



FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Alliance Statement on New House Speaker Mike Johnson's "Debt Commission" Plan

Rep. **Mike Johnson** (R-Louisiana) was elected speaker of the U.S. House on Wednesday, winning the top job in a party-line vote and ending a standoff that had gone on for more than three weeks. The Alliance immediately issued a statement regarding both Johnson's record of voting against older Americans' best interests and his announcement that he plans to create a [bipartisan "debt commission."](#)

"House Speaker Mike Johnson isn't a household name yet, but he's made it clear that he has no intention of protecting seniors," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "He has taken dozens of votes that put the needs of drug corporations, Wall Street, and the wealthiest Americans ahead of older Americans."

"It's outrageous that Johnson announced plans to create a so-called 'debt commission' during his first speech as Speaker of the House," Fiesta added. "The commission, which would meet behind closed doors, is supposed to come up with schemes to cut the Social Security and Medicare benefits Americans worked a lifetime to earn."

Calling the plan for a Commission "undemocratic, dangerous, and cowardly," Fiesta said that if Speaker Johnson and his buddies want to come after Social Security, they should at least have the guts to do so in public.

Johnson earned a 0% pro-retiree score in the [Alliance's Congressional Voting Record](#) last year. His lifetime voting record score is a pathetic 5%.

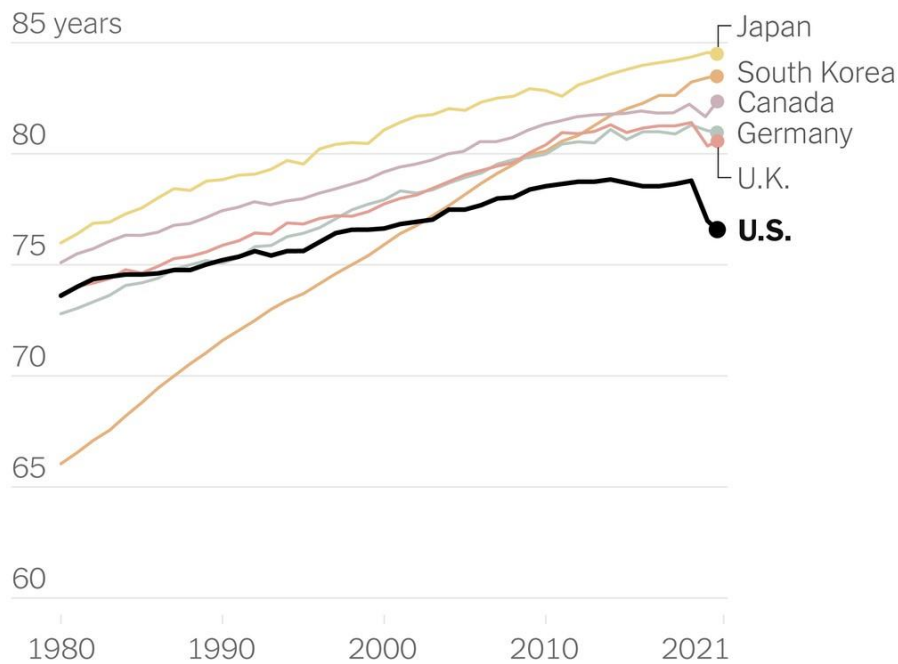
"Speaker Johnson earned those scores by voting AGAINST allowing Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices, FOR raising the retirement age, FOR privatizing Social Security and Medicare, and even AGAINST funding for Meals on Wheels," Fiesta concluded. "Speaker Johnson is already off to a horrific start. Seniors deserve better."

U.S. Life Expectancy Stagnates as Income Inequality Soars

Life expectancy in the U.S. [has sunk to 76.1 years](#) for Americans born in 2021, according to data from the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Just two years ago the average was 79. People living in Britain, France, Germany, South Korea, and Japan are all expected to outlive their counterparts in the United States.

Researchers attributed much of the decline to the high level of income inequality. American workers are finding it difficult to pay for health care, adequate housing and good schools, which results in a lower standard of living and longevity.

Life expectancy in select high-income countries



Source: World Bank, by *The New York Times*

Economic inequality is not a new issue in this country, which faced the same concerns in the 1920s and 1930s. During the Depression, activists utilized the tools of democracy to build a labor movement that could take on corporations and lessen the wage gap. Despite short term defeats from the U.S. Supreme Court, working Americans elected a pro-labor government, including President **Franklin D. Roosevelt**, who signed into law the New Deal — legislation that included improvements in working conditions and strengthened the labor movement.

An overhaul of the economic system in the 1980's under President **Ronald Reagan** brought lower taxes, less regulation, increasing income inequality and often worse living standards.

“Declining U.S. life expectancy should be a call to action. Workers who make a living wage and have good working conditions are more likely to live long and healthy lives,” said Alliance **President Robert Roach, Jr.** “A strong retiree and worker movement focused on improving living conditions for all Americans can make a difference today and tomorrow.”

Advocates Push for Caregiving Issues to Move to Forefront

More than [53 million Americans](#) provide unpaid care to parents, spouses, friends, and disabled children and a growing number of candidates are speaking about the need to address this crisis on the campaign trail. This includes **Sen. Bob Casey (PA)**, who is putting caregiver issues at the top of his list for his reelection campaign.

The demand from unpaid caregivers for assistance spiked during the pandemic, leading to Medicaid programs in some states allowing payments directly to caregivers and a Congress requiring many employers to provide paid leave. However, these policies have not fixed the lack of long-term care infrastructure in the United States, demonstrated by direct care worker shortages and rising costs.

President Biden pursued a caregiving agenda in 2020 that included paid leave for all workers but Congress so far has not acted on it. Unpaid caregivers who take care of family members would have received \$5,000 in tax and Social Security credits under Biden's plan.

Still, caregiver advocates are looking forward to the 2024 elections as an opportunity to push for an overhaul that includes 12 weeks of paid leave, caregiver tax credits, child care affordability policy, and an expansion of services to aid older Americans and people with disabilities in their homes.

"It is time for Congress to enact President Biden's caregiver agenda and improve long-term care work and infrastructure," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "We must support caregivers so seniors and people with disabilities get the high-quality care they need."

KFF Health News: Let's Have an Honest Conversation About What to Expect as You Age **By Judith Graham**

How many of us have wanted a reliable, evidence-based guide to aging that explains how our bodies and minds change as we grow older and how to adapt to those differences?

Creating a work of this kind is challenging. For one thing, aging gradually alters people over decades, a long period shaped by individuals' economic and social circumstances, their behaviors, their neighborhoods, and other factors. Also, while people experience common physiological issues in later life, they don't follow a well-charted, developmentally predetermined path.

"Predictable changes occur, but not necessarily at the same time or in the same sequence," said [Rosanne Leipzig](#), vice chair for education at the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. "There's no more heterogeneous a group than older people."

Read more [here](#).

California Alliance Celebrates 20 Years of Activism and Results for Retirees

Executive Director **Fiesta** traveled to Oakland this week for the California Alliance's (CARA's) 20th Anniversary Convention, speaking at a panel on the Senior Vote 2024. **Reps. Barbara Lee** and **Katie Porter** spoke live virtually, and Rep. **Adam Schiff** addressed the convention by video.

"It was great to see so many familiar faces and meet new California Alliance activists," Fiesta said after the event. "We need every one of them to fight for older Californians."



The Alliance for Retired Americans is a national grassroots advocacy organization with 4.4 million members fighting for retirement security for all Americans. www.retiredamericans.org @activeretirees