



FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Xavier Becerra is Confirmed to Lead HHS, Bringing Renewed Hope for Action to Lower Drug Prices

Xavier Becerra, who until recently was California's Attorney General, has been [confirmed](#) by the Senate as the next Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The vote was 50-49, with Sen. **Susan Collins** (ME) casting the only GOP vote in favor of his confirmation.

Becerra served as a member of Congress from 1993-2017, earning a lifetime pro-retiree score of [99%](#) in the Alliance Voting Record from 2001-2016. He is the first Latino to lead HHS, which includes the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.



While in Congress, Secretary Becerra helped write the Affordable Care Act (ACA) that vastly expanded health insurance coverage across the country, and he pledged during his confirmation hearings that he will work to strengthen the law. As California's Attorney General, Becerra led 20 states and the District of Columbia in a campaign to protect the ACA from being dismantled by his Republican counterparts.

Secretary Becerra

"Secretary Becerra has been a friend to retirees throughout his career and understands the issues facing older Americans," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "One of the most important items on his agenda will be working to make President **Biden's** commitment to requiring Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices a reality. The Alliance is ready to help him achieve that goal in any way we can."

Senate Prepares to Consider Biden Nominees to the Postal Service Board of Governors

On Monday President Biden officially nominated three candidates to serve on the USPS Board of Governors: **Anton Hajjar**, the former general counsel of American Postal Workers Union; **Amber McReynolds**, CEO of the National Vote at Home Institute; and **Ron Stroman**, former deputy postmaster general. The candidates must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate before joining the Board, which oversees the work of Postmaster General **Louis DeJoy**.

Meanwhile DeJoy is implementing his 10-year plan to restructure the Postal Service. The plan dramatically changes the way the agency functions and mailing industry officials believe it would further slow delivery of mail and packages, including prescription drugs.

“It is critical that the Senate confirm these nominees as soon as possible so they can put the brakes on Postmaster DeJoy’s disastrous restructuring plan,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “The Postal Service is essential to all Americans, and particularly for seniors. It needs leaders who understand that the Post Office is not a for-profit corporation but rather a service all Americans can rely on.”

Pfizer Touting Benefits of COVID Vaccine to its Bottom Line

A top Pfizer executive told investors last week that the multinational drug corporation [may hike prices for the COVID-19 vaccine](#) following the pandemic.

Public health experts expect that people will continue to need periodic COVID shots to protect them from the deadly disease. Currently the federal government is purchasing doses of the vaccine from Pfizer for about \$20 a dose, and making them available for free to the American public.

During a virtual global healthcare conference hosted by Barclays bank, analyst **Carter Lewis Gould** asked **Frank D’Amelio**, Pfizer CFO and executive Vice President of Global Supply, about pricing of the COVID-19 vaccine in the future.

D’Amelio said the corporation sees a "significant opportunity" to profit from the vaccine as the world moves "from a pandemic situation to an endemic situation" and can charge a new price for the vaccine.

“Americans pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs because Congress has failed to rein in the anti-competitive and predatory practices of the pharmaceutical industry,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “If we don’t act, the Pfizer vaccine will be just the latest drug with an escalating price tag. We need real action and lower drug prices now.”

KHN: Covid Cases Plummet 83% Among Nursing Home Staffers Despite Vaccine Hesitancy
By Melissa Bailey and Shoshana Dubnow, *Kaiser Health News*

Joan Phillips, a certified nursing assistant in a Florida nursing home, loved her job but dreaded the danger of going to work in the pandemic. When vaccines became available in December, she jumped at the chance to get one.



Months later, it appears that danger has faded. After the rollout of covid vaccines, the number of new covid cases among nursing home staff members fell 83% — from 28,802 for the week ending Dec. 20 to 4,764 for the week ending Feb. 14, data from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services shows.

New covid-19 infections among nursing home residents fell even more steeply, by 89%, in that period, compared with 58% in the general public, CMS and Johns Hopkins University data shows.

These numbers suggest that "the vaccine appears to be having a dramatic effect on reducing cases, which is extremely encouraging," said **Beth Martino**, spokesperson for the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living, an industry group.

"It's a big relief for me," said Phillips, who works at the North Beach Rehabilitation Center outside Miami. Now, she said, she's urging hesitant co-workers and anyone else who can to "go out and take the vaccination."

[Click to read more.](#)

Alliance Condemns Senseless Shootings in Georgia

The Alliance joins the AFL-CIO and other labor organizations in passionately denouncing the shootings this week in Georgia that left eight people dead, including 6 people of Asian descent, and one other person wounded.

"Our condolences go out to the families and friends of everyone who has been touched by the violence in Georgia this week," said **President Roach**.

"The 4.4 million members of the Alliance share your grief, and we condemn any and all acts of hatred toward any ethnic group. Unfortunately, Asian-Americans have also been targeted in other states, and the attacks against them and all minorities must end immediately."