on that pension to meet their most basic needs."

Ten years ago the plan was 93% funded, and on a path to 100% funding. However, the 2008-09 recession and a series of bankruptcies in the coal industry over the last six years have decimated the fund. Several coal companies were relieved of further pension obligations by bankruptcy courts and contributions were wiped out.

"Our government must meet that commitment that was made generations ago. Preserve these pensions, so that thousands of our seniors can live in dignity," added President Roach.

Social Security Administration Picket Events Planned for Monday Across the Nation

An Alliance priority for the Fiscal Year 2018 federal budget is full funding for the Social Security Administration (SSA). The Senate Appropriation Committee has proposed cuts to the SSA budget of \$492 million from the prior year, and the House could soon follow.

These cuts will do irreparable harm to SSA workers and every citizen who relies on Social Security for retirement, survivor or disability benefits now or in the future. If approved, the agency

would not have the funding to replace employees due to attrition and will be unable to process high priority workloads. Furloughs of 20 days or more may be inevitable. More offices will close, lines will be longer, and wait times on the 800-number will grow to hours. Backlogs will grow and office hours could be reduced again.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) needs the public, as well as community and local labor organizations, to assist. AFGE will organize picket lines at local SSA offices around the country during the lunch hour this Monday, January 29.

Please join the Alliance and AFGE and fight for full funding for the SSA.

“The Alliance and AFGE are urging you to contact your Congressional Representative and U.S. Senators,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Call your members of Congress at 1-866-616-4372 and tell them to fully fund the SSA. Once you provide your ZIP Code, you will be connected directly to the office of your U.S. Senators and Representative.”

Trump’s Pick for Health and Human Services Secretary Confirmed, Despite Opposition

On Wednesday, the Senate [confirmed](#) former Eli Lilly executive **Alex Azar** as the next Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services by a vote of [55-43](#). All but one Republican - Sen. **Rand Paul** (KY) - voted in favor of confirmation.

During his time at Eli Lilly, Azar was responsible for increasing drug prices, leading to incredulity when he pledged to lower prices if confirmed as Secretary. He remains opposed to allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices and to drug importation. During his tenure, Eli Lilly more than tripled the price of the life-saving medication insulin.

“This confirmation is a travesty,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “We need a Secretary who will take on the drug corporations, not put profits ahead of patients’ health.”

Hawaii, Texas Alliance Chapters Hold their Conventions

The Hawaii Alliance for Retired Americans held their biennial convention on January 13, with more than 100 members in attendance. President Roach and Executive Director Fiesta addressed the attendees. Newly re-affiliated machinists union (IAMAW) members were among the participants.

The executive board was all re-elected: **Justin Wong**, Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA), as President; **Elmer Yuen**, Hawaii Government Employees Association (HGEA), as Vice President; **Carol Noland**, United Public Workers (UPW), as Secretary; and **Phyllis Hiramatsu**, Community Advocacy Network (CAN), as Treasurer.

Sen. **Brian Schatz**, Honolulu Mayor **Kirk Caldwell**, and **Guy Fujimora**, Secretary-Treasurer of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 124, also addressed the convention, which took place in his union hall.

Governor **David Ige** was scheduled to address the convention but his motorcade was diverted away when false alarm text messages of a ballistic attack were sent to cell phones.

“Thank you to the entire Hawaii Alliance board for their continued service, and to all the attendees for persevering despite the mistaken missile warning,” said President Roach.



Left to Right: Sen. Schatz, Alliance Executive Board member Jean Dobashi, and President Roach

The [Texas Alliance for Retired Americans](#) held their biennial convention at the Sheraton Hotel in Austin on January 19, kicking off the annual convention of the Texas AFL-CIO COPE (Committee on Political Education). More than 50 members attended, representing affiliates and local chapters from around the state.

Tony Padilla, a retired machinist and labor leader from Austin, was elected President of the Texas Alliance. Previously, he had served as Secretary. American Postal Workers Union (APWU) retiree **Lewis Fulbright** of Dallas was re-elected as Treasurer. **Gene Lantz**, a UAW retiree also from Dallas, was elected as Secretary, a position he had held prior to his recent time as President.

“I would like to thank Gene Lantz for his hard work and continued service as we welcome President Padilla and Treasurer Fulbright,” said Fiesta.

A number of representatives from the Texas labor community briefed the convention attendees, including Texas AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer **Montserrat Garibay**. He requested the Alliance's participation in the State Federation's ambitious voter registration and mobilization drive. Texas AFL-CIO President **Rick Levy** pledged to work with the Texas Alliance in every area and region of the Lone Star State. **Brendan Kelly**, Director of Field Mobilization, represented the national Alliance.



From the left: Brendan Kelly, Lewis Fulbright, Tony Padilla, and Gene Lantz