

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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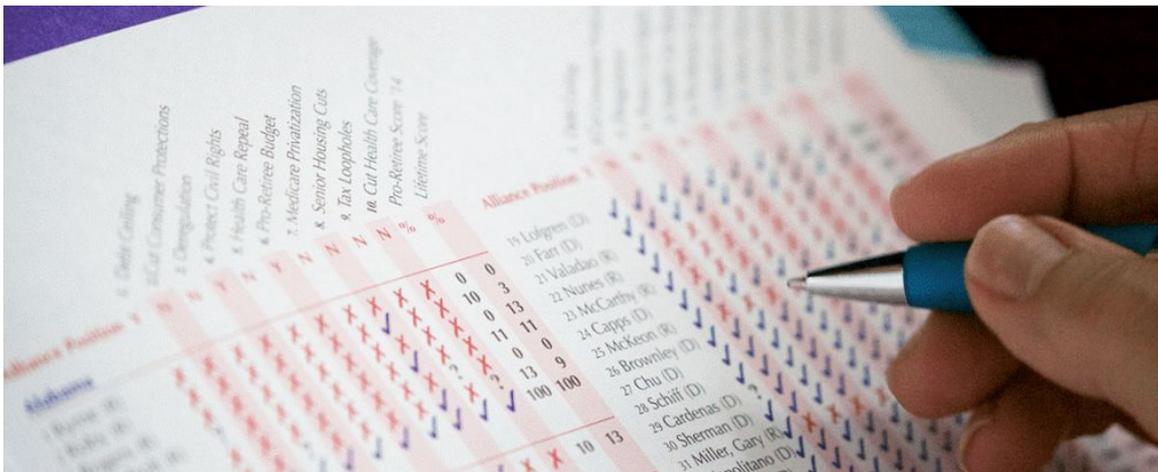
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Alliance Voting Record Shows Majority of Congress Failed to Support Retirees Last Year

The Alliance released its 2017 [voting record](#) on Thursday, scoring every U.S. Representative and Senator on issues affecting current and future retirees.

The annual report examined 10 key Senate and House votes in 2017, highlighting issues concerning the health and well being of retirees. Specific votes affected retiree benefits including Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, along with prescription drug prices and health care. Votes on bills such as tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and corporations, combined with tax increases for lower-income and middle class families, are included as well.



Neither Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (KY) nor Speaker Paul Ryan (WI) cast a single pro-retiree vote. Key committee

leaders, such as Senate Finance **Chairman Orrin Hatch (UT)** and House Education and the Workforce **Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (NC)** also received scores of 0%. Many members of Congress followed their leadership and voted against retiree interests, resulting in low scores.

“Our quality of life is under attack in Washington, and our Voting Record shows how committed each member of Congress is to the needs of older Americans,” Alliance President **Robert Roach, Jr.** said. “This report will help us to make informed voting choices in November.”

Thirty-four members of the Senate achieved perfect scores of 100% in 2017, while another 40 received a score of 0%. In the House of Representatives, 178 members received perfect scores of 100% in 2017 while 191 received scores of zero.

House Fails to Pass New Work Requirements that Would Leave Two Million People Hungry

The U.S. House of Representatives was unable to pass the 2018 Farm Bill, which includes stricter work requirements for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) beneficiaries. The bill would cut \$20 billion from the program over 10 years, eliminating assistance for approximately 2 million people. The Alliance sent a [letter](#) to members of the House urging them to vote no, and Alliance members phoned Capitol Hill to register their opposition.

The vote was [198-213](#). Joining with House Democrats who opposed the bill due to the increased work requirements, the conservative House Freedom Caucus sank it over an immigration dispute with GOP leadership. President **Trump** had previously said he will veto any final farm bill that does not include the more onerous requirements.

42 million Americans live in poverty, and SNAP allows them to purchase food for their families. Older Americans are eligible for SNAP with no work requirements once they reach age 60, but income and resource restrictions are still in place.

“Thank you to the many Alliance members who called Congress on this issue,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “Such drastic changes to the SNAP program would increase bureaucracy and hurt people. Congress’ priorities are wrong: tax breaks for the wealthy while making it harder for vulnerable people to feed their families.”

Janus v. AFSCME Decision Expected Soon

The U.S. Supreme Court will soon issue a decision in Janus v. AFSCME Council 31, a case that could take away the freedom to join together in a union. A decision could come any day between now and June 30.

The case has deep implications for public sector unions and their ability to charge agency fees for workers not paying union dues. Agency fees, also known as fair share fees, allow unions to have the financial capability to represent and negotiate on behalf of all employees. Without requiring these fees, even the workers who contribute nothing will receive all the benefits of a union contract.

A pro-Janus decision would make these fees illegal, significantly reducing unions’ resources to negotiate on behalf of their members. A wide variety of well-funded corporate donors are backing the anti-union case, including the Koch Brothers. Organizations such as The Freedom Foundation and National Right to Work have begun aggressive campaigns to convince union members to drop out by spreading [false information](#) regarding how dues are distributed.

Corporate backers hope a ruling in their favor will bleed unions of precious resources, taking away the ability to win progress for working people and making it easier to roll back what took decades to win.

Regardless of the decision, organized labor remains strong. Over 14,000 people formed or joined a union in just one week this year, and historic teacher strikes and grassroots labor movements are spreading nationwide.

“The case is an attack on active workers, retirees and all of our retirement security,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “We are truly all in this together.”

Read more about [the Janus case on the Alliance website](#).

Trump Selects McConnell Brother-in-Law, Big GOP Donor, to Lead PBGC

President Trump announced that tech entrepreneur **Gordon Hartogensis** is his pick to lead the Department of Labor’s Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), which insures private-sector pension plans for retirees. The position requires Senate confirmation.

The PBGC covers the pension plans of nearly 40 million retired Americans should those plans fail and retirees stop receiving benefits. The agency provided monthly paychecks to approximately 900,000 pensioners last year.

According to [Roll Call](#), "From his résumé, it is unclear what retirement fund experience Hartogensis, a Stanford graduate with a bachelor’s degree in computer science who has worked as a technology logistics executive since 1993, brings to the agency — beyond managing his family’s trust since 2011."

“The person who leads the PBGC must be someone who will watch out for the millions of retirees and their surviving spouses who depend on their hard earned pensions to meet their most basic needs,” said President Roach. “We commend Tom Reeder for being transparent and responsive to the needs of pension plan participants during his time as Director.”

Senate Hearing Examines Multiemployer Pension Plans

On Thursday, the Select Committee on the Solvency of Multiemployer Pension Plans heard from **Tom Reeder**, Director of the PBGC. Mr. Reeder spoke on the financial state of the PBGC and discussed the enormity of the funding shortfall in the multiemployer trust fund. PBGC’s Multiemployer Program provides financial assistance to multiemployer plans that have run out of money so that they can pay benefits at PBGC guaranteed levels. The current level of assets in the multiemployer trust fund is \$2 billion, while the liabilities are \$67 billion. If nothing is done, the trust fund is expected to become insolvent in 2025. The Trump Administration suggests raising premiums as a solution.

Sen. **Heidi Heitkamp** (ND) pointed out that higher premiums would not solve the problem. She brought up the Butch Lewis Act, which she is sponsoring, that would provide a loan to the troubled pension plans. She also pointed out past federal loan programs. The federal government has provided over \$600 billion in loans to banks, insurance companies and automakers during economic crises to help stabilize the economy. She extracted from Mr. Reeder that the funding shortfall of Central States and the other troubled multiemployer plans is also a crisis that would hurt workers, their families and the entire economy.

Sen. **Joe Manchin** (WV), who sits on the committee, raised the mine workers pension fund, which is expected to become insolvent in 2022, and the need to shore it up because of the disastrous effect a failure would have on retired mine workers, their widows and families.

Washington State Alliance for Retired Americans Holds their Convention

Delegates at the 2018 Washington State Alliance (WSARA) Convention gathered in Federal Way, Washington on Tuesday. Executive Director **Fiesta** swore in **Shirley Hickey**, Washington Education Association (WEA), as the new Secretary, as well as the following union Vice-Presidents who were re-elected for 3-year terms: **Steve Kofahl**, American Federation of Government Employees; **Marsha Beck**, Communications Workers of America; and **Mary Lindsey** (WEA).

Revisions to the by-laws officially changed the name of the organization to the Washington State Alliance for Retired Americans. Attendees heard from **Lisa Brown**, candidate for Congress in the 5th Congressional District, who talked about why she decided to return to politics and challenge incumbent Representative **Cathy McMorris Rodgers**.



Left to right: Richard Fiesta, VP Mary Lindsey (WEA), Secretary Shirley Hicks (WEA), VP Marsha Beck (CWA) and VP Steve Kofahl, (AFGE).

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.