This past year has been a challenging one for the Alliance for Retired Americans, but even more so for the people we represent and the issues we support.

Within days of the 2016 election it was clear that the campaign trail promises President Trump made—to oppose cuts to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security—would be abandoned.

Protecting health care for current and future retirees was a priority of our advocacy. We helped pre-empt a direct cut to Medicare in the new Administration’s first budget proposal in early January. Time and again we spoke out and successfully thwarted attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and the Medicaid cuts that would come with that.

As the year closes we are again fighting to prevent the largest wealth transfer in a generation: $1.5 trillion in cuts to essential programs to fund unneeded tax breaks skewed heavily to the wealthiest Americans and profitable corporations. These cuts take significantly from important domestic government programs, and still increase the deficit so much that $25 billion in Medicare cuts will be triggered. And 2018 promises to be equally challenging, with House Speaker Paul Ryan publicly announcing his intention to pursue cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid next year.

Alliance activists eagerly joined with active union members to support a broad range of affiliate priorities, from circulating petitions to putting so-called “Right to Work” to a vote in Missouri, to staffing GOTV phone banks in Virginia, building awareness of the BCTGM #CheckTheLabel campaign to boycott Mexican-made Nabisco snacks and rallying in support of the UAW organizing campaign in Mississippi.

The 2017 elections in New Jersey and Virginia, where Alliance members helped turn out votes for union-endorsed candidates, were a bright spot and remind us that if we are engaged and focused, we can elect candidates who support working families and retirees and begin to turn back the radical right-wing agenda Congress is pursuing.

We are grateful for the support of our union affiliate members and our community members and look forward to continuing our work in 2018.

In solidarity,

Robert Roach, Jr.
Despite unified Republican control of the House, Senate and White House, Alliance members stood with allies representing labor, people with disabilities, patient advocates and others in stopping the passage of bills that would have slashed Medicaid and driven health care prices higher for all Americans. The GOP plans were stopped in dramatic fashion in the United States Senate, with Republican Senators Collins, McCain and Murkowski voting to oppose the bill.

Our activists helped to focus public and media attention on the most egregious aspects of the various GOP plans—$800 billion in cuts to Medicaid, allowing insurers to charge older customers five times more for coverage, and elimination of protections for people with pre-existing conditions—all of which particularly hurt seniors and retirees.

We used every tool available to raise awareness and get the attention of Congress. Alliance members gathered 300,000 petition signatures against the House and Senate plans, and delivered copies to district offices in key states. We held 87 meetings with members of Congress or their district staff to discuss retiree health care concerns and urge votes against ACA repeal. We made more than 30,000 calls to House and Senate offices over the course of the campaign.

Our retiree activists also led or joined 40 grassroots actions against Senators or House members who were undecided or supported one of the repeal bills. These included Senators Flake (R-AZ), Heller (R-NV), Toomey (R-PA), Capito (R-WV), Blunt (R-MO), Burr (R-NC), Rubio (R-FL) and Cruz (R-TX). The state Alliance presidents in West Virginia, Arizona and Nevada each wrote and placed op-eds describing the effect of repeal on older Americans in the largest papers in their states.

We were also engaged digitally. Alliance members sent 35,000 emails to their Senators and House members urging them to oppose cuts to Medicaid and ACA repeal. And through email and Facebook we organized members to contact their governors and urge them to weigh in against the GOP health plan.

We secured funding from Community Catalyst to run online issue ads in Arizona, Nevada and West Virginia that encouraged residents to tell their Senators to vote no on repeal. The ads reached 595,000 Facebook users in these states, and nearly 6,000 people “clicked” to contact their senators and governors, a strong performance showing the engagement of our audience.

After the Senate vote defeating the proposal, Alliance President Robert Roach joined Arizona members in going to Senator McCain’s office to thank him for his vote against the bill, and to Senator Flake’s office to express our disappointment for his vote in favor of it.
Virginia

Alliance members worked to turn out retirees in support of Labor-endorsed candidates, including Ralph Northam for Governor, Justin Fairfax for Lieutenant Governor and Mark Herring for Attorney General. Voter turnout was strong. All three statewide Democrats won with wide margins, and Democrats picked up more than one dozen seats in the state House of Delegates.

We helped organize retirees through the Norfolk, Western and NoVa Labor Councils, sent more than 5,600 emails statewide in support of candidates, and staffed 57 Alliance GOTV shifts leading up to Election Day.

New York

The New York State Alliance conducted a full-scale public education campaign in coordination with allies statewide to defeat a ballot initiative that would have led to a state constitutional convention.

The campaign focused on the threat to New York state retirees if the convention were called, and primarily used Facebook and its email newsletter to reach Alliance members in the state. The NY State Alliance highlighted a different retiree leader talking about the reasons to oppose the ballot measure in its newsletter each week.

President Robert Roach held several meetings with staff from the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) to discuss ways to strengthen the PBGC to protect pension benefits and the services that PBGC provides to pension beneficiaries.

In late fall, the Alliance will host an educational symposium, Responses to the Pension Crisis, for union leaders and senior staff. More than a dozen national and international pension experts will share their expertise during the two-day event.

The symposium is timely. In October, the U.S. Government Accountability Office released a 173-page report on the state of retirement security that discusses pensions, Social Security, Medicare and the status of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation. The report recommends that Congress create a national commission on retirement and notes that fundamental changes to the nation’s current retirement system have occurred over the past 40 years, increasing the risks and responsibilities for individuals in planning and managing their retirement.
Anniversary Summer—Laying Groundwork for Budget Battles Ahead

Each July and August the Alliance marks the anniversaries of Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. This year activists around the country took the opportunity to call on their elected officials to protect and strengthen the programs for the future.

Alliance members kicked off festivities with a Capitol Hill press conference. Marguerite O’Connor, an Alliance member and American Federation of Teachers retiree, spoke of the importance of Medicare in keeping her healthy and in her home throughout retirement. She was joined by members of Congress including Reps. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), House Democratic Leader; Joe Crowley (D-NY), Democratic Caucus Chair; and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Doris Matsui (D-CA), Seniors Task Force Co-Chairs, as well as Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), Charlie Crist (D-FL), Lois Frankel (D-FL), Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM), Al Lawson (D-FL), and Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) in expressing the need to protect Medicare and Medicaid from cuts in the Senate’s health care bill and the most recent House budget bill. Across the country, 72 local events were held from Florida to Washington State.

Alaska Launches Newest State Alliance

The Alaska Alliance for Retired Americans held its first organizing convention in November, bringing the number of state Alliances to 36. Retired AFSCME member Dale Chubin was elected president. The new Alliance has 10,000 members and has already been active in the fight to protect the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid.
STATE ALLIANCE ADVOCACY CASE STUDIES

In addition to mobilizing in support of national retiree issues, Alliance members are leaders in state and local issues. Our members’ work in Illinois, Connecticut and Florida illustrates the kind of effective advocacy that is happening throughout the country.

The Illinois Alliance and Illinois’ Community Care Program
Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner’s administration has sought since 2015 to cut $120 million dollars from the Community Care Program, which keeps seniors in their homes through the use of qualified health care workers.

The Rauner administration has tried to move 40,000 vulnerable seniors and citizens with disabilities into a new program that would offer inferior assistance. For example, it would offer coupons for food, and vouchers for Uber, which are not the same as the meals and transportation that are currently provided.

Members of the Illinois Alliance have been working in coalition with AARP, Alzheimer’s Association, Caring Across Generations and SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana to protect Illinois’s home care program.

Through multiple press conferences and demonstrations, they have succeeded in convincing state authorities of the importance of seniors and members of the disabled community continuing to receive the care they need and remaining in their own homes.

In August of this year, the Rauner administration halted controversial plans to overhaul the program and reduce services. The battle continues.

As expected, the stories were poignant and powerful. Edie Fishman, 95, said that thanks to her guaranteed Medicare coverage, she can continue to reside comfortably and independently in her home. One elderly retired couple, June and Donald Pinkin, said that if it were not for Medicare, they would likely have had to mortgage their house.

After collecting about 75 stories, they shared them widely with their Congressional delegation and state legislators during the health care battles. A video of the stories will be available in late 2017.

Connecticut Alliance Story Collection Project
In early 2017, the Health Care Foundation of Connecticut was seeking help collecting stories to highlight what the Affordable Care Act had meant to people when they were at their most sick and vulnerable.

The Connecticut Alliance, led by President Bette Marafino, received a grant to go to senior housing facilities and nursing homes and talk to residents. Connecticut Alliance activists spent several weeks gathering stories from residents who relied on Medicare and Medicaid with the help of a local MSW student.

However, amidst fears that the Governor’s Community Care Program Service Task Force is being used to implement the same ideas as the unpopular Community Reinvestment Program that has so far been held at bay.
Fighting for Nursing Home Residents in Florida

Last summer Hurricane Irma devastated large parts of Florida and led to the death of 14 nursing home residents.

Governor Rick Scott has received criticism for failing to respond quickly and adequately to calls for help from nursing homes who were without power. In addition, at least one nursing home operator did not have a working backup generator, which is required by law.

The Florida Alliance has been pressing the issue in the wake of the storm. With other local groups they gathered 12,000 petition signatures urging the state Legislature to conduct a full investigation into the lack of emergency response and held a news conference before presenting to the legislature.

More than three dozen news stories have been published and broadcast about the Alliance’s events and have helped to keep the public focus on the issue.

While both the state attorney general and the legislature have so far declined to open investigations, Florida Alliance secretary Barbara DeVane says that they will keep pressing for answers and working for reforms to prevent similar tragedies from happening in the future.

In 2017, Alliance members were active and engaged in support of many of our affiliates’ priorities. We were proud to rally for Nissan workers in Mississippi with the UAW, to organize around the Friedrichs and Janus court battles with AFSCME and AFT, to join BCTGM in Illinois and nationally to support the #CheckTheLabel campaign against Mexican-made Nabisco snacks, and to gather signatures to subject Missouri’s so-called “Right to Work” law to a statewide vote.

In October President Roach and Rich Fiesta attended the AFL-CIO convention in St. Louis where they worked to deepen our partnerships and lay the groundwork for greater activism.
Visit us at www.retiredamericans.org.