

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Have you Completed Your Medicare Checkup? Open enrollment ends December 7

Medicare's annual open enrollment season ends December 7. It's the perfect time to do a "Medicare Check-up" and confirm that you are in the right Medicare insurance plan for your situation. The Alliance for Retired Americans' benefits partner, Union Plus, is offering the Union Plus Retiree Health Insurance Program to help Alliance members with their Medicare needs. This is a free service and there is no obligation to change your plan or enroll.

Learn about the coverage options available to you, including ways to potentially save money on your future out-of-pocket health care expenses. To speak to a licensed insurance agent at eHealth, an insurance broker specializing in the Medicare insurance plan needs of Alliance members, call 1-888-898-5304 (TTY users: 771) Monday - Friday between 8am - 8pm EST or visit UnionPlusMedicare.com.

Big Pharma Increased its Lobbying Budget by 126% in 2017

[A new report](#) from *Axios* shows that the pharmaceutical industry's main trade association, PhRMA, boosted its influence considerably in 2017. The study reviewed the trade association's 990 IRS tax filings.

The powerful trade association increased spent; \$8.6 million on registered state and federal lobbying – up 126 percent over 2016; \$17 million on advertising and public relations – 10 times what it spent in 2016; and \$3.1 million on its CEO's salary alone – nine percent more than he was paid in 2016.

According to tax filings, PhRMA's primary goal was to demonstrate to the public that other forces are to blame for skyrocketing prescription drug prices. The association made sizable contributions to patient advocacy groups like the Addiction Policy Forum and the AIDS Institute.

Industry profits are at record levels, and prices for 12 of the 20 drugs that are most commonly prescribed under Medicare Part D [rose at 10 times](#) the rate of inflation this year, and the industry [implemented 4,412](#) brand-name price hikes by July.

“We are not fooled by Big Pharma’s attempts to pull the wool over our eyes and we can’t wait around for them to do the right thing,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, secretary-treasurer of the Alliance. “Congress and the Trump administration must take action to lower prescription drug prices so that seniors no longer have to choose between paying for medicine or paying for rent and food.”

Social Security Workers and Retirees Struggle with Enormous Backlog due to Years of Underfunding

The Alliance is calling on all members of Congress to support the [Maintain Access to Vital Social Security Services Act](#) (H.R. 7146) introduced by Rep. **Gwen Moore** earlier this week. The bill would require the Social Security Administration (SSA) to hold at least two public meetings and release a written report justifying the closure of any SSA field offices.

Since 2000, the Social Security Administration (SSA) [has closed](#) 125 field offices. Shutdowns became more frequent between 2010 and the present, with [more than half](#) of all closures happening during that time. Lawmakers [also reduced](#) SSA’s operating budget by 11 percent and staffing by 10 percent between 2010 and 2017, despite the agency’s increasingly high workload.

As a result, beneficiaries [encounter](#) long wait times when seeking help at field offices and long hold times when calling Social Security’s 800 number. People applying for disability insurance [often go through](#) extensive waiting periods before their case is approved or denied. The average wait time for a disability hearing is 600 days. Many go bankrupt, become more sick and frail, or die before their applications are even processed fully.

“Given the incredible difficulties that beneficiaries and employees face, it’s clear that we must dramatically increase funding for Social Security,” said **Richard Fiesta**, executive director of the Alliance. “The fact that lawmakers have made it harder for seniors to access the benefits that they earned over a lifetime of hard work is unconscionable.”



The Alliance has continued to take steps to stop this underfunding and protect benefits for current and future generations. Members have participated in several Social Security-related events this year, including rallies to protest the closures of field offices in [Arlington](#) and [Baltimore](#).

Members also [adopted](#) two Social Security-related resolutions at our membership meeting. [One of them](#) aims to put a moratorium on field office closings and SSA cuts, set funding for administrative expenses at 1.5 percent of benefits, and expand resources and staffing.

House Republicans Introduce Tax Scam Part 2

House Ways and Means Committee Chair **Kevin Brady (TX)** [unveiled](#) a new tax proposal on Monday. The legislation [would make](#) aspects of last year's Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) permanent and includes new giveaways for special interests and wealthy corporations.



Corporations have enjoyed dramatically higher profits from last year's tax law, which [reduced the corporate tax rate](#) from 35% to 20%, while most workers did not see a difference in their paychecks and others saw their taxes increase. If approved, the new proposal will solidify incentives for companies to move more of their business overseas, the way that GM announced this week it will do.

Even more troubling for seniors, the new legislation will make it easier for top Republicans to use the federal deficit, which is already set to increase by \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years because of the original tax cuts, as an excuse to cut Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has already started using the deficit as an excuse for making massive cuts to "entitlements."

"Lawmakers should not consider extending an extremely flawed and dangerous law that hurts seniors and workers," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, president of the Alliance. "They should repeal last year's tax cuts and work to expand our earned benefits instead."

The House Ways and Means Committee passed the legislation out of committee on a party-line vote without holding any hearings. It is unclear when the bill will come to the full House of Representatives for a vote.

Correction. In our last issue, we incorrectly stated that New York State Alliance President **Barry Kaufmann** served as Parliamentarian during our national membership meeting. Kaufman was chair of the Resolutions Committee, and Florida Alliance Member **Bill Cea** served as

Parliamentarian. We regret the error. If you would like to see materials from the conference, click [here](#).

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.