



FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Register by Monday for the Alliance's 2022 National Membership Meeting

Members of the Alliance for Retired Americans will hold their quadrennial National Meeting virtually on July 27-28 from 1 to 5 PM Eastern Time. Alliance officers will be elected, leaders in the fight to strengthen and expand retirement security will address the meeting, and leading Democratic pollster and strategist **Celinda Lake** will share her insights ahead of the 2022 midterm elections.

The National Meeting will also consider new Alliance resolutions which guide the Alliance's policy positions, and Alliance members will participate in two interactive workshops.

Please [click here to register](#) for the meeting. The registration deadline is **Monday, July 18, 2022**.

Big Pharma Spends \$150 Million Lobbying Against Lower Drug Prices

According to a report from corporate watchdog Accountable.US, the top five pharmaceutical firms and PhRMA [have spent at least \\$147 million](#) lobbying against prescription drug price reductions since the pandemic began in 2020, despite record profits. The report also found that major drug corporation CEOs have raked in over \$292.6 million in compensation during that period – a time when as many as 18 million Americans could not afford their needed medications.

Those top 5 companies as measured by stock value – Johnson & Johnson, Eli Lilly and Company, Pfizer, AbbVie and Merck & Co. – used their political power to torpedo legislative proposals such as H.R. 3, the **Elijah E. Cummings** Lower Drug Costs Now Act. Working together with the industry trade group PhRMA, these corporations and individuals are asking Congress to "abandon" efforts to allow Medicare to negotiate lower prices.

Accountable.US previously discovered that Republican members of the House Energy & Commerce Committee had accepted nearly \$1.7 million in contributions from top pharmaceutical firms and lobbyists opposed to Medicare price negotiations.

Now that Senate Democrats are closer to another agreement that will give Medicare the power to negotiate lower drug prices, big PhRMA is pushing even harder against reforms that will make prescriptions more affordable.

"PhRMA's combination of price gouging and controlling politicians with their purse strings has been a recipe for disaster," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "The longer

we go without giving Medicare price negotiating power, the longer we are allowing corporate greed to control the lives of our most vulnerable citizens.”

As PhRMA continues to lobby, Sen. **Joe Manchin** (WV) pumped the [brakes](#) this week on negotiations with Senate Majority Leader **Charles Schumer** (NY) on a budget reconciliation bill, saying he would only support a bill that includes provisions aimed at lowering the price of prescription drugs and a two-year extension of Affordable Care Act subsidies -- not new spending on climate change or new tax increases targeting wealthy individuals and corporations.

President Roach Addresses AFT Retirees in Massachusetts

Robert Roach, Jr., President of the Alliance, traveled to Boston on Tuesday and Wednesday this week to speak with retirees from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). His presentation included a description of the Alliance’s intergenerational work, including a partnership with the State University of New York (SUNY), AFT, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the Machinists (IAM) that provides pre-enrollment credits toward a college degree for high school students. The credits are for extra classes taken in a high school aviation program.

“We are working to educate young people and motivate them to be part of the labor movement,” President Roach said.

The retirees and President Roach also discussed the 2022 midterm elections, Social Security expansion and pensions.



Congress Must Improve Customer Service by Boosting the Budget for Social Security Administration

Public access to federal agencies seems to be waning by the day, and nowhere is this more evident than in the Social Security Administration (SSA), according to economist and retired federal employee **David Weaver**.

Weaver writes in [The Hill](#) that the understaffed and underfunded SSA offices designed to serve the elderly and disabled are burdening their constituents with long wait times, in part due to Congress’ \$1 billion cut to President **Biden’s** customer service budget request for SSA.

An increase in congressional funding would help prevent such problems as seniors and people with disabilities having to wait in long lines at SSA offices in the hot sun of Florida, New Mexico,



and Texas. An observer in Texas noted that she had personally witnessed a woman being wheeled over and loaded into an ambulance after fainting in line on a hot day.

One solution: using Congressional offices and their staff resources to address Congress's pattern of systematically underfunding federal agencies and then blaming those agencies when problems arise. Members of Congress usually have case workers on staff who have technical expertise on federal programs such as Social Security, and they can help resolve problems with federal agencies when other efforts fail.

“Members of the public would be wise to go directly to their elected officials when they are unable to access government services, including having questions about their Social Security benefits answered,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “Members of Congress should not be allowed to blame federal agencies like SSA when they caused the problem by defunding them in the first place.”

Obituary: Gerald McEntee, Longtime AFSCME President

Gerald McEntee, longtime president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the largest trade union of public employees in the United States, [passed away on July 10 at his home in Naples, Florida.](#)

McEntee led AFSCME for over 30 years, growing the organization from 900,000 to 1.4 million members during his tenure from 1981 to 2012. His fight for workers’ rights and public services spanned six decades.

Among his greatest achievements as AFSCME president was his development of a national political program that positioned the union as a powerful political force. His fight for progressive legislation extended to his leadership of the AFL-CIO political committee, where he played a critical role in pushing forward several major bills and advocating for civil rights. He was also a fierce defender of Social Security and was pivotal in the fight to stop the privatization of the program.

“Jerry was a transformative leader and a powerful advocate for workers and retirees,” said **President Roach**. “He was a major supporter of the Alliance and our work. We’re forever indebted to him for what he has done for labor.”