



# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## **Biden's American Rescue Plan Brings \$1.9 Trillion in Coronavirus Relief**

President **Joe Biden** signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act on Thursday, bringing a coronavirus relief package to the nation a year after a pandemic had been declared. His signature came one day after the House passed the legislation [without any Republican support](#) and five days after the Senate had [passed it](#) entirely along party lines.

The signing sets in motion the delivery of a one-time [\\$1,400](#) check per person for most American households, with check values phasing out beginning at \$75,000 for a single adult and \$150,000 for a married couple. Americans who have already set up direct deposit can expect to see relief payments hitting their bank accounts as soon as this weekend.



President Biden said Thursday night that all Americans could be eligible to receive a vaccine by May 1.

Funding to fight the virus includes \$50 billion for testing expansion and \$20 billion for a national vaccination program; a 100,000 person public health corps; funding for community health centers and tribal health services; and investments in COVID-19 treatment and new strain research and vaccine administration.

The law includes billions in benefits that help older Americans, such as incentives for states to expand Medicaid and a 15% increase in SNAP (food stamp) benefits through September 2021. It strengthens the Affordable Care Act with some of the most

significant changes to insurance affordability in more than a decade.

\$350 billion will go to state, local, and territorial governments, which have had to foot the bill for unexpected health and safety costs due to the coronavirus in the midst of lost tax revenue from the recession. The law also includes extended unemployment benefits and ensures housing for those suffering economically by extending the federal eviction and foreclosure moratorium until September 2021.

"This legislation provides critical economic relief to millions of Americans, including older adults, first responders, and small businesses," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "Equally important, it provides states and local communities the funds they need to continue combatting COVID 19 and expedite the COVID-19 vaccine process so that schools and businesses can reopen safely."

White House officials have outlined how [the plan will help Americans from nearly every walk of life.](#)

## Retirees Applaud Provision to Save Multiemployer Pension Plans from Insolvency

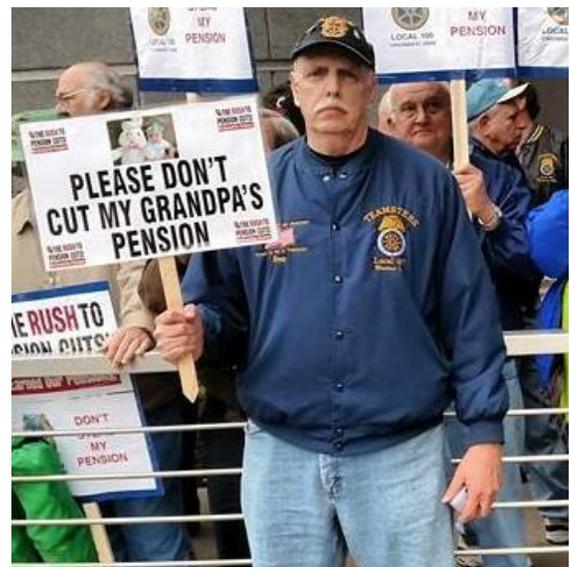
One of the most important parts of the American Rescue Plan for union members and many other workers and retirees is its [provision saving multiemployer pension plans from insolvency](#). More than ten million Americans will have greatly increased pension security for the benefits they have earned now that President Biden has signed the bill into law.

"Working people deserve to retire with dignity. A pension is a promise that should be guaranteed after a lifetime of dedication and hard work," said **Liz Shuler**, Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO and Executive Vice President of the Alliance for Retired Americans. "The labor movement and the Alliance have worked for years to ensure that millions of workers are protected and receive their earned retirement income security. This legislation finally does that."

Multiemployer pension plans are collectively bargained pension plans operated jointly by unions and employers, usually within the same or related industries – such as construction, retail, manufacturing, transportation, and mining. Many multiemployer plans are in financial trouble due to the 2008 recession and corporate bankruptcies. The COVID-19 recession has exacerbated the situation.

"Millions of Americans can feel confident today knowing that the retirement benefits they have earned and paid for will be there when they need them," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "Plans experiencing problems will have the resources they need from the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation to pay benefits for the next thirty years. We salute the U.S. House and Senate for passing this historic legislation and President Biden for his leadership in seeing it through."

"I am breathing a sigh of relief and so are millions of Americans whose pensions were at risk through no fault of our own," said **Greg Smith** of Norton, Ohio, an Alliance member and retired Teamster who has advocated for a solution to the multiemployer pension crisis for eight years. "I worked for 31 years and contributed to my pension with every paycheck. But when Congress passed the Multiemployer Pension Reform Act in 2014, my fund announced in 2015 that they were going to cut my pension benefit by 52 percent. It took years of fighting, but my retirement will now be more secure."



Greg Smith

## PRO Act Passes the House

The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act passed the House on Tuesday with a [225-206 vote](#). The historic bill would provide protections for workers trying to organize [and is the labor movement's single biggest legislative priority in this Congress](#). The legislation will remove barriers that keep workers from forming a union and enable them to bargain for better wages, benefits, and safer workplaces.

Workers who form or join a union have greater retirement security. Union workers earn more and can negotiate for benefits such as health care, pensions and employer contributions to retirement plans, which leads to higher income and increased Social Security benefits in retirement. Further, unions often come with negotiated defined benefit pensions, which provide lifelong retirement income.

“The labor movement has been and continues to be the leading force in the fight to strengthen Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “A strong and growing labor movement helps all Americans enjoy a secure and healthy retirement.”

The bill faces an uphill battle in the Senate if 60 votes are needed for it to pass. Currently no Republican senators have voiced support for the bill. The AFL-CIO Executive Council issued [a statement](#) on Thursday calling on the Senate to reform its current procedural rules.

**Action Needed: Tell the Senate You Support the PRO Act! [Please sign this petition now.](#)**

## KHN: Texas Winter Storm Exposes Gaps in Senior Living Oversight

By Sandy West, *Kaiser Health News*

HOUSTON — When the big, red and extremely loud fire alarm went off in Maria Skladzien’s apartment, the 74-year-old ventured into the hallway with fellow residents of her Houston-area senior living community. The brutal winter storm that swept through Texas had knocked out power, which, in turn, disrupted water to the four-story building. The blaring alarms raised fears of fire.

The building’s elevators were unusable without power. Dependent on her wheelchair, Skladzien went back inside her second-floor apartment. She watched as residents gathered in the subfreezing temperatures outside, wondering if she would have to “throw herself out the window” to survive.

“It’s a very uneasy feeling,” she said, sitting in the living room of her small apartment a week later, packages of water brought by friends and volunteers tucked against walls and sitting on tables. No fire had occurred, but her fears continued because the elevators were still not functioning. “So many crazy things race through your mind in a situation like this.”

[Winter storm Uri](#) brought power failure and burst water pipes to millions of homes and businesses throughout Texas. But the impact, as is often the case in emergencies, was most profound on the state’s most vulnerable — including residents of senior living facilities.

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