


FRIDAY ALERT

Alliance  Retired Americans

815 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006 | 202-637-5399 | www.retiredamericans.org

Headlines:

GOP Calls for Repeal of Affordable Care Act are Fading Fast

The Alliance Submits Statement on "Observation Status" to Congress

Sen. Bernie Sanders Introduces Proposal to Overhaul VA

2,000 Detroit Pensioners Will Revote After Receiving Inaccurate Bankruptcy Ballots

Reps. Cole, Delaney Propose Bipartisan Commission to Improve Social Security

Report Ranks Minnesota Healthiest State for Retirees

Here is your June 6 Friday Alert.

GOP Calls for Repeal of Affordable Care Act are Fading Fast

In a sign that the harshest opposition to the Affordable Care Act may be softening, GOP candidates across the country are dropping calls to repeal the health care reform law and are instead spending this year's election season talking about trying to "fix" it. Republican leaders in Washington who are still calling for repeal have yet to release their own comprehensive health reform proposal, and several Republican candidates have drawn criticism for failing to specify which portions of the Affordable Care Act they would seek to modify.

"With the Affordable Care Act, seniors are seeing expanded access to free preventive screenings, an end to insurance companies denying care due to pre-existing conditions, and the closing of the Part D prescription drug doughnut hole. The fact that voters won't accept critics of the law continuing to call for its repeal is an indication that the Affordable Care Act is working," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary Treasurer for the Alliance. For more, go to <http://nwp.org.at7ba855>.

The Alliance Submits Statement on "Observation Status" to Congress

On Tuesday, the Alliance submitted a statement for the record of a House Ways & Means Subcommittee on Health hearing entitled "Current Hospital Issues in the Medicare Program." The statement focuses on the widespread placement of seniors under an observation status designation during multi-day hospital stays. Increasingly, hospitals have been placing patients under observation status rather than admitting them as inpatients. This distinction is important, because an observation status label means seniors are considered outpatients during stays in the hospital. As a result, many seniors are spending multiple days in the hospital only to discover they are responsible for both higher copays and bills for routine medications unrelated to their stay.

The most dramatic consequences are often for seniors moving from hospitals to skilled nursing facilities. Since admission to these facilities requires a three day inpatient stay to be covered under Medicare, many seniors under observation status are released from the hospital only to discover that they have no coverage for post-acute care. These seniors often find themselves taking on thousands of dollars in unexpected bills or going without necessary skilled nursing facility care altogether.

One solution is for Congress to pass the bipartisan bill "Improving Access to Medicare Coverage Act of 2013," S.569 and H.R. 1179, introduced by Senators **Sherrod Brown** (D-OH) and **Susan Collins** (R-ME) and Reps. **Joe Courtney** (D-CT) and **Tom Latham** (R-IA).

"Passage of the bipartisan Improving Access to Medicare Coverage Act would count the time patients spend in the hospital under observation status towards the three-day stay requirement and provide seniors with the full Medicare benefits they have earned," said **Richard Fietsa**, Executive Director for the Alliance. Read the full Alliance statement at <http://bit.ly/1A4Zd2d>.

Sen. Bernie Sanders Introduces Proposal to Overhaul VA

In the wake of the recent scandal involving mismanaged care in VA hospitals, Senators **Bernie Sanders** (I-VT) and **John McCain** (R-AZ) have struck a deal on bipartisan legislation to reform the Department of Veterans Affairs. Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Sanders has introduced a bill, the Restoring Veterans' Trust Act, that would make a number of sweeping changes to the VA health program, such as implementing expedited hiring and firing authority for employees, opening 26 new facilities throughout the country, and making it easier for veterans to seek care outside the system when VA facilities unavailable. More at <http://www.foxnews.com>.

2,000 Detroit Pensioners Will Revote After Receiving Inaccurate Bankruptcy Ballots

When ballots detailing Detroit's proposal to restructure \$18 billion in debt were sent out to 67,000 retirees, beneficiaries, and creditors last month, an estimated 2,000 Detroit retirees and workers received ballots with inaccurate information. As a result, those current and former workers will now have to revote on the proposal. The error involved data about Detroit's plan to collect \$239 million that the General Retirement System paid into worker annuity accounts over a 10-year period. While most of the ballots were unaffected, it is expected that the error could further complicate what is already widely viewed as a confusing process for the workers and retirees covered by the city's general pension fund. Members of the bankrupt city's General Retirement System have to approve the debt reduction plan for the proposal to move forward. New ballots will be sent out to the 2000 affected current and former workers. For more details on the revote, go to <http://bit.ly/1A6dAa9>.

Reps. Cole, Delaney Propose Bipartisan Commission to Improve Social Security

Last week, Reps. **Tom Cole** (R-OK) and **John Delaney** (D-MD) introduced a bill that would create a new bipartisan commission to examine ways to improve Social Security. The bill calls for a 13-member commission that would be given one year to propose a list of recommendations for improving the program and increasing the solvency of the Social Security system. Currently, Social Security has sufficient funds to pay full benefits through 2033 and funds to pay about 75% of scheduled benefits through 2067.


"We must be vigilant whenever anyone talks about 'fixing' Social Security – and that is how *The Washington Post* refers to the goals of this commission," said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. "At a time when more and more Americans are struggling to save for retirement, any proposal to improve Social Security should focus on expanding the program to better meet the needs of current and future retirees." More at <http://nwp.org.at7ba855>.

Report Ranks Minnesota Healthiest State for Retirees

A United Health Foundation report looking at 34 different statistical measures ranked all 50 states based on the overall health and well-being of older Americans. The survey looked at various factors including obesity rates, access to care, and availability of quality nursing home beds. In the final tally, Minnesota topped the list while Mississippi came in last. Though Minnesota had average rates of obesity among older adults, it benefited from high proportions of able-bodied seniors, high rates of routine dental care, and high rates of activity during the brief Minnesota summers. For more on the study, go to <http://on.mpls.net/1nFgA206>.


For a printable version of this document, go to <http://bit.ly/1n7h6y6>.

For the Alliance's Spanish language page, which includes last week's Friday Alert in Spanish, go to www.alianzadeobolados.org



Find us on Facebook

Donate Now



Forward to a Friend

Alliance for Retired Americans

815 16th Street, NW Fourth Floor ~ Washington, DC 20006

202-637-5399 (main)

www.allianceforretired.org

Copyright 2014, All rights reserved.

[Click here to unsubscribe](#)