



FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Alliance Fighting for Lower Drug Prices as Debate Heats up in Congress

Alliance members in key congressional districts continued their efforts this week to persuade four moderate House Democrats who voted in Committee against allowing Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices.

House members **Stephanie Murphy** (FL), **Scott Peters** (CA), **Kathleen Rice** (NY), and **Kurt Schrader** (OR) received hundreds of letters from Alliance members, and local and national media outlets [published](#) articles drawing attention to their actions. The votes of Reps. Peters, Rice and Schrader also blocked a key mechanism to provide funding that expands Medicare to include dental, hearing and vision care. The Alliance's recent [poll](#) of voters aged 65 and above found that an 87% majority of voters over age 65 favor allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices.

Another major concern was a media report that Arizona Sen. **Kyrsten Sinema** told White House officials that she did not support allowing Medicare to negotiate lower prices. On Thursday Sen. **Joe Manchin** (WV) told the media that Medicare should be allowed to negotiate prices, but he has reservations about expanding benefits.

In addition to the letter campaign, on Long Island, New Yorkers harmed by high drug prices were joined at a protest on Wednesday by advocates from more than a dozen organizations across the state, including the New York State Alliance for Retired Americans (NYSARA). They demanded that Rep. Rice fight for her constituents instead of mega-profitable drug corporations.

Marjorie Harrison, a NYSARA member, spoke at the rally outside Rep. Rice's Garden City office in protest of her vote. To great applause Ms. Harrison said Alliance members are asking Rice to "disavow your 'no' vote in committee last week and recommit yourself to our senior citizen agenda of lower prescription costs and expanded health coverage for all."

In Arizona, Alliance state president **Sandra Cole** issued a [press release](#) and said, "time and again Sen. Sinema has assured us that she cares about the challenges facing older Arizonans, but if media reports from Washington are correct, her actions tell a different story. For seniors, the centerpiece of President **Biden's** Build Back Better Plan is lowering drug prices by allowing Medicare to negotiate with the pharmaceutical corporations."

FDA, CDC Back Pfizer COVID-19 Boosters for Seniors, High-Risk Americans

On Thursday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) vaccine advisory committee endorsed the use of a [Pfizer and BioNTech's Covid-19 booster shot](#) for people 65 years old and older and those who may be at risk of developing severe disease. The move could allow broad latitude for people to access additional doses.



The independent committee said the booster dose should be given at least six months after the initial two-dose vaccination series.

The CDC panel's votes came less than a day after the Food and Drug Administration authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech booster for the same groups. The Moderna and Johnson & Johnson inoculations await their own approval. CDC Director **Rochelle Walensky** accepted the CDC panel's recommendations regarding COVID-19 booster vaccine doses for adults older

than 65 and for residents of long-term care facilities on Friday, clearing the way for the country to begin rolling out boosters more widely.

Dr. Walensky also accepted the panel's recommendations for booster shots for people ages 50 to 64 who have medical conditions that leave them at risk for severe COVID-19 infections, and for adults ages 18 to 49 who have underlying medical conditions, based on their individual benefit and risk.

The science advisers voted to exclude people at risk because of their occupations, disagreeing among themselves about the evidence of benefits of booster doses for health care workers, teachers and other workers who do not meet the other criteria. Walensky said such workers should get Pfizer boosters.

"We urge everyone to follow the latest guidance," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "Vaccinations are crucial for the country to end the pandemic which has claimed the lives of more than 683,000 Americans."

Survey Says Most Private Insurance Plans Won't Waive COVID-19 Cost-sharing

At the urging of the federal government, insurance companies waived cost-sharing for COVID-19 patients in 2020. However as the pandemic continues, a majority of companies have opted to [discontinue](#) this practice, meaning that COVID-19 patients with 'long-haul' cases are responsible for their full deductibles and copays.

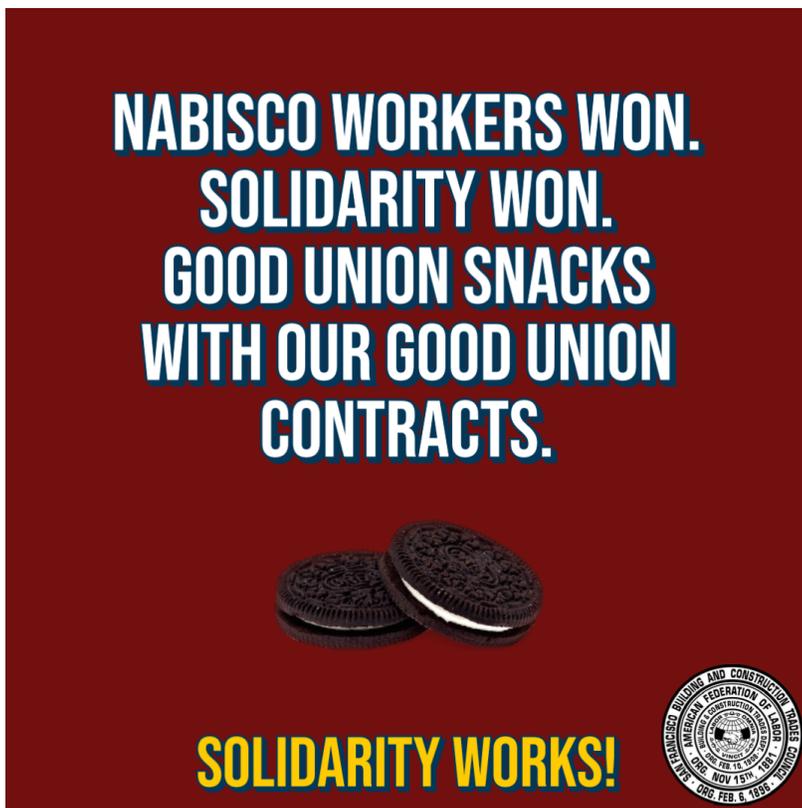
The data come from a [Kaiser Family Foundation survey](#) conducted in August. Of the plans surveyed, 72% said they would no longer cover out-of-pocket costs for COVID-19 care. The

survey also found that this percentage is likely to increase in the future, leaving more patients responsible for the cost of their care.

“These patients can expect to see steep hospital bills similar to others with chronic diseases such as cancer,” said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. “Getting vaccinated is the best way to avoid high out of pocket medical bills.”

Nabisco Strike Ends: BCTGM Members Overwhelmingly Accept New Contract

Alliance members have been strong supporters of Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM) workers at Nabisco/Mondelez plants throughout the United States as they fought the company’s plans to move production to Mexico and slash earned retirement benefits.



On Saturday the BCTGM members voted to accept a new collective bargaining agreement. This signals the end of the BCTGM’s two-month strike against Nabisco/Mondelez, where workers had banded together in pursuit of better wages, hours, and benefits.

In a [press release](#) from the BCTGM, union President **Anthony Shelton** stated, “This has been a long and difficult fight for our striking members, their families and our Union. Throughout the strike, our members displayed tremendous courage, grit and determination.”

“We are thrilled to hear of the BCTGM’s success in adopting a new collective bargaining agreement,” added **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

“The right to organize is so important, and the Alliance has stood in full support of those who bravely walked the picket line.”