



FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

815 16th Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20006 • 202.637.5399

www.retiredamericans.org

Spanish version: www.alianzadejubilados.org

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President Biden Unveils Framework for Build Back Better Bill

On Thursday, President Biden travelled to the Capitol to present a new [outline of a framework](#) of a broad legislative package that will provide support to millions of American families. Congress and the White House have spent weeks hammering out a deal. Congressional leaders say that further changes will be made to the package before it is voted on by the full House and Senate.

The plan expands Medicare to include guaranteed hearing benefits; will enable 4 million people in states that have not implemented the ACA to purchase affordable health insurance; and provides funding to allow more people to receive long-term care services at home rather than an institution as well as support for caregivers.

The framework does not include President Biden's [plan](#) to allow Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices, which has encountered staunch opposition from a handful of Democratic members in the House and Senate. PhRMA, the pharmaceutical industry's lobbying arm, has spent at least \$30 million in lobbying, political contributions, and advertising this year to protect its monopoly power to set prices.

However, key members of the House of Representatives [are still working to include](#) drug price negotiation and other measures to lower the amount that seniors and consumers pay at the pharmacy counter in the final bill.

"Americans pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs, and our poll found that [85% of voters over the age of 65](#) want Medicare to negotiate lower prices for prescription drugs," said Alliance Executive Director **Richard Fiesta**. "Congress must find a way to include Medicare drug price negotiation or other measures that will lower drug prices in the final bill."

Representative Larson Introduces Social Security Expansion Bill With 194 Co-Sponsors

Representative **John Larson** (CT) [held a press conference](#) on Tuesday as he introduced the Social Security 2100: A Sacred Trust Act (H.R. 5723). Alliance President **Robert Roach, Jr.**, attended the event with [dozens of lawmakers](#) who spoke in favor of the legislation.

Rep. Larson's bill expands and strengthens Social Security. It increases benefits for all beneficiaries by requiring wealthy Americans to pay Social Security payroll tax on wages above \$400,000. It also ensures that annual cost-of-living increases are calculated based on the CPI-E, which takes into account the items retirees spend their money on, including prescription drugs. It will also restore the earned Social Security benefits to nearly 2 million public sector retirees by repealing the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset.

"In America, millions of Social Security beneficiaries are having to make the choice between food and medicine on a daily basis. This is unacceptable in the richest and greatest country in the



world," said President Roach. "Black American, Hispanic American and Asian American Social Security beneficiaries were disproportionately affected during the pandemic, exacerbating inequality. A recent poll indicated that our nation's seniors voted in the last election with the hope and expectation of seeing improvements to the Social Security benefits they have earned. Voters will remember this when they vote. The Alliance for Retired Americans 100% supports Representative Larson's bill."

Alliance President Robert Roach Jr. joined Rep. John Larson at the Social Security 2100 Act press conference.

Arizona Alliance Holds Halloween Rally Outside Senator Sinema's Office

Dressed in scary Halloween costumes, members of the Arizona Alliance held a rally outside Senator **Kyrsten Sinema's** (AZ) Phoenix office today. The event was held to decry the Senator's decision to break her promise to support Medicare drug price negotiation and instead side with the powerful pharmaceutical industry.

In 2014, then-Representative Sinema told the Alliance [in writing](#) that she backed the measure which would lower drug prices.



“Senator Sinema has had enormous leverage and influence over what President Biden’s Build Back Better plan includes, and drug price negotiations were removed from the framework released yesterday. She clearly did not fight for us when the time came,” said Arizona Alliance President **Saundra Cole**. “**This is a life or death issue for thousands of seniors**. Nearly one in four older Americans reports they can’t afford a prescription drug their doctor prescribed due to its price, and many skip doses, cut pills in half or don’t fill their prescriptions at all. We expected better from our senior U.S. Senator.”

[Ninety-four percent of Arizonans](#) want Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices. Senator Sinema has [received more than](#) \$250,000 in campaign contributions from the pharmaceutical industry.

“Alliance activists in Arizona and beyond have worked tirelessly to make Medicare drug price negotiations a reality,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “This bill is not final yet, and we need to keep fighting for lower drug prices on behalf of every older American.”

KHN: Medicare Punishes 2,499 Hospitals for High Readmissions

By Jordan Rau

The federal government’s effort to penalize hospitals for excessive patient readmissions is ending its first decade with Medicare cutting payments to nearly half the nation’s hospitals.

In its 10th annual round of penalties, Medicare is reducing its payments to 2,499 hospitals, or 47% of all facilities. The average penalty is a 0.64% reduction in payment for each Medicare patient stay from the start of this month through September 2022. The fines can be heavy, averaging \$217,000 for a hospital in 2018, according to Congress’ Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, or MedPAC. Medicare estimates the penalties over the next fiscal year will save the government \$521 million. Thirty-nine hospitals received the maximum 3% reduction, and 547 hospitals had so few returning patients that they escaped any penalty.

An additional 2,216 hospitals are exempt from the program because they specialize in children, psychiatric patients or veterans. Rehabilitation and long-term care hospitals are also excluded from the program, as are critical access hospitals, which are treated differently because they are the only inpatient facility in an area. Of the 3,046 hospitals for which Medicare evaluated readmission rates, 82% received some penalty, nearly the same share as were punished last year. ...([more](#))

[Click here to see whether your hospital was penalized.](#)

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.