

FRIDAY ALERT

 **Alliance for Retired Americans**
815 16th Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20006 • 202.637.5399
www.retiredamericans.org
Spanish version: www.alianzadejubilados.org

March 15, 2019

Connecticut Alliance President Bette Marafino Testifies about Social Security Expansion on Capitol Hill



The House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee held the second hearing in its series on "Protecting and Improving Social Security" on Wednesday. **Bette Marafino**, President of the Connecticut Alliance for Retired Americans, [testified](#) and shared several retirees' [stories](#) that vividly demonstrated the challenges facing older Americans. Rep. **John Larson** of Connecticut is the subcommittee chair.

"To ensure all Americans have the dignified retirement they have earned after a lifetime of work, the Alliance for Retired Americans urges Congress to expand Social Security and increase earned benefits for current and future beneficiaries," said President Marafino.

Watch an interview Ms. Marafino gave prior to her testimony [here](#).

White House Budget Targets Health Care for Seniors, Proposes Nearly \$2.5 Trillion in Cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security

President **Trump's** campaign pledge not to cut Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security went out the window on Monday with the release of the administration's proposed 2020 federal budget. Overall, the White House budget for Fiscal Year 2020 would cut \$845 billion from Medicare, \$1.5 trillion from Medicaid and \$26 billion from Social Security.

“This is a particularly cruel and outrageous plan. Congress needs to declare it dead on arrival,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Republicans want to cut the health care and retirement benefits seniors have earned to pay for the 2017 tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and corporations.”

Alliance members can help protect seniors’ earned benefits [by sending a letter to your Representative](#) telling them to reject this outrageous proposal.

The proposed budget also reduces funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by about 13 percent – a cut of \$4.9 billion. NIH is a leader in the world effort to find a cure for diseases such as Alzheimer's and cancer.

Have You Heard? A Valuable Benefit for Alliance Members

Alliance members and their extended families can take advantage of discounts up to 70% off the manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price on hearing aids purchased through the Alliance’s partnership with Hear In America. Three years of follow-up care and loss-and-damage coverage are included.



Many gerontologists and senior advocates consider hearing aids necessary medical treatment. Recent studies have found that hearing loss is linked to dementia and cognitive decline, making it more important than ever to have your hearing checked. Past studies have also shown that untreated hearing loss is directly related to faster brain shrinkage, depression, and falls.

Research conducted by the Johns Hopkins School for Public Health found that older adults with untreated hearing loss pay much more in total health care costs over time, averaging 46% more in expenses than people who did not have hearing loss.

To arrange a FREE hearing screening and evaluation, contact Hear In America today and find out if hearing aids would benefit you. For more information or to register, call 1-800-286-6149 or go to www.hearinamerica.com/ara.

Lower-cost Generic Medicines will be “More Difficult to Get” if the NAFTA 2.0 Agreement is Approved by Congress

Activists are raising concerns that the USMCA (aka "NAFTA 2.0") trade pact that would replace the 25-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement, would lock in high drug prices. Referring to the language as it currently stands, Rep. **Mark Pocan** (WI), co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, [said this week that NAFTA 2.0 provisions related to prescription drugs are "very egregious."](#)

This week Ambassador **Jesus Seade**, Mexico's Undersecretary for North America, also acknowledged that the prescription drug provisions in the proposed agreement will lock in high drug prices, saying lower-cost generic medicines will be [“more difficult to get”](#) if the USMCA (United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement) is approved by Congress.

The administration has not yet submitted the text for the bill that lawmakers would have to approve, and the timetable for any vote in Congress [remains in flux](#). Congress has the right to amend or reject the agreement as written.

“Americans pay the highest prices [in the world](#) for prescription drugs,” said Executive Director Fiesta, “and access to safe, generic medicines is one of the ways that people are able to afford the medicines they need. The USMCA will delay the introduction of generic medicines and lock in high prices for biologics, medicines that fight cancer and other critical diseases.”

“This agreement cannot be approved in its current form,” Fiesta added. “We urge all members of Congress to insist on fair drug prices for seniors and all Americans.”

Oral Health Care Remains an Important Missing Piece of Medicare

Oral health is an integral part of overall health. Medicare [does not cover routine dental care, and the majority of people on Medicare have no dental coverage at all](#). According to a new Kaiser Family Foundation report, nearly 37 million Medicare beneficiaries lack dental insurance coverage and must pay out of pocket for dental care. The amount spent is significant; in 2016 19% of Medicare beneficiaries who used dental services spent more than \$1,000 out-of-pocket on dental care.

“Dental coverage should be included under Medicare. The Alliance is engaged with our allies on Capitol Hill to make that happen,” said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. “When you combine having no dental benefits and paying too much for their prescription drugs, many seniors end up having to choose between food and medicine.”

Untreated cavities and gum disease can exacerbate certain diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and lead to chronic pain, infections, and loss of teeth. Lack of routine dental care can also delay diagnosis of conditions, which can lead to potentially preventable complications, high-cost emergency room visits, and adverse outcomes.

Limited or no dental insurance coverage can result in relatively high out-of-pocket costs for some and foregone oral health care for others. Almost half of all Medicare beneficiaries did not have a dental visit within the past year (49%), with higher rates among those who are black (71%) or Hispanic (65%) and have low incomes (70%), as of 2016.

Beware - Social Security Scam Alert

In recent months, reports of people impersonating SSA employees over the phone have increased drastically. The SSA has released a warning to all beneficiaries and their loved ones to be wary and protect their personal information. This is what one Social Security [scam sounds like](#).

“Please do not engage with callers who say they are from SSA and ask you for personal information,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “We urge Alliance members to report any suspicious calls to Social Security’s Office of the Inspector General at 1-800-269-0271 or by [submitting a report on the OIG website](#).”

More information from the SSA, and instructions for how to report a fraudulent call, are available online [here](#).