

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Mitch McConnell's October Surprise: Cuts to Social Security and Medicare are Coming

Senate Majority Leader **Mitch McConnell** explicitly stated that Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid need to be cut in an interview with [Bloomberg](#) this week.

The comments followed a [Treasury Department report](#) showing that the federal deficit grew to \$779 billion in fiscal year 2018, a 17% increase from FY 2017. McConnell placed the blame for the ballooning debt on a bipartisan unwillingness to cut earned benefit programs, ignoring the [impact of the GOP Tax Scam](#) passed last year that added trillions to the deficit.



Alliance Executive Director **Richard Fiesta** said that McConnell's statement leaves no doubt that Social Security and Medicare are on the ballot in the midterm elections, and that it should be taken as a dire warning to anyone who cares about these programs for current or future beneficiaries.

McConnell's comments follow other Republicans saying that so called "entitlement" spending must now be addressed to cover the growing national debt. House GOP leaders **Paul Ryan** and **Steve Stivers** [stated similar plans](#) earlier this year, and White House Economic Advisor [Larry Kudlow](#) said that cuts would have to occur in 2019.

Senate Majority Leader McConnell

"We take Senator McConnell at his word. Given the chance, he will side with CEOs, corporations and the wealthiest of the wealthy over retirees and working Americans," said Fiesta. "The only way to stop this assault on our earned benefits is to vote for candidates who will fight to protect these programs from any cuts that affect seniors, people with disabilities, children and every family who relies on them."

Annual Medicare Open Enrollment Goes through December 7 - Check Your Coverage

With Medicare's open enrollment period only three days away, it's the perfect time to do a "Medicare Check-up" and make sure that you are in the right Medicare insurance plan for your

situation. Visit [eHealth](#) for unbiased resources that help Alliance members with their Medicare needs. This is a free service for Alliance members and there is no obligation to change your plan or enroll.

Learn about the coverage options available to you, and compare existing plans to see what fits your needs best. To speak to a licensed insurance agent at eHealth, an insurance broker specializing in the Medicare insurance plan needs of Alliance members, call 1-888-519-2029 (TTY users: 771) Monday - Friday between 8am - 8pm EST or visit [their website](#).

Medicare open enrollment began on October 15 and runs through December 7. For more information, please visit [Medicare.gov](#).

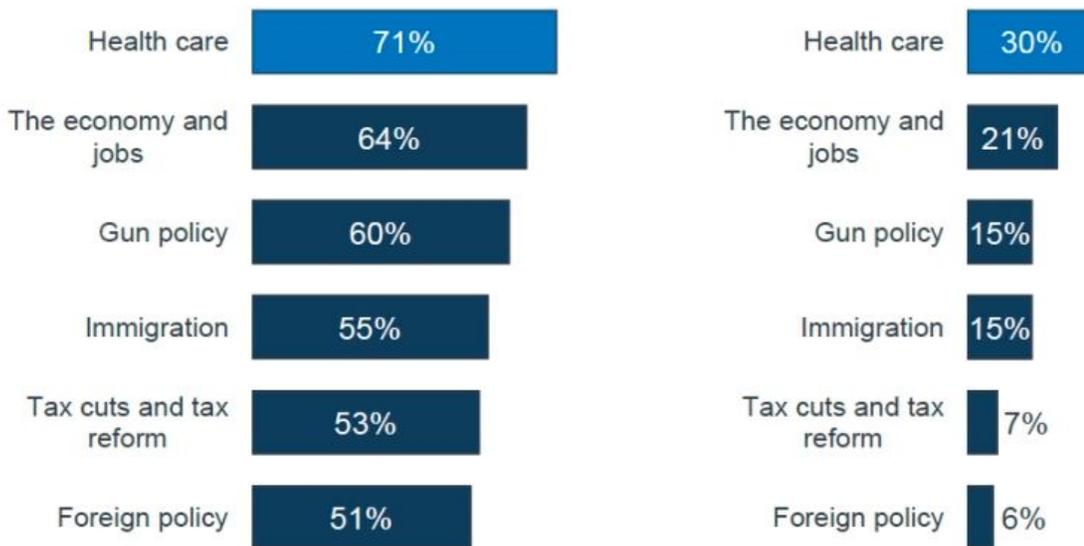
Health Care Issues Top Concerns for Midterm Elections

With midterm elections just eighteen days away, health care concerns top the list of issues on voters' minds. A [new poll](#) by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 70% of likely voters listed health care as very important in the elections, ranking higher than the economy, gun control and immigration.

Health Care Is Top Issue For Voters In The Midterm Elections

Percent who say each of the following issues is "very important" in making their decision about who to vote for Congress this year:

When asked to choose one, percent who say each of the following is the "most important" issue in making their decision about who to vote for Congress this year:



NOTE: Questions asked of and reported among total registered voters.
SOURCE: KFF Election Tracking Poll (conducted September 19-October 2, 2018)



Asked to pick only one issue, a third selected health care. The poll found a partisan split, with 40% of Democrats saying health care was their biggest concern, compared to only 17% of

Republicans. The poll also asked voters about specific issues related to health care, including cost of prescription drugs, accessibility and affordability.

Although health care concerns are a high priority, far fewer respondents said they're hearing from candidates about the issue. Only 23% of voters felt that candidates were talking "a lot" about pre-existing conditions, and the poll found that messages on immigration, the economy and President Trump are much more frequent.

Despite voters' sentiments, [Democratic candidates](#) across the country are campaigning on health care platforms, such as defending protections for those with pre-existing conditions and expanding Medicare. The shift has put Republicans, who are now distancing themselves from years of efforts to repeal and sabotage the Affordable Care Act (ACA), on defense. The ACA includes protections for those with pre-existing conditions as a key provision, and some vulnerable Republican incumbents are signing on to [last minute legislation](#) to shield those protections from a GOP-led lawsuit aiming to fully repeal the ACA.

Sen. McConnell announced [renewed plans](#) this week to repeal the ACA if Republicans maintain control of the Senate after the midterm elections. ACA repeal has failed on numerous occasions, most recently in the summer of 2017.

"Affordable health care and protection for the [130 million Americans](#) with pre-existing conditions should be a major concern," said Alliance President **Robert Roach, Jr.** "Americans 55-64, who are most likely to be priced out of the insurance market, are feeling the effects of rising health care costs and uncertainty every day."

Administration to Announce a New Rule on Drug Pricing

The White House is expected to propose a [rule](#) next week aimed at providing more transparency in drug pricing, but many experts are saying it will have little impact on soaring prescription drug costs.

The rule, initially included in the administration's "blueprint" to lower drug prices, would require pharmaceutical companies to post their list prices in television ads targeted at consumers. Health and Human Services Secretary **Alex Azar** [stated](#) that requiring drug makers to disclose information to the public would discourage those companies from raising their prices.

The pharmaceutical industry has vowed to fight the changes and questioned the legality of such a rule. Many drug companies and lobbyists have insisted that ads wouldn't provide enough time to explain the pricing to patients. Instead, the industry suggested placing information about pricing online, where they could provide an explanation regarding out-of-pocket costs and financial assistance options.

Analysts believe that the rule wouldn't have a real impact on drug prices. Instead of providing transparency, the change could confuse patients who aren't sure what the accurate price of a prescription will be. Some policy experts expressed concerns over patients being [deterred from seeking treatment](#) after hearing a list price in an ad, saying the out of pocket cost is often much lower.

“Bringing down the skyrocketing prices of prescriptions is necessary to ensure seniors can access the drugs they need to survive,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “Instead of focusing on unclear and ineffective solutions, we must send to Washington a Congress who will allow Medicare to negotiate prices with drug companies.”

Medicaid Opponent Appointed to Lead National Medicaid Program

The administration has [selected](#) **Mary Mayhew** to lead the national Medicaid program at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Mayhew will serve as the deputy administrator for CMS, and as the director of Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

Mayhew served as Health Commissioner in Maine for six years under Governor **Paul LePage**, where she led efforts to create stricter eligibility standards for Medicaid enrollment and added work requirements to important social safety net programs, such as food stamps. Governor LePage is well known for consistently [refusing to expand](#) Medicaid after Maine voters overwhelmingly approved expansion in a 2017 ballot measure.

During Mayhew’s tenure, Maine saw a 24% decline in Medicaid enrollment, and a 70% drop in enrollment for temporary assistance programs, while hunger and poverty rates increased. A report issued by the federal Health and Human Services [Inspector General](#) also found that under Mayhew’s leadership, the state did not comply with federal and state regulations with respect to Medicaid beneficiaries, placing many patients at risk.

CMS is currently finalizing a request from Maine and Governor LePage to implement work requirements for Medicaid beneficiaries, and Mayhew will oversee that.

“The White House has appointed someone who has actively sought to cut people from the program she now leads,” said Executive Director Fiesta. “That is the person you hire only if you want to cut Medicaid all across the country.”