



FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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John Sweeney, President of the AFL-CIO from 1995-2009, is Remembered as a Visionary

AFL-CIO President Emeritus **John Sweeney** [passed away](#) on Monday at age 86. A giant of the labor movement, he was revered by millions of Americans as a leader and visionary who never stopped advancing the rights of workers during his extraordinary life. Among his many

accomplishments, he was the driving force in the creation of the Alliance for Retired Americans.



“In 2000, President Sweeney envisioned a new model for union retiree activism, which led to the creation of the Alliance,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Retirees owe him a debt of gratitude, and the Alliance is proud to be a part of his legacy.”

Early in his career, he took a pay cut to become a researcher for the International Ladies Garment

President Sweeney with IMAW retiree Joe Reilly at Alliance Legislative Conference in 2011.

Workers Union. In 1960, he went to work for a New York local of the Building Service Employees International Union, the forerunner of the SEIU. He became the head of the local in 1976, then moved to Washington in 1980, when he became the union’s national president.

He was elected president of the AFL-CIO in 1995, reshaping the AFL-CIO to place greater emphasis on political activism and on recruiting new members to unions. In that role, he was a leading advocate for the Affordable Care Act and an influential voice for advances including higher

wages, the Family and Medical Leave Act, workplace safety measures and federal protection against sexual harassment and discrimination on the job.

Senate Approves Budget for Biden's \$1.9 Trillion Stimulus

The Senate [approved a budget resolution early Friday morning](#) to speed passage of President **Biden's** pandemic response plan.

After more than 800 GOP amendments were filed, the Senate voted 51-50 to pass the measure, allowing Democrats to enact a COVID-19 response bill with just 51 votes in the chamber. Vice President **Kamala Harris** cast her first tie-breaking votes just after 5 a.m., securing the resolution's passage. Every Democrat voted for the proposal, while all Republicans voted against it.

Next week 25 House and Senate committees will begin consideration of President Biden's plan to send out additional \$1,400 stimulus checks to many Americans and boost the weekly federal unemployment benefit to \$400 through September, in addition to hundreds of billions of dollars in aid to states, communities and schools.

A meeting on Friday with Biden, Harris and House Democratic leaders and committee chairs will determine the next steps for the stimulus.

"Congress is moving quickly, and we urge them to keep up that pace," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "The sooner they act, the sooner we can bring an end to this pandemic, save lives and rebuild the economy."

Survey: Pandemic Caused Many Americans to Withdraw Money from their Retirement Accounts

The pandemic has caused a major setback in retirement plans for many Americans. One third of respondents said they took a distribution or loan from their retirement account, according to a recent [survey](#) by finance magazine *Kiplinger*. The survey, conducted at the end of 2020, included 744 respondents between the ages of 40 and 74 with retirement savings of at least \$50,000.

Moreover, 40% of those surveyed said the pandemic has made them less confident they will have sufficient funds to retire, and most withdrawals from retirement accounts represented significant amounts of money. Thirty-two percent of the respondents who made withdrawals took out more than \$75,000.

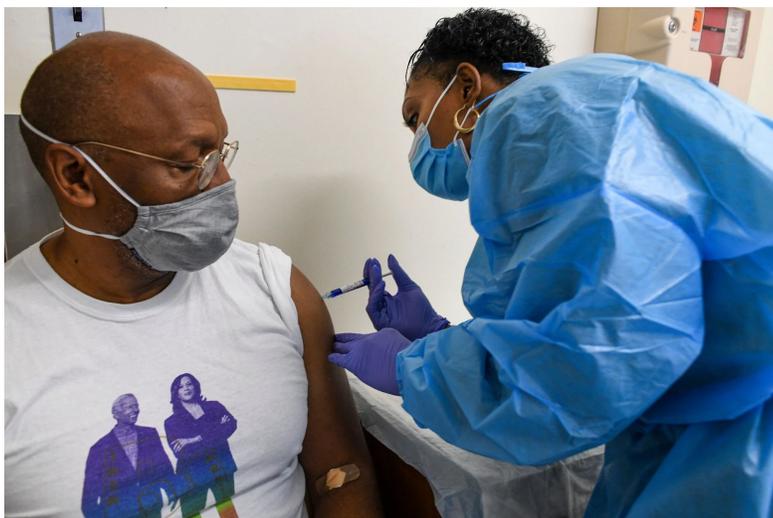
"The Covid-19 pandemic has affected millions of people in hundreds of different ways, and retirement planning has been one of them," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "The pandemic's harmful effects on retirement savings reinforce the need to expand Social Security and protect earned pension benefits."

KHN: When Your Chance for a Covid Shot Comes, Don't Worry About the Numbers

By Arthur Allen and Liz Szabo, *Kaiser Health News*

When getting vaccinated against covid-19, there's no sense being picky. *You should take the first authorized vaccine that's offered, experts say.*

The newest covid vaccine on the horizon, from Johnson & Johnson, is probably a little less effective at preventing sickness than the two shots already being administered around the United States, from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. On Friday, Johnson & Johnson announced that, in a 45,000-person trial, its vaccine was about 66% effective at preventing moderate to severe covid illness. No one who received the vaccine was hospitalized with or died of the disease, according to the company, which said it expected to seek Food and Drug Administration authorization as early as this week. If the agency authorizes use of the vaccine, millions of doses could be shipped out of J&J's warehouses beginning in late February.



The J&J vaccine is similar to the shots from Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech but uses a different strategy for transporting genetic code into human cells to stimulate immunity to the disease. The Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines were found in trials last fall to be 94% effective against confirmed covid. They also prevented nearly all severe cases.

But the difference in those efficacy numbers may be deceptive. The vaccines were tested in different

locations and at different phases of the pandemic. And J&J gave subjects in its trial only one dose of the vaccine, while Moderna and Pfizer have two-dose schedules, separated by 28 and 21 days, respectively. The bottom line, however, is that all three do a good job at preventing serious covid.

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President Roach: Black History Month Comes Amid Milestones, But Work Remains

President Roach offered his view on the advancements Black Americans have made as the Alliance commemorates African-American History Month during February.

“We should look at our progress,” said President Roach. “The election of President **Barack Obama** and Vice President **Harris** are important milestones, and this is a time for honoring them and other American civil rights leaders.”

“Yet too many Black Americans lack medical care, housing and educational opportunities,” he continued. “While we celebrate our heroes, we must remember who we are, where we came from, and where we must go. **The struggle continues.**”