The Alliance wishes you and your family a safe and joyous holiday season. Please click [here](#) for a special union Christmas song by Texas Alliance President Gene Lantz!

The Friday Alert will resume on December 31, 2021.

Senate Republicans and Chamber of Commerce Double Down on Opposition to the Build Back Better Act

Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer (NY) this week said that a Senate vote on the Build Back Better Act will not happen this year.

The House-passed version of Build Back Better would provide guaranteed hearing care for all Medicare beneficiaries, and provide coverage for all vaccines, such as the shingles vaccine. It would also limit drug price increases; allow Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices for some drugs, and cap out-of-pocket drug costs at $2,000 a year for Medicare beneficiaries.
Sen. Ron Wyden (OR) told Politico this week that Republicans are challenging President Biden’s plan to cap insulin costs at $35 a month. Senate Republicans are looking into a procedural move to prevent the insulin cap from applying to Americans with private insurance plans, even if it means that some patients will go without relief. Diabetes patients currently pay anywhere from $375 to $1,000 per month for the drug.

Meanwhile, Politico reports that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is readying a multi-pronged campaign aimed at pressuring several Democratic Senators to reject the legislation altogether. Their campaign, which includes TV, print and radio ads as well as tele-town halls, is aimed at Senators Joe Manchin (WV), Kyrsten Sinema (AZ), Mark Kelly (AZ) and Catherine Cortez Masto (NV).

“We shouldn’t be surprised that big corporations are doing everything they can to block this legislation that would help millions of American families,” said Robert Roach, Jr., President of the Alliance. “But it’s worth fighting for, and Alliance members will redouble our efforts to get this package over the finish line.”

Covid Booster Rates are Sluggish in Nursing Homes

In a troubling sign, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is reporting that booster rates were just 22% among fully vaccinated nursing home staff as of December 5. In addition, the CDC says that just over half (51%) of fully vaccinated nursing home residents had received a COVID-19 booster shot as of that date. “Fully vaccinated” was defined as two doses of a two-dose mRNA series (Pfizer or Moderna) or one dose of a single-dose vaccine (Johnson and Johnson).

“The 22% figure is particularly alarming, since nursing home staffers could infect not only themselves, but also the vulnerable residents they see each day,” said Richard Fiesta, Executive
Director of the Alliance. “That is why the CDC is strongly urging people who live or work in long term care facilities to get a COVID-19 booster shot.”

Research shows that the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines may decrease over time, especially among people aged 65 and older, and early studies suggest that boosters are needed in vaccinated people to maintain adequate protection against hospitalization or death due to the new, more transmissible Omicron variant.

To find a vaccine or booster near you click here.

Postal Reform Act Awaits a Vote to Strengthen the Post Office

As postal workers are working diligently to deliver holiday packages on time, the American Postal Workers Union is focused on a key piece of legislation – the Postal Reform Act, H.R. 3076 in the House and S. 1720 in the Senate. A bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced the legislation seven months ago but so far it has not been brought up for a vote in either chamber.

The legislation would shore up the Postal Service’s finances by repealing the Congressional mandate that USPS spend billions of dollars every year to prefund retiree health care and pensions. If this legislation is enacted into law, the Postal Service could instead pay these costs on a yearly basis, as other government agencies and corporations do.

The bill would also allow the postal service to offer new services, including postal banking, that would bring in new revenue and meet local needs.

“Older Americans rely on the Post Office to deliver their prescription drugs and other critical mail,” said Joseph Peters, Jr., Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “The activism of thousands of Alliance members who attended demonstrations and wrote to their members of Congress helped build support for the Postal Reform Act earlier this year. Now we need Congress to bring it up for a vote and get it to President Biden’s desk.“

As U.S. Passes 800,000 Virus Deaths, 1 of Every 100 Older Americans Has Died

With the United States now having lost more than 800,000 lives due to the coronavirus, new data has uncovered a grim trend among those most likely to be affected: one out of every 100 Americans over the age of 65 has died from COVID-19, accounting for nearly 75% of the country’s total coronavirus deaths. Also deeply concerning, Covid has become the third leading cause of death among Americans aged 65 and older, after heart disease and cancer.

Although seniors are the most vaccinated age group in the nation, the rate at which elderly people are dying from the virus has risen in the past two months. With experts warning of the spread of new variants, many seniors are isolating out of fear of the disease.
“The coronavirus pandemic has been devastating for America’s seniors, and we're not out of the woods yet,” President Roach added. “With cases rising as we approach the holidays, we urge everyone to continue to follow the latest CDC guidance regarding vaccinations, boosters, social distancing and use of masks.”

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.