



Alliance for Retired Americans

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President Roach Tells Senate Committee Social Security Must Be Expanded

Alliance President **Robert Roach, Jr.** testified Thursday at a Senate Budget Committee hearing focused on expanding Social Security for all beneficiaries. Entitled, “Saving Social Security: Expanding Benefits and Demanding the Wealthy Pay Their Fair Share or Cutting Benefits and Increasing Retirement Anxiety,” the hearing laid out the case for increasing benefits as millions of seniors struggle to make ends meet. [Click here to see the video of the hearing.](#)



Sen. Sanders with President Roach

The testimony came on the same day that Sen. **Bernie Sanders** (VT), Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, and other Democratic legislators [put forward new Social Security legislation](#) that would increase benefits by \$200 per month and extend the system’s solvency past the year 2096 by ensuring that the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share of Social Security taxes.

Sen. Sanders’ legislation, the Social Security Expansion Act, which the Alliance strongly supports and has formally endorsed, addresses the challenges seniors face by:

- **Expanding Social Security benefits across-the-board** for current and new beneficiaries by \$200 per month, or \$2,400 per year;
- **Increasing Cost-Of-Living-Adjustments** by adopting the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E);
- **Updating the Special Minimum Benefit for Social Security recipients** by making it easier to qualify, assisting low-income workers to stay out of poverty

“We need improvements because older Americans today are hurting,” said President Roach at the hearing. “And I have seen examples for myself firsthand. I have observed on many occasions seniors at the supermarket checkout who had to put food back because the grocery bill was more than they had. Seniors are having to make decisions between food and medicine on a daily basis.”

In addition, the Alliance has endorsed Connecticut Rep. **John Larson’s** legislation in the House, H.R. 5723, Social Security 2100: A Sacred Trust Act. It also strengthens Social Security and repeals the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset, both of which unfairly claw back the Social Security benefits of workers or their spouses or survivors if they worked for a period of time in jobs not covered by Social Security.

Medicare Advantage Insurance Firms Accused of Submitting False Bills to Inflate Profits

The Justice Department [has filed a lawsuit alleging](#) that some Medicare Advantage insurance companies mined patient records for outdated, irrelevant conditions and illegally billed Medicare more to increase profits.

One of the insurers inflated bills by millions of dollars, the government alleged in a false-claims lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in California.

The case was part of a broader government crackdown on abusive billing practices in the Medicare Advantage program, Medicare’s privatized insurance option. The Justice Department is pursuing civil lawsuits against several companies that participate in the system, from major insurers to prestigious nonprofit hospital systems, alleging unfair gains realized by taking taxpayer money under false pretenses.

The Palo Alto Medical Foundation, which has 1,600 doctors, and its parent affiliate, Sutter Health, which runs 24 hospitals in Northern California, settled one case with the government in August 2021 for \$90 million. When a sample of hundreds of their cases were audited, 96 percent of their diagnoses for strokes, 90 percent of their cancer diagnoses, and 66 percent of fractures were found to be invalid.

“The Palo Alto case is just one example,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “The government is investigating allegations of a troubling pattern of egregious behavior by Medicare Advantage insurers that involve the theft of taxpayers’ funds.”

New Drug Prices Soar to Median of \$180,000 a Year

A study published in the JAMA medical journal has found that in 2020 and 2021, nearly half of new drugs were priced at [more than \\$150,000 per year](#). That is in sharp contrast to 2008, when fewer than 10 percent of drugs were introduced at that price level.

The median launch price of a new drug in the United States has soared from \$2,115 in 2008 to \$180,007 in 2021, a 20% annual inflation rate over the period, researchers at Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston found.

“More than 47% of new drugs now cost \$150,000 or more annually,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “If anyone needs further proof that Medicare must be able to negotiate lower prices, they should look at the prices for new drugs that are entering the market.”

Kaiser Health News: Despite a First-Ever ‘Right-to-Repair’ Law, There’s No Easy Fix for Wheelchair Users

By Markian Hawryluk

Robin Bolduc isn’t the type of person who takes “no” for an answer — particularly when it comes to fixing her husband’s wheelchair.



Bruce Goguen (Photo: ROBIN BOLDUC)

Her husband, **Bruce Goguen**, 69, is paralyzed from multiple sclerosis. And without his chair, he would be stuck in bed, at risk of developing pneumonia or pressure sores that could lead to sepsis and death.

When components of the chair wear out or break down, the road to repair is littered with obstacles. Recently, the Broomfield, Colorado, residents had to replace a button that Goguen presses with his head to control his wheelchair. They considered going through his wheelchair supplier for the repairs.

“If we did that, he would literally be in bed for months,” said Bolduc, who, along with her husband, is a member of the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition, an advocacy group. “There’s a quality-of-life issue — he could be lying in bed staring at the ceiling. He has no movement without his wheelchair.”

Read more [here](#).

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.