



FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Alliance for Retired Americans Hosts Fourth Annual Retirement Security Symposium

Government officials, labor movement leaders, policy experts, Social Security and pension advocates, academics, attorneys, and economists gathered to discuss retirement security and social insurance issues with hundreds of virtual and in-person participants Tuesday at the Alliance's symposium, *Preparing for Retirement, Individual and Collective Efforts*.

The focus of the day was actions individuals and policymakers should take to ensure a secure retirement for all. "Retirement security is under attack. In the corporate boardrooms around this country, they're contemplating how to eliminate pension plans," said Alliance **President Robert Roach, Jr.** "Individual effort leads to a concerted effort, which leads to success in combating those efforts."

AFL-CIO President **Liz Shuler** told the audience that Republicans in Congress continue to press for fiscal commissions seeking to cut Social Security, declaring, "We need to be clear, as we always have been, that Social Security is not the problem, it is a key solution to the retirement income crisis and it needs to be expanded. We need our young workers engaged in this fight, we need our retirees engaged in this fight, standing right next to each other, letting Americans all over the country know how this affects each of us, telling those stories, organizing."



AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer and Alliance Executive Vice President **Fred Redmond** thanked Alliance members for their important work in protecting and expanding retirement security through outreach to retirees and explained why every American is affected by retiree issues.

American Federation of Teachers President **Randi Weingarten** discussed the importance of implementing policies like the Inflation Reduction Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act, and negotiating lower prescription drug prices to help all American families, not just retirees. She also stressed the need to engage with union members and retirees to combat disinformation.

Rep. **John Larson** (CT), Ranking Member of the House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee, spoke about the need to protect and expand Social Security now. “How is it that if you’re living longer, you should live on less? That’s not what (President) **Roosevelt** intended and that’s not what President **Biden** intends, and that’s why he’s been so upfront and outspoken about Social Security,” Rep. Larson stated.

Alliance Executive Director Richard Fiesta discussed ways to strengthen and expand Social Security; **Gordon Hartogensis**, Director of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) spoke about the success of President Biden’s American Rescue Plan (ARP); and **Kevin Muse**, Supervisory Actuary with PBGC, spoke about the ARP’s Special Financial Assistance Program.

Anne Henderson, PBGC Senior Advisor; **Norman Jackson**, Deputy Director, U.S. Department of Labor (DOL’s), Philadelphia Regional Office; and **Timothy Rowe**, Senior Investigator, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington District Office, discussed the PBGC’s Missing Participants Program and DOL’s efforts to recover retirement funds beneficiaries did not know about or have lost track of.

Kenneth Stribling, President of the National United Committee to Protect Pensions (NUCPP) discussed the Butch Lewis Act legislation; **Tyler Bond**, Research Director for the National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS), gave a presentation describing the role of public pensions in reducing retirement inequality; **Shaun O’Brien**, AFSCME Policy Director, provided an update on public pensions; **Ilana Boivie**, Senior Economist with the Machinists Union (IAMAW), broke down both the pitfalls and the benefits of 401(k) plans; and **Calvin MacDowell**, Senior Associate with Retirees AFT, spoke about “Pre-Retirement Workshops: Recruiting the Next Wave of Retiree Activists.”

Video of the event and additional materials are available [here](#).

Appeals Court Rules in Favor of Arizona Alliance in 2022 Cochise County Election Case; Hand Counting Ballots Not Allowed in Arizona Elections

The Arizona State Court of Appeals [ruled](#) in favor of the Arizona Alliance Wednesday, deciding that the Cochise County supervisors and the county recorder had no authority under Arizona law to attempt to hand count all ballots cast in the 2022 general election. The case is *Arizona Alliance for Retired Americans v. Crosby*. Arizona Alliance members testified during the trial portion of the case.

The ruling from the three-judge panel upholds a decision from a Pima County Superior Court judge that was issued nearly a year ago, a day before the statewide election when the Cochise County Board of Supervisors voted to hand count early ballots despite state law requiring that

hand counts of early ballots only be conducted after two state audits of a random sample of ballots.

Ignoring warnings from state officials, the county prepared a full hand count audit of early ballots, prompting the Arizona Alliance to file a swift lawsuit, alleging that the early audit would sow confusion among voters and undermine confidence in Arizona's elections.

The court concluded the county got ahead of itself when it insisted it could move to a full hand count of all ballots after the election.

Wednesday's decision also freezes the [county's intent to hand count ballots in future elections](#), including next year's presidential race.

"Voters in Arizona and every state have the right to cast a ballot that will be counted in the most accurate way possible," said **Dora Vasquez**, Executive Director of the Arizona Alliance. "This ruling affirms the rule of law."

House Budget Committee Holds "Fiscal Commission" Hearing

On Thursday, the House Budget Committee held a full committee hearing entitled "Sounding the Alarm: Examining the Need for a Fiscal Commission."

Led by Republican Chairman **Jodey Arrington** (TX), the hearing primarily focused on why a fiscal debt commission is necessary. Republican witnesses, including former Democratic Senator **Kent Conrad** (ND), former Republican Senator **Rob Portman** (OH), and current Rep./former House Budget Chair Rep. **Steve Womack** (AR), spoke about the benefits of the provisions and ideas in previous fiscal commissions and why Congress needs to go that route again to avoid future budget rescissions, especially to Social Security and Medicare.

The lone Democratic witness, former Budget Committee Chair and Rep. **John Yarmuth** (KY), as well as the current Budget Committee Ranking Member, Rep. **Brendan Boyle** (PA), argued strongly that fiscal commissions are nothing more than sneaky, closed door schemes to make cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and other critical government programs.

"Because the commission would not take place via regular order and include hearings and recorded votes in both chambers, elected officials could support drastic reductions to the Social Security and Medicare programs without the knowledge of the American people," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "The Alliance strongly opposes any effort to erode the benefits Americans have earned over a lifetime."

"A 2014 poll from the National Academy of Social Insurance found that [83% of Americans](#) are specifically in favor of preserving Social Security benefits, even if that means increasing taxes on the wealthy," added Executive Director **Fiesta**.

ACTION NEEDED: Tell CMS that Nursing Homes Need More Staff to Keep Residents Safe

The health and safety of nursing homes residents is put at risk when there are not sufficient nurses and aides to meet their needs. Currently, the number of staff in 7 in 10 nursing homes' staffing levels is below the level experts have determined is necessary to prevent resident harm.

Earlier this year the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a proposed rule that would require an increase in the minimum staffing standards for long-term care facilities that participate in Medicare and Medicaid. The proposal faces strong opposition from the corporations that own and run nursing homes.

Additionally, the rule would benefit nursing home employees, who are terribly understaffed and overworked, since it serves as an important first step towards quality care and jobs. If approved, nursing homes would have to increase staffing in 75% of facilities. That means more than 90,000 new nurse and nurse assistant jobs nationwide.

Help the Alliance stand up for nursing home residents and the hard-working staff who need more support.

Tell CMS you support nursing home residents, and higher staffing levels are needed to ensure their health and safety. [Click here to send your message now!](#)

KFF Health News: Medicare Enrollees Can Switch Coverage Now. Here's What's New and What to Consider.
By Julie Appleby

Consumers know it's fall when stores start offering Halloween candy and flu shots — and airwaves and mailboxes are filled with advertisements for Medicare options.

It's [annual open enrollment](#) time again for the 65 million Americans covered by Medicare, the federal health program for older people and some people with disabilities.

From Oct. 15 to Dec. 7, enrollees in either the traditional program or Medicare Advantage plans, which are offered by private insurers, can change their coverage. (First-time enrollees generally sign up within a few months of their 65th birthday, whether that's during open enrollment season or not.)

There are a few new features for 2024, including a lower out-of-pocket cost limit for some patients taking expensive drugs.

No matter what, experts say, it's a good idea for beneficiaries to examine their current coverage because health and drug plans may have made changes — including to the pharmacies or medical providers in their networks and how much prescriptions cost.

Read more [here](#).