



FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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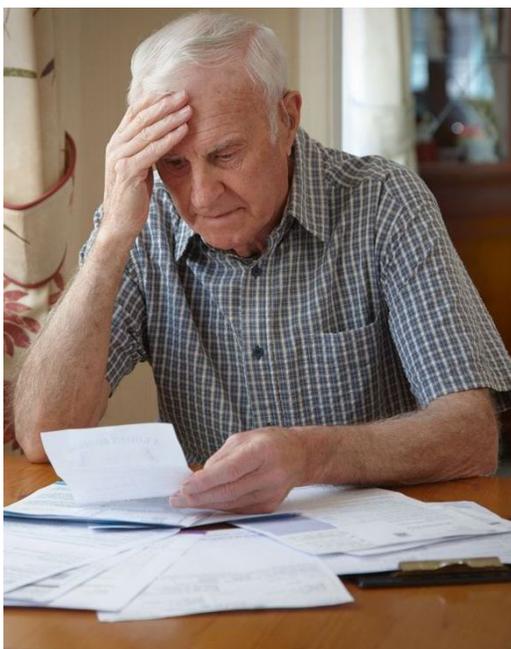
January 10, 2020

Elections Could Impede Progress on Prescription Drugs and Surprise Medical Billing

Congress has a short window to pass legislation to lower drug prices and eliminate surprise medical bills, both key concerns of voters before the 2020 presidential elections.

House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** and top House Democrats are insisting that any major drug price deal authorize the government to directly negotiate drug prices — [an idea considered a "nonstarter" by Senate Republicans](#) and President **Trump**.

The House-passed drug bill, the "Lower Drug Costs Now Act," would require Medicare to negotiate drug prices on the 250 highest priced drugs, including insulin, and make the lower negotiated drug prices available to ALL insured Americans, not just seniors. It would also cap annual out of pocket expenses for Medicare beneficiaries at \$2,000 annually. Savings from the negotiations will be reinvested into Medicare and used to expand benefits, including providing hearing, dental and vision coverage. Additional details about the bill's provisions are available on the Alliance [website](#).



Another drug pricing proposal, negotiated between Sens. **Chuck Grassley** (IA) and **Ron Wyden** (OR), the chairman and ranking members of the Finance Committee, would not include negotiated prices.

The first test on surprise medical bills is likely to come within weeks, when a bipartisan group of House members meets to finalize plans for protecting patients from being charged thousands of dollars if they get out-of-network care at a facility that is in-network for their insurance.

Stopping surprise medical billing practices has widespread Hill support, but stalled last year amid fierce battles between insurers, employers and providers over who would pay for it. Doctor Patient Unity, a dark money group largely funded by two private equity-backed physician staffing companies,

spent \$53 million on ads over the last half of 2019 to attack the leading fix, according to Advertising Analytics.

“Lower drug prices and surprise billing should not be partisan issues,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “The House has shown us the way forward on prescription drugs with H.R. 3 and has also written legislation on surprise medical billing. Congress should put patients before profits and deliver comprehensive solutions for the American people.”

Actuaries: Multiemployer Pension Plans Still at Risk

The clock is ticking for lawmakers working on ways to protect the benefits promised to [more than a million participants in as many as 117 multiemployer pension plans](#). These plans, jointly funded by groups of employers in industries including construction, trucking, mining and food retailing, are underfunded and could fail within the next 20 years, according to [a report issued just before the holidays](#) by Cheiron Inc., an actuarial consulting firm.

The House and Senate are deeply divided on how to solve this problem affecting these U.S. workers and retirees. In July, the House of Representatives passed legislation to address the solvency of multiemployer plans by providing low-interest loans through H.R. 397, the Butch Lewis Act, but the Senate has yet to take up the measure.

“The Alliance was proud to help pass the [Butch Lewis Act](#) last year,” said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. “But the Senate must finish the job to avert a financial disaster for the more than a million people counting on the pensions they have earned.”

Add Your Voice: Billionaires Must Pay their Fair Share into Social Security

1,200 of the wealthiest Americans stopped paying their 2020 Social Security taxes on January 2nd. The vast majority of Americans will continue to pay until December 31st.

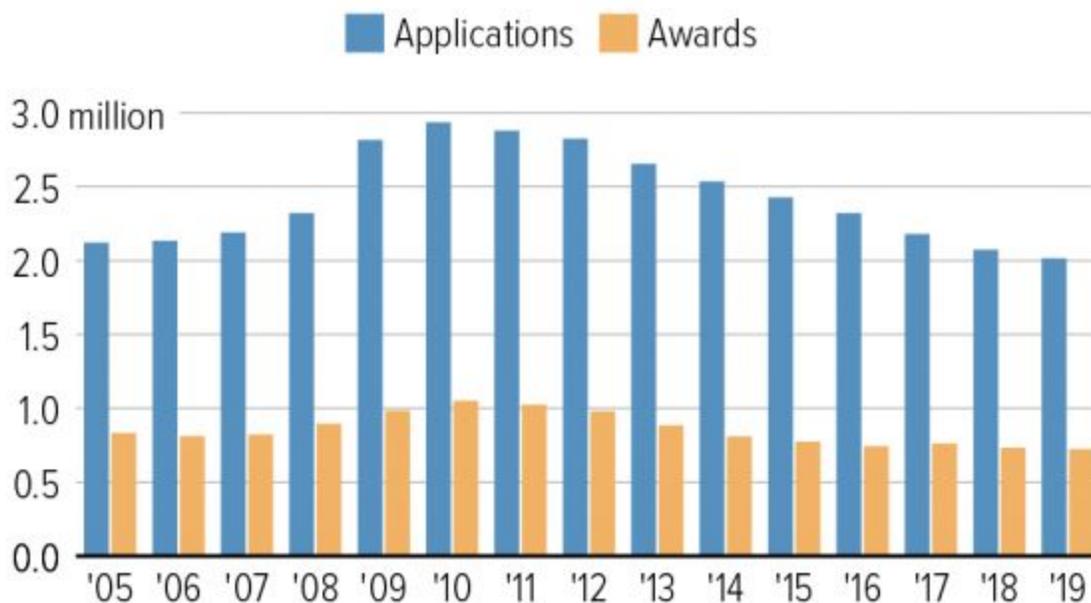
One of those affluent people was Amazon CEO **Jeff Bezos**, who pays less than \$8,000 per year into Social Security. “The system is broken when a worker in an Amazon warehouse is paying a higher percentage of their income into Social Security than the world’s richest person,” said Executive Director **Fiesta**.

[Tell your lawmakers to expand Social Security and make wealthy Americans pay their fair share by signing our petition.](#) If the rich paid their fair share into the system, we could expand Social Security and increase benefits for current and future generations.

Administration Continues to Threaten Social Security Disability Insurance Benefits

A recent proposal by the administration puts the [Social Security benefits of disabled Americans at risk](#). The new rule would allow the government to look more closely at whether people still qualify for disability benefits after they have been awarded them.

Disability Insurance Applications and Awards Have Fallen Significantly Since 2010 Peak



Source: Social Security Administration

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Currently, the government evaluates whether a person receiving disability benefits is still eligible every few years. This proposed change would allow the government to increase these types of examinations and require more paperwork and documentation from beneficiaries. Ironically, [applications and awards for disability insurance have steadily declined since 2010](#).

“Disability benefits are a critical part of our Social Security system. People with disabilities should not have to jump through unnecessary hoops to get the modest benefits they earned,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “The administration claims that its plans will save \$2 billion but neglects to mention that it will cost taxpayers \$1.8 billion to implement and manage these changes.”

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.