

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## Congress Eyes Giving the Pharmaceutical Industry a Gift after the Elections

The pharmaceutical industry is lobbying Congress in hopes of receiving a [\\$4 billion windfall](#) in the lame-duck session following the midterm elections, after losing an attempt to secure the money as part of the bipartisan opioids package passed last week. According to drug company executives, the money is designed to correct a technical error for the \$11.8 billion Congress required them to pay over 10 years in a budget deal earlier this year in the fight over the Medicare Part D doughnut hole. That money was to go toward seniors' medicines.

Consumer advocates are calling the potential windfall an industry buyout, arguing that the money would do nothing to lower drug prices. Pharma lobbyists are some of the most powerful in Washington, and many drug makers have formed alliances with lawmakers who would otherwise push back against skyrocketing drug costs.

The drug industry has [reason to worry](#) if Democrats secure control of the House after the election. Many Democratic representatives have promised investigations into rising drug prices, and will push to allow Medicare to negotiate for lower prices. Republican committee chairs and leadership have been friendly to drug companies, something that could change with new leadership.

Democrats would also like to allow drug importation from other countries in order to make drugs more affordable. However, the newly negotiated US-Mexico-Canada Agreement includes intellectual property protections for American drug makers that shield them from foreign competition and [prevent importation](#).

“The voices of seniors who are struggling to afford their prescriptions should outweigh those of pharmaceutical CEOs who just want to line their pockets with more profit,” said Alliance President **Robert Roach, Jr.** “We must elect representatives who will fight for lower drug prices, not billion dollar windfalls for PhRMA.”

## Judge Kavanaugh Vote Expected This Weekend

The full Senate is expected to vote on Judge **Brett Kavanaugh's** nomination to serve on the United States Supreme Court this weekend. The Senate Judiciary Committee voted to advance the nomination in a party-line vote last week. After Sen. **Jeff Flake** (AZ) called for an FBI investigation into sexual assault allegations brought against Kavanaugh, the President ordered a limited investigation. Reports of the investigation's findings were delivered to Senate Judiciary staff Thursday, and Majority Leader **Mitch McConnell** (KY) moved ahead with procedures to

confirm Kavanaugh. A cloture vote held today passed the Senate by a vote of 51-49, largely along party lines. A full Senate vote on final confirmation could come as early as tomorrow.

“Many protections for older Americans, including those with pre-existing conditions, are at stake with this nomination,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “One important example is that if confirmed, Judge Kavanaugh could be the deciding vote in a case that would make the Affordable Care Act unconstitutional. That would strip away protections for the [84% of older Americans ages 55-64 living with pre-existing conditions.](#)”

### **Postal Workers National Day of Action: U.S. Mail is Not For Sale!**



The American Postal Workers Union (APWU) and other unions representing postal workers are hosting a [day of action](#) across the country this Monday, October 8 to tell lawmakers that the postal service is not for sale. The actions are to protest the administration’s efforts to privatize the postal service, which would lead to higher prices and less reliable service.

The Postal Service delivers mail to every American, and relies solely on the sale of stamps and services to cover its operating costs. Privatization would leave millions of Americans without postal service and millions of workers without a job.

*To find an event supporting the postal workers and saying no to privatization, [click here!](#)*

### **Nominee for Social Security Administration Commissioner Falls Far Short**

The President recently nominated **Andrew Saul** to serve as Commissioner of the Social Security Administration (SSA), a role that has been filled by Acting Commissioner **Carolyn Colvin** since 2013. At his hearing before the Senate Finance Committee yesterday, Saul left open the option of closing more Social Security field offices and replacing more in-person contact with their website.

During Saul’s [confirmation hearing](#), Senator **Ron Wyden** (OR) asked him if he would commit to “maintaining the field office option” for seniors who need or want to meet with an actual person. Saul replied that before decisions are made regarding field offices, he will “understand what the conditions are in that locale,” avoiding a clear answer.

Saul served as the chairman of the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, but lacks a background in Social Security. He used to serve on the board of the [Manhattan Institute](#), a right-wing think tank. The Manhattan Institute is known for their position advocating for drastic cuts

to Social Security, saying that current benefits are “too generous.” Saul was forced to drop out of a New York congressional race in 2007 for taking [questionable campaign donations](#).

“Andrew Saul’s background simply does not make him fit to serve as the Social Security Administration Commissioner,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Having a commissioner who will defend Social Security from dangerous cuts and provide for beneficiaries must be our priority.”

## **Last Week to Register for the Alliance's 2018 National Membership Meeting in Las Vegas**

The deadline to join us at the Alliance for Retired Americans' quadrennial [National Membership Meeting](#) is just six days away. The meeting will be held November 13-15, 2018 at the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas. Attendees will participate in workshops, vote on resolutions, elect Alliance officers and at-large board members, and network with other retiree activists. During the Awards Banquet luncheon, we will recognize outstanding work done by state Alliances and activists.



You can download a registration form [here](#) or [register for the meeting online](#). The deadline to register for the meeting is **October 11, 2018**, and hotel reservations must be made by October 23, 2018. For more details, please email **Joni Jones** at [jjones@retiredamericans.org](mailto:jjones@retiredamericans.org).

The meeting will feature notable guest speakers, including **Nancy Altman** and **David Cay Johnston**. Altman, a well-known Social Security expert, serves as the president of Social Security Works and recently wrote her third book on the program. Johnston, a pensions and tax expert, is famous for books including

*Perfectly Legal: The Covert Campaign to Rig Our Tax System to Benefit the Super Rich — and Cheat Everybody Else*, and for his work covering the President’s tax returns. A Pulitzer Prize winning investigative journalist, Johnston regularly appears on MSNBC’s *Rachel Maddow Show*.

## **California Alliance Holds Regional Conferences**

The California Alliance (CARA) held [nine regional conferences](#) throughout the month of September, highlighting their 15th anniversary, engaging attendees in the Seniors Vote Project, and gearing up for the midterm elections. Each conference included a candidate forum, ballot proposition panels, and keynote speakers. CARA members voted on two statewide policy priorities: to protect, improve and expand Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and to support efforts to win universal health care. By many accounts they were CARA’s best conventions ever - more than 900 people attended!