

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Western Regional Meeting is Pronounced a Success!

Monday through Wednesday of this week, the Alliance held its Western Regional Meeting - the first of four regional meetings in 2008 - in Las Vegas, Nevada. Speakers included U.S. Rep. **Shelley Berkley** of Nevada, who represents Las Vegas; **Scott Watts**, President of the Nevada Alliance; **Danny Thompson**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Nevada AFL-CIO; **Edward Coyle**, Executive Director of the national Alliance; and **Richard Fiesta**, Director of the Department of Government and Political Affairs for the national Alliance. Alliance members had a chance to voice their own opinions throughout the conference and in smaller breakout sessions. Executive Vice President **Judy Cato** of the national Alliance spoke about community-based issues, and national Alliance President **George J. Kourpias** addressed pensions, health care, long term care, housing, energy costs, and the national debt in his remarks. He then swore in the following newly-elected regional board members to the Alliance Executive Board for their respective sub-regions: **Bill Holayter** of Washington State (Subregion 1); **Luis Duran** of California (Subregion 2); **Frank Lay** of Colorado (Subregion 3); and **Jo Etta Brown** of Nevada (At-Large). Locations and dates for later conferences are: Northeastern Regional Conference, April 17-18, 2008, Philadelphia, PA; Midwestern Regional Conference, April 28-29, 2008, St. Louis, MO; and Southern Regional Conference, June 4-5, 2008, Orlando, FL. For copies of the official registration forms, call 1-888-373-6497, email **Joni Jones** at jjones@retiredamericans.org, or visit www.retiredamericans.org.

Health Care Survey Shows Seniors Struggling to Pay for Prescription Drugs

Medicare Part D is not protecting seniors from unaffordable prescription drug prices, according to the results of the AFL-CIO's 2008 Health Care for America Survey. More than 26,000 people, including over 1,600 Alliance members, responded to the survey over a seven-week period in January and February. Compared to 46% overall, 53% of Medicare beneficiaries who responded said prescription drugs are either not affordable or not covered, reflecting the inability of the privately administered Part D drug benefit to negotiate with big drug companies for lower prices and the dangers of the "donut hole" period when prescriptions are not covered. 38% of Medicare recipients also reported specialists as either not covered or not affordable, while 37% placed tests, preventative care and checkups in this category. One third of all respondents went without medical care due to cost, one quarter described "serious problems" paying for care and 79% called health care a top voting issue. "Thank you to every Alliance member who participated in this survey," said **George J. Kourpias**, President of the Alliance. "Your responses prove that seniors have had enough, and that we will be making a change in November."

Trustee's Report Shows Medicare and Social Security Sustainability

The Medicare and Social Security Trustees' reports issued Tuesday confirmed that the programs do not face an immediate crisis, while highlighting America's growing health care problems. The

Social Security surplus is expected to continue for more than three decades, with the trust fund not set to expire until 2041. Medicare's trust fund will be insolvent by 2019, due largely to continually rising health care costs. Both dates are unchanged from last year's account "Reports of Medicare's death have been greatly exaggerated," said Rep. **Pete Stark** (D-CA), chairman of the House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee. "Though the trigger has been pulled by Republican ideologues, this year's trustees report shows that Medicare remains solvent and sustainable." The Bush Administration has used the report to renew efforts to privatize both programs. Under Medicare's 45% trigger law, the President must reduce Medicare spending when the program is expected to be more than 45% funded by general government revenue for more than two years – Tuesday's was the third such consecutive warning. "The President is using this artificial measure to ignore America's real health care crisis and protect big insurance company programs that have already stolen years from Medicare's solvency," said **Edward Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance.

Dates for Mailing Stimulus Rebate Checks Announced

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has listed the dates for mailing out stimulus payment checks, which will be issued according to the last two digits of the main tax filer's Social Security number. Recipients who use direct deposit will be among the first to receive the payments, starting on May 2. Paper checks will be put in the mail starting on May 16. The IRS is scheduled to mail checks by July 11 to all eligible taxpayers who have filed a return by the April 15 deadline. Those who file a tax return after April 15 will receive their economic stimulus payment later. A return must be filed by October 15 in order to receive a stimulus payment this year. See the IRS [online calculator](#) for an estimate of the amount you will receive. For the complete schedule of payments by Social Security number, visit <http://www.irs.gov/irs/article/0,,id=180250,00.html>.

State Alliance News From Florida and MD/DC

Last week, the Florida Alliance for Retired Americans held its 2008 Legislative Conference, where a panel of elected officials and community activists addressed issues including affordable housing, healthcare, nursing homes and the upcoming Presidential election. Speakers included State Reps. **Shelly Vana** (Dist. 85) and **Susan Bucher** (Dist. 88); **Lynn Bannister**, U.S. Senator **Bill Nelson**'s Director of Outreach; **Richard Polangin**, FLARA's Government Affairs Director; and **Sarah Byrne**, Legislative Representative for the national Alliance. Members also participated in a press conference, organized by FLARA President **Tony Fransetta**, to draw legislative attention to senior housing and call for self-sufficiency and affordable housing for older Floridians. Also last week, MD/DC Alliance President **Bruce Dunton** testified before Maryland's House Ways and Means Committee. He urged legislators to support HB 79, an income tax exemption that would provide an extra \$2,200 for many seniors on fixed incomes. "Our expenses are rising and our incomes are not. We just got hit with a huge electricity increase. Many of us are in the Medicare Part D donut hole, so pay more for our prescription drugs," Dunton testified. "The extra \$2,200.00 could go a long way to help us meet ends."

Did You Know...

Fewer Americans are counting on Social Security to retire - 60% now planning retirement expect it to be a primary income source, down from 65% in 2007. (*The Wall Street Journal*).