

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

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Citing Costs, Pfizer Hid Potential Alzheimer's Cure from the Public

In 2015 Pfizer Corporation researchers found that the drug Enbrel, used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, reduced the risk of Alzheimer's disease by 64 percent. However, the company neither made the data public by publishing it in a medical journal nor pursued a clinical trial itself.

According to *The Washington Post*, the corporation determined that testing Enbrel as an Alzheimer's drug would cost millions, and because the drug's patent would soon expire, the research would not lead to profits for Pfizer.

The *Post* article cited a Pfizer document showing that Enbrel could potentially prevent, treat and slow the progression of Alzheimer's safely. Pfizer's researchers encouraged the company to perform an \$80 million clinical trial to verify their data. After three years of an internal review, the corporation halted further [investigations into the drug](#).

Outside medical professionals acknowledged that Pfizer's research cost estimates were accurate and also expressed frustration with Pfizer's decision.

"It would benefit the scientific community to have that data out there," explained **Kennan Walker**, an assistant professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins University. "...it gives us more information to make more informed decisions."

"[5.8 million](#) Americans are living with Alzheimer's, placing a heavy burden on them and their families. Research into this disease is vital," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "Pharmaceutical companies say they charge high prices because of research costs. In this case, Pfizer walked away from promising research because it would not make a profit. It is shameful that a highly profitable corporation made this decision."

"The [Alzheimer's Association](#) says that in 2019, Alzheimer's and other dementia will cost the nation \$290 billion, including \$195 billion in Medicare and Medicaid payments," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "This is a moral issue as well as an economic issue."

Former Social Security Commissioners Call on Congress to Solve Customer Service Crisis

The Social Security Administration (SSA) now faces a ["crisis"](#) due to dwindling funds and increasing enrollment. To resolve this, former commissioners **Ken Apfel**, **Carolyn Colvin**, and **Jo Anne Barnhart** co-wrote a [letter](#) asking Congress to fix the agency's budget.

As the American population ages, SSA is expected to increase payments to retirement and disability beneficiaries by 43% over the next two decades. However, Congress decreased the agency's budget by [9%](#) between 2010 and 2018. This occurred at the same time that enrollment increased by 20%. The cuts forced the agency to close 67 field offices and lay off 12 percent of its staff since 2010.

The former commissioners propose changing the way that SSA's budget is created. In 2011, lawmakers passed the Budget Control Act, placing caps on "nondefense discretionary spending" and requiring SSA to compete with other federal agencies for funding. The trio of commissioners is asking Congress to remove caps on the agency's budget to fund necessary services for the public, including field offices, processing centers, and the agency's toll-free hotline.

"The average wait time for those who call the Social Security hotline is 24 minutes - this is unacceptable," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "At the end of Fiscal Year 2018, 858,000 people were waiting for appeals hearings before administrative law judges on their applications for disability benefits. The annual average processing time for a hearing decision was an astounding 1 year and 8 months. Congress must take steps to make sure that the agency can provide the high-quality customer service that Americans deserve. Remember, these are funds collected from workers' Social Security withholding throughout their lives. We need the services we paid for."

Chairman of the House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee, **Rep. John Larson** (CT), [responded](#) to the letter saying that he has long advocated for the changes called for and will introduce legislation to ensure that SSA has enough funds necessary to serve the public. The committee will also hold a hearing soon to address the agency's customer service issues.

Washington State and Florida Alliances Hold Conventions

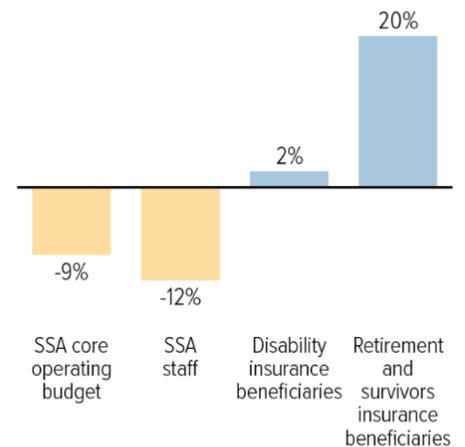
At their annual conference in Federal Way last Thursday, Washington State Alliance members heard speeches from state AFL-CIO President **Larry Brown**, state Senator **Claire Wilson**, Washington State Education Association (WEA)-Retired Vice President **Mary Lindsey**, Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisor (SHIBA) volunteer **Janey Elliott**, and national Alliance Executive Director **Fiesta**.

The speakers covered a range of topics, including the state's growing union membership, treatment of LGBT seniors in health care, and state and federal legislation addressing retirement security, Social Security and Medicare. The chapter's re-elected President, **Jackie Boschok**, and incoming Community Advocacy Network (CAN) Vice President, **Jerry Beckendorf** (Tacoma/Pierce County Advocates for Retirement Action), were sworn in.

Meanwhile, the Florida Alliance for Retired Americans held a two-day convention in Orlando on Wednesday and Thursday this week. Upon a reading of their credentials, the entire board was unanimously re-elected by acclamation. Throughout the convention, the assembled were briefed

Social Security Administration Faces Increased Workload With Fewer Resources

Percent change from 2010 to 2018 (funding adjusted for inflation)



Note: For beneficiaries, figures reflect the change from Sept. 2010 to July 2018; for staff, from Sept. 2010 to March 2018. These are the latest data available.

Source: CBPP analysis based on Social Security Administration and Office of Personnel Management data

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by Florida AFL-CIO legislative and political director **Rich Templin** on the 2019 session of the state legislature, during which Alliance members participated in extensive lobbying efforts.

Additional speakers included **Susan Arthur** of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA), **Roland Broussard** of the Elderly Housing Development & Operations Corporation (EHDOC), and Alliance regional board member **Ken Goodfriend** (AFT), as well as Alliance mobilization director, **Brendan Kelly**.

During the awards banquet, six honorees were named and Florida Alliance President Emeritus **Tony Fransetta** (UAW) recounted their records of activism in the retiree movement. The honorees were:

- Tony Fransetta Outstanding Senior Advocate Award: **William Cea** (AFT) and **Carol Ann Loehndorf** (AFSCME);
- President's Lifetime Achievement Award: **Robert Meeks** (IBT) and **Joan Reinhart** (AFSCME); and
- **J.W. Strickland** Award for dedication to others: **John Kaufman** (SMART) and **Robert Wagner** (UAW)



(L-R) Alliance Executive Director Richard Fiesta, incoming CAN Vice President Jerry Beckendorf and re-elected Washington State Alliance President Jackie Boschok



Front row (L-R): Joan Reinhart, Carol Ann Loehndorf, and Robert Meeks
Back row (L-R): FLARA Treasurer Bev Curphey; Robert Wagner; Claudie Pouncey, President of Space Coast CLC, accepting the President's lifetime achievement award on behalf of John Kaufman; Bill Cea; and Florida President Bill Sauers