

FRIDAY ALERT



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Ryan Determined to Cut Social Security, Medicare

In interviews last month, House Speaker **Paul Ryan** (R-WI) signaled his intention to force a 2018 debate on “restructuring” Medicare, as well as several big safety-net programs. “We have to address entitlements, otherwise we can’t really get a handle on our future debt,” Ryan said on “CBS This Morning” in December.

Ryan is [expected](#) to move so-called “entitlement reform” through the House and then exert pressure on the Senate to take up the issue. Among the ideas that Ryan favors are raising the Social Security retirement age and the Medicare eligibility age, and converting Medicare to a voucher program, ending the promise of guaranteed medical benefits for retirees.

There are some GOP senators who share Ryan’s enthusiasm for cutting Social Security and Medicare, including Sen. **Orrin Hatch** (R-UT), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, who announced this week that he will not seek re-election this year.

“I’d love it,” said Sen. **Jeff Flake** (R-AZ). “That’s a heavy lift, particularly after the tax bill ... but we know we’ve got to rein in these programs in order to make them sustainable.”

When asked this past Wednesday whether the President’s campaign pledge not to cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid still stood, White House press secretary **Sarah Huckabee Sanders** [said](#) “at this point” that the President hasn’t changed his position.

“At this point,” is quite a choice of words, said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. “It is a far cry from ‘the President will keep his promise to the American people.’ That is deeply troubling.”

“It sounds suspiciously like a White House that is trying to create wiggle room,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. Please [join our Rapid Response team](#) to receive special updates and action alerts on this topic.

Trump Administration Loosens Nursing Home Regulations

The Administration — reversing guidelines put in place under President **Obama** — is [scaling back the use of fines](#) against nursing homes that harm residents or place them in grave risk of injury.

Since 2013, nearly 6,500 nursing homes — 4 of every 10 — have been cited at least once for a serious violation, according to federal records. Medicare has fined two-thirds of those homes. Common citations include failing to protect residents from avoidable accidents, neglect, mistreatment and bedsores.

The new guidelines discourage regulators from levying fines in some situations, even when they have resulted in a resident's death. The guidelines will also probably result in lower fines for many facilities.

Nursing homes often claim they're doing the best they can with limited budgets, [but owners themselves are doing very well](#) financially according to *The New York Times*.

"The rollback of these regulations is not necessary to stabilize the industry financially," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "This is merely a giveaway to the corporations that run many nursing homes."



Seema Verma, administrator for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, said that the agency's regulations were "taking doctors away from what matters most: patients."

Expect More Attacks on Health Care Access in 2018

The Hill newspaper [listed](#) five likely ways Trump could undermine ObamaCare in the year ahead. The first is based on Trump's executive order from October, said to be aimed at easing Affordable Care Act rules. The major implications of the change are still to come. Agencies need to issue regulations to bring the order into effect, and that has not happened yet. There are questions about how far those regulations will go and how they will impact the stability of ObamaCare. Democrats fear the order will undermine the law by opening up skimpier, cheaper plans that will siphon healthy people away from ObamaCare plans.

For instance, in making technical changes to "association health plans," allowing more companies and self-employed individuals to join them, they would exempt the associations from some of the law's core insurance rules.

Also on the *Hill* list: cuts to funds for outreach offering sign-up information; targeting essential health benefits that are currently required; allowing counties to lose insurers; and withholding support for stabilizing the ObamaCare markets.

Obituary: Jim Baldrige, 71, Former President of the Maryland-DC Alliance

Jim Baldrige, who served as president of the Maryland-D.C. chapter of the Alliance from 2013 - 2017, [died after a long illness](#) on December 20. He is survived by his wife of 47 years, Margaret, their daughter, Mary Jean, and their son, Paul.

Prior to his position with the Maryland-DC Alliance, Jim came of age politically in the early 1970s as a machinist at Beth Steel Shipyard, where his proficiency in math and skill in handling huge wrenches, hammers and other tools helped him repair propellers and other gear on ocean-going ships. He was an active member and key organizer of the Union of Shipbuilding and Marine Workers of America, protesting the Vietnam War. Later, he worked as a mechanic, repairing hospital equipment at Johns Hopkins Hospital for thirty years before retiring in 2011.

He [remained active until the end](#) in Veterans for Peace, driving his pickup truck festooned with anti-war slogans in the Martin Luther King Jr. birthday march on MLK Boulevard in Baltimore followed by a contingent of anti-war vets.



Jim Baldrige, center in foreground, with friends helping Hyatt workers unionize in Baltimore. (June, 2012)

“We will miss Jim for many reasons, including his activism and his dry sense of humor,” said Executive Director Fiesta. “But most of all, we will miss his warmth.”

A celebration of Jim Baldrige's life is set for Saturday, Feb. 17, at 2 p.m. at Govans Presbyterian Church, 5828 York Road in Baltimore.

The Alliance for Retired Americans is a national organization that advocates for the rights and well-being of over 4.4 million retirees and their families.