

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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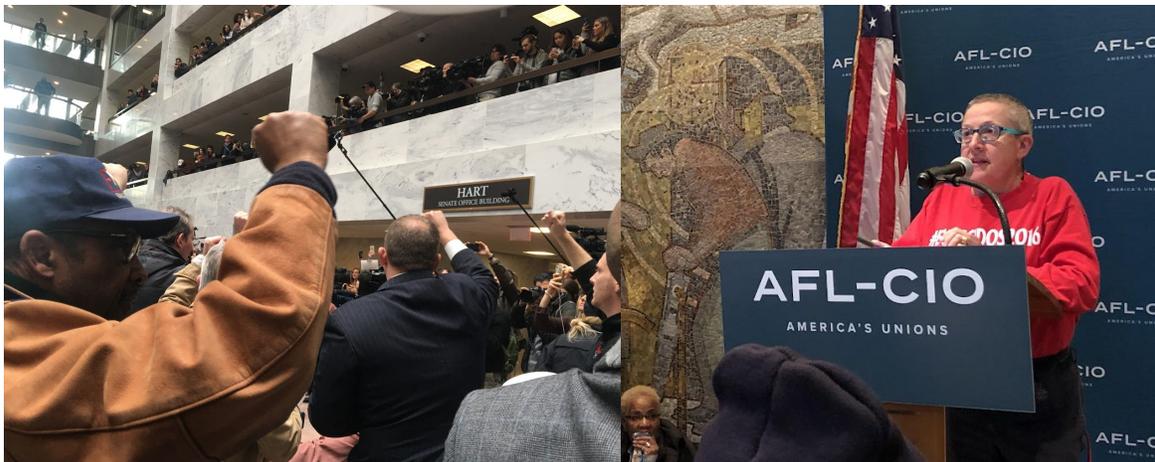
January 25, 2019

As Shutdown Stretches Over a Month, No End in Sight

This week, the longest federal government shutdown in United States history reached a new “milestone” -- one month of missed paychecks for thousands of federal employees. As the shutdown reached the 33-day mark, public workers, union representatives and their allies, including those from the Alliance, the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW), protested outside of Senate Majority Leader **Mitch McConnell’s** office in the Hart Senate Office Building on Wednesday.

The protest included a minute of silence for each day of the shutdown, before erupting into chanting, marching, and occupying the office, due to McConnell’s role in blocking legislation that could end the shutdown. Twelve individuals [were arrested](#) for partaking in the action, including several union leaders. The protesters demanded an immediate end to the shutdown while raising concerns about the inability for federal workers and contractors to pay their mortgages and medical bills.

Many federal employees responsible for the aviation industry, including Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agents, air traffic controllers, and FAA safety inspectors, have been hit hard by the missed paychecks. Most of these workers are being forced to come into work without pay. Many are calling in sick both to protest and to try and earn money from home, putting a strain on airport security around the country.



Left: President Roach protests at the Hart Senate Office Building on Wednesday; Brendan Kelly, Director of Field Mobilization for the Alliance, and Alliance members also participated. Right: Susan Flashman, Acting President of the Maryland/DC Alliance, speaks at a rally at the AFL-CIO on Saturday.

“We stand with the federal workers affected by this shutdown, and call upon the President, Senator McConnell and all of Congress to bring back the employees and get them their paychecks,” said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance.

On Thursday, the Senate [voted on two competing bills](#) regarding the shutdown. The Republican-led measure was a bill to reopen the government and contained the \$5.7 billion requested by the President to build a wall along the Mexico border. The Democratic-supported measure was a continuing resolution to provide federal funding until February 8, in order to give time for negotiations while putting federal workers back in the office. Both failed. The Republican-led vote failed [50-47](#), with 60 needed, while the Democratic-led vote failed [52-44](#), with 60 needed.

Department of Commerce Secretary [Wilbur Ross](#) drew unwanted attention in the midst of the shutdown after questioning why furloughed workers would need food banks.

Skyrocketing Insulin Prices Highlight Necessity for Drug Policy Changes

This week, the Health Care Cost Institute (HCCI) [released](#) a study revealing that insulin prices doubled between 2012 and 2016, from just over \$2,800 to \$5,700 annually. This dramatic increase in costs has forced many people living with Type 1 diabetes to ration their supply of insulin, risking their health in order to make ends meet.

Numerous elected officials sent letters in recent months to drug manufacturers, requesting information on prescription drug price hikes.

People living with Type 1 diabetes will have to take insulin injections for their entire lives. Any lapse in health care coverage can be devastating due to the high out-of-pocket costs that result. Even month to month, the [price of the medication can change](#) -- a problem noticed by countless families across the country. Furthermore, patients are worried that employers could try to discriminate against someone with higher health costs.

“Access to life-saving medication is a fundamental right. One key step we must take is allowing Medicare to negotiate prices with drug corporations like the Veterans Administration does,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

Alliance Co-Signs Letter Opposing Drug Provisions in NAFTA 2.0

The Alliance joined seventy other organizations in signing a [letter](#) to Congress opposing provisions in NAFTA 2.0, the newly-proposed United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which would increase the costs of prescription drugs. The pharmaceutical provisions in this agreement would facilitate the expansion of prescription drug monopolies, reducing the competition that keeps prices of medicine lower.

With prescription costs already high enough that some consumers are going without necessary medication, this new agreement would only exacerbate the problem. The letter states that nearly one-in-four Americans report that they or another family member have not filled a recent

prescription because of cost. The drug provisions of NAFTA 2.0 would see those numbers increase.

“It is time for Congress to implement legislation that would prioritize American health and safety over drug corporation profits,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Like the letter says, we call for an elimination of the provisions that inhibit affordable access to medicine in North America and an assurance that future trade deals will not include such provisions.”

Los Angeles Teachers Prevail in their Week-Long Strike

One week after 30,000 Los Angeles public school teachers walked out of their schools to strike for a pay raise and smaller class sizes, a [deal was struck](#) Tuesday between United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and the Los Angeles Unified School District to get them back in the classrooms. The teachers returned to work on Wednesday.

Los Angeles Unified published a [press release](#) regarding the agreement, demonstrating that the deal included a 6% pay raise for educators, a four-student reduction in class size for grades 4-12, and increased nursing, counseling, and library services. Improvements will be conducted through the 2021-2022 school year.



American Federation of Teachers (AFT) members and their allies protested for six days in the California rain for higher wages and smaller class sizes.

The school district is the second largest in the country, serving over 600,000 students. Thousands of educators, parents, and students participated in the strike and supported the teachers. Other organizations, such as the International Association of Firefighters, also joined in solidarity.

In the aftermath of the LA Teachers’ Strike, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) [voted to approve](#) a strike to begin as early as January 28. It would be the first strike in Denver in over two decades. Educators are asking for a base-pay raise and remedies to a flawed pay incentive system from 2005.

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.