

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Nation's Longest Government Shutdown Puts Millions at Risk, Including Many Seniors

In a [letter](#) to the President, U.S. Senator **Bob Casey** (PA), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, criticized the ongoing government shutdown and its growing negative effects on seniors and people with disabilities. In particular, he expressed concern about the future of SNAP nutrition benefits (formerly known as food stamps), rental assistance, and mobility programs as the Departments of Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Transportation remain unable to conduct business as usual.

Senator Casey wrote that “elected and appointed officials in Washington have a sacred responsibility of ensuring seniors can age with dignity and people with disabilities can live independently.” He urged the President to ask the aforementioned departments, as well as the Federal Trade Commission and Federal Communications Commission, to release information detailing actions the Administration is taking to mitigate the harmful effects of the shutdown towards vulnerable populations.

Approximately two-thirds of the households in the HUD rental assistance program are seniors or people with disabilities. **Douglas Rice**, Senior Policy Analyst at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [said](#) that 1,150 rental assistance contracts expired in December or will expire in January, and cannot be renewed by HUD due to a shortfall in funding.

The financial strain on these households will increase exponentially if the shutdown extends into March or longer. If it lasts until March, 2.2 million low-income households will be put at risk of higher rent payments or even eviction due to the loss of subsidies for the Housing Choice Vouchers program. All told, the record-breaking government shutdown will put millions of Americans at risk of living in poverty.

“We are talking about basic needs like food and housing for seniors and people with disabilities,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “We need the Senate to bring the funding bills passed by the House to a vote and get the government back to work for the American people.”

Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Legacy for Unions

On Monday, January 21st, we celebrate the birth of Rev. **Martin Luther King, Jr.** and the work he did for underrepresented communities in the United States. Dr. King would have turned 90 this year, and while nearly everyone can speak to his legacy regarding the Civil Rights Movement, fewer recall his advocacy for unions.

The day before he was murdered just over fifty years ago in Memphis, Dr. King delivered his famous “I Have Been to the Mountaintop” speech, declaring that “the issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants,” highlighting the necessity for the right to collectively bargain and join a union.

Dr. King was in Memphis in support of striking African-American sanitation workers, many of whom worked 60-hour weeks but still needed to collect welfare to survive due to their low wages.

“Martin Luther King, Jr. understood the importance of unions. He saw the connection between civil rights and union rights, and used his voice to elevate those issues in a way that still influences conversations today,” said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance.



Martin Luther King, Jr. with leaders of the sanitation strike in Memphis, 1968

Whether observed through volunteering, learning about King’s life, or simply taking a moment to contemplate his legacy, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is an important holiday that should not be forgotten.

Alliance Executive Vice President **Jo Etta Brown** is observing the holiday by [speaking](#) at the Martin Luther King Day luncheon sponsored by the Democratic Men’s Committee of Carson City. She will discuss Dr. King’s advocacy for social justice and peace, while focusing on his legacy as it pertains specifically to Nevada.

Los Angeles Teachers Strike for Pay Raises and Smaller Class Sizes

Over 30,000 Los Angeles teachers walked out of their schools on Monday to strike for a 6.5 percent pay raise and a smaller student to teacher ratio. It is the first strike in three decades for the second-largest school system in the country, which serves approximately 640,000 students. In addition to the smaller class sizes, union negotiators have asked for more librarians, counselors and nurses on campuses as well as a reduced emphasis on standardized testing.

[Please take a moment to sign the American Federation of Teachers \(AFT’s\) petition here](#), telling LAUSD superintendent **Austin Beutner** to quit stalling and reach an agreement with LA’s teachers.

California is [one of only twelve states](#) that allows educators to strike, though most states do allow for collective bargaining and wage negotiation. During a press conference on January 16, the district agreed to [open bargaining](#) the next day that would include Mayor **Eric Garcetti** mediating. Los Angeles teachers have vowed to “walk the line, rain or shine” for as long as it takes.

AFT, United Teachers Los Angeles, the California Labor Federation, and the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor are asking for solidarity and support for the duration of the strike, promoting an [“adopt a school”](#) program where parents and community members can help with striking activities. That includes continuing to operate every activity at the school, helping build events, feeding picket lines, and coordinating parking.

Today marks day five of the strike. [United Teachers LA](#) is providing daily updates with the latest information. Already over 12,000 parents and community members have joined the cause, with thousands showing up to the seven different regional actions across Los Angeles County.

“Last year Alliance members cheered and supported striking teachers in places like Arizona, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and West Virginia, all of whom won hard-fought victories that will strengthen schools and local communities,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “We need to help the teachers in Los Angeles win in their battle as well.”

Video: Arizona Alliance President Doug Hart Discusses what Social Security has Meant for His Family



In a new series, the Alliance will be sharing personal stories from our members highlighting key retiree issues. The series kicks off this week with [Arizona Alliance President Doug Hart discussing the impact that Social Security had on him and his family](#) as a child, and why he is active in the fight to strengthen and expand Social Security for future generations.

Doug Hart