

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## **New Hampshire Alliance Members Greet Sen. McCain with Protests...**

On the eve of Senator **John McCain's** Tuesday visit to Exeter, New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Alliance for Retired Americans united outside the Concord Legislative Office Building to protest his plan for Social Security privatization. Local seniors urged McCain and his Senate colleagues **John Sununu** and **Judd Gregg** to keep their “hands off my Social Security.” Participants in the event included **John Mendolusky**, President of the New Hampshire Alliance for Retired Americans, several state legislators, and members of the groups New Hampshire Citizens Alliance for Action, Working Families Win, and Americans United for Change. In an interview appearing in the March 3 edition on *The Wall Street Journal*, Sen. McCain said, “As part of Social Security reform, I believe that private savings accounts are a part of it -- along the lines that **President Bush** proposed.” The proposal that Sen. McCain favors is the same George W. Bush privatization plan rejected by the American people in 2005 for jeopardizing the economic security of current and future retirees and ravaging guaranteed benefits for seniors and the disabled. Pictures from a second Alliance event, last week’s Arizona Social Security protest, are available at [www.retiredamericans.org/ht/d/Gallery/pid/335](http://www.retiredamericans.org/ht/d/Gallery/pid/335).

## **...As the U.S. Senate Rejects Social Security Privatization Again**

On Thursday night, the U.S. Senate voted 57-41 to reject an amendment to the FY 2009 Budget put forward by Sen. **Jim DeMint** (R-SC) that would have funneled surplus Social Security funds into risky private accounts rather than keeping them in the Social Security trust fund. Sen. McCain did not vote. “Sen. DeMint tried and failed for the third year in a row to privatize Social Security,” said **Edward Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Three strikes and you should be out, but I’m sure he’ll keep trying.” Complete results of the Senate vote are available at [http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll\\_call\\_lists/roll\\_call\\_vote\\_cfm.cfm?congress=110&session=2&vote=00065](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=110&session=2&vote=00065).

## **IRS to Mail out Information Assisting Seniors with Their Stimulus Rebates**

Starting next week, information packets will be mailed out to recipients of Social Security or Veterans Affairs benefits to help them in filing for their 2008 stimulus payments, the Internal Revenue Service announced on Monday. According to Reuters, the 10-page tax package -- specially designed for people who may qualify for an economic stimulus payment but who normally do not file tax returns -- will contain everything seniors will need to file a 2007 tax form immediately. Under the recently enacted economic stimulus plan, individuals may be eligible for the minimum payment of \$300 and \$600 for married couples, even if they do not normally file a tax return. To qualify for the minimum economic payment, individuals or couples must have at least \$3,000 in any qualifying government income from retirement, disability or survivors' benefits. “Seniors need to pay close attention so they don’t lose out on their rebate,” said **Ruben**

**Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. Facts about the stimulus bill are also available on the Alliance website at <http://www.retiredamericans.org/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/6066>.

### **Hospitals Turn the Tables on Insurance Companies, Offer “Favorability” Ratings**

Hospitals are hitting back at some of the country’s biggest health insurance companies, who have recently started rating facilities and providing the results to beneficiaries for use in deciding where to seek treatment. The *Los Angeles Times* reports that a group of medical centers has commissioned a survey of 113 executives from more than 500 hospitals, approximately 10% of all hospitals in America, to “help consumers shop for coverage.” The results of interviews designed to measure relationships between health care centers and insurers found that three of the five largest insurance companies in the nation had approval ratings that were more negative than positive. UnitedHealth Group Inc. received the worst score, attaining an “unfavorable” opinion from 91% of respondents, and “favorable” marks from only 8% of executives. WellPoint Inc. and Cigna were the other two corporations receiving the poorest ratings. “This survey confirms some of what we have always suspected about some of this country’s biggest insurance companies – that dealing with them is increasingly difficult and complex, and that they do not have the patients’ best interests in mind,” said **George J. Kourpias**, President of the Alliance.

### **Social Security Changes Mean More Seniors Are Delaying Retirement**

A study published in February by the Social Security Administration found that Americans are postponing their retirement dates due to an increase in Social Security’s full benefits retirement age (FRA). The moving FRA has created a shift in the large number of retirements that generally occur when workers may begin receiving their full Social Security benefits. Eighteen percent of men and 12% of women born in 1937 claimed payments at age 65, when they were able to collect full retirement checks. But for Americans born in 1940, the peak retirement age moved to age 65 and 6 months. In addition to raising the age to become eligible for full Social Security benefits, the change resulted in a greater benefits decrease for retirees who begin collecting at age 62. The study concluded that as a result, people who might otherwise have retired early were more likely to delay taking Social Security until their FRA, to avoid a reduction in benefits.

### **Regional Conferences Less Than Two Weeks Away**

U.S. Rep. **Shelley Berkley** (NV-01) will address Alliance members from across the west at the national Alliance’s first regional conference of 2008, March 24-26 in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Western Regional Conference will provide a forum for activists to work together and prepare for November’s Presidential election while learning how to increase grassroots advocacy. Locations and dates for later conferences are: Northeastern Regional Conference, April 17-18, 2008 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Midwestern Regional Conference, April 28-29, 2008 in St. Louis, Missouri; and Southern Regional Conference, June 4-5, 2008 in Orlando, Florida. For copies of the official registration form for any of the four regional conferences, call 1-888-373-6497, email **Joni Jones** at [jjones@retiredamericans.org](mailto:jjones@retiredamericans.org), or visit our website at [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org).

EDITOR’S NOTE: THE NEXT *FRIDAY ALERT* WILL BE PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2008.