

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Medicare Changes May Address Doctor Payments, Nursing Home Deficiencies

On Wednesday, the U.S. Senate Finance Committee met to discuss upcoming Medicare legislation, including tighter rules for Medicare Advantage plans. The Committee Chairman, **Sen. Max Baucus** (D-MT), later said that the committee had found some areas of agreement surrounding physician payments and “stopping unscrupulous marketing of plans to Medicare beneficiaries.” However, he stated that the committee was unlikely to reach an agreement soon that would improve preventive care, increase access to the prescription drug benefit, and settle other areas of controversy. He added that he expected legislation increasing doctor payments to move directly to the Senate floor in early June. Senators **Charles Grassley** (R-IA) and **Herb Kohl** (D-WI) are pushing to have their nursing home bill included in the package of changes. They have introduced a bill to upgrade nursing home care and increase the penalties for violations of federal standards, including higher fines for violations resulting in a patient’s death. Under the bill, nursing homes would increase transparency by providing consumers and the government with more information about their owners and any individual or company that has a role in managing their operations. Department of Health and Human Services officials have been frustrated in identifying some of the owners of nursing homes that are providing substandard care. “We want a bill that cuts Medicare Advantage subsidies to insurance companies and upgrades nursing home care,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

Alliance Wishes Sen. Kennedy a Full and Speedy Recovery

The Alliance expressed its best wishes to **Sen. Ted Kennedy** (D-MA), who has been diagnosed with a brain tumor, in a press release this week. “On behalf of the 3.5 million members of the Alliance for Retired Americans, I want to extend our thoughts and prayers to Senator Edward M. Kennedy and his family during this difficult time. We all join together in wishing him a full and speedy recovery,” said Alliance President **George J. Kourpias**. “Older Americans have no greater friend than Senator Kennedy. His lifetime of public service has preserved, and often strengthened, retirement security in America,” Mr. Kourpias continued.

Health Insurance Benefit Available to Alliance Members

Please remember that affordable insurance to supplement Medicare is available to Alliance members through the ARA Retiree Health Plan. The Retiree Health Plan Annual Open Enrollment period is underway now through June 30, 2008! During this period, Medicare-eligible retirees and their spouses are guaranteed acceptance **with no waiting periods regardless of pre-existing health conditions**. Visit www.araretireehealth.com for further details or call **1-866-298-9117** to receive your Free Retiree Health Information Kit and your open enrollment application. No agent will call you - everything is handled through the mail.

Many Eligible Low-Income Seniors Not Applying for Part D Subsidy

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the Congressional Budget Office have estimated, respectively, that about 2.6 million to over 4 million individuals who may qualify for the Medicare prescription drug low-income subsidy are not receiving it. Various barriers, such as reluctance to disclose personal financial information or lack of knowledge of the subsidy, may prevent potentially eligible Medicare beneficiaries from applying for the subsidy. To view the highlights of the report, go to <http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d08812high.pdf>.

Alliance Activities Around the Country

This past Wednesday, in St. Louis, Alliance President **Kourpias** addressed the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) retiree conference as part of CBTU's 37th International Convention. Last week, the Indiana Alliance held its state convention, where Indiana Alliance President **Elmer Blankenship** brought special attention to those who have been dropped from the recently privatized Food Stamp program. **Richard Fiesta**, the national Alliance's Director of Government and Political affairs, spoke about upcoming Medicare and other senior issues coming up in Congress. Also last week, the Florida Alliance's Central Florida-area Vice President **Donesa Jackson** participated in a Central Labor Council educational forum for 75 - 100 elected and future political leaders in Orlando. Ms. Jackson explained in detail issues including Social Security privatization, healthcare, senior housing, and alternative energy resources.

Next Week is Older Americans' Mental Health Week

The Alliance is a national partner in the observance of older Americans' mental health week, May 25-31, 2008. Led by the Older Women's League, the voice of midlife and older women, the week is an annual opportunity to spread the message that mental illness is not a normal part of aging. Public awareness increases a community's understanding of mental illness and reduces the stigma that keeps many older Americans from seeking help. One in four American adults have a diagnosable mental illness, but less than one-quarter of older adults with mental illness get any type of mental health attention. "Mental illnesses are common and treatable," said **Edward Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "The more people know, the more they can help seniors who are suffering." To learn more, visit <http://www.mentalhealthweek.org/Welcome.html>.

Southern Regional Meeting, Florida Alliance Convention Fast Approaching

The Alliance will hold its last regional meeting, the Southern Regional Meeting, on June 4-5, 2008 in Orlando, Florida. The meeting will provide a forum for activists to work together and prepare for November's Presidential election. Please call **Joni Jones** at 1-888-373-6497 or e-mail jjones@retiredamericans.org for details. The Florida Alliance's Annual Convention and Quarterly Executive Board meeting on June 2-3, 2008, also in Orlando, precedes the Regional Meeting.

Did You Know...

According to a report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of people in the labor force ages 65 and older is expected to increase by nearly 74% by 2015 (*USA Today*).