

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## **Administration Threatens to Veto Medicare Bill That Does Not Protect Insurers**

According to the Associated Press, the Bush administration is threatening to veto any legislation that protects doctors' Medicare payments at the expense of private insurers. Beginning on July 1, reimbursement rates for doctors will drop 10.6% when they treat older and disabled patients participating in Medicare. To keep that from happening, lawmakers are looking at finding at least \$9 billion in savings from other Medicare programs over the next five years. Medicare Advantage private insurers are at the top of the list for Democrats and some Republicans to cut, since they receive generous government subsidies to serve their 9.5 million beneficiaries. The veto threat came in a May 22 letter to Sen. **Charles Grassley** (R-IA) that was circulated Thursday on Capitol Hill. Sen. **Max Baucus** (D-MT) is overseeing the crafting of Medicare legislation on the Senate side. His spokeswoman noted that while the senator was aware of the administration's concerns, the government pays about 13% more for patients in Medicare Advantage than for comparable patients in traditional Medicare. "The Bush Administration is putting the interests of private insurers before those of seniors," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "Medicare beneficiaries need the doctor payment issue to be resolved quickly, and veto threats that protect corporate interests don't move the ball forward."

## **GOP Senate Candidates May Have a Hard Time in November**

According to [www.rasmussenreports.com](http://www.rasmussenreports.com) and a column by former **Bill Clinton** pollster **Dick Morris** in the publication *The Hill*, Republican candidates may be facing "obliteration" in the 2008 general elections for the U.S. Senate. Polling suggests that a massacre even greater than the worst of previous GOP years, 1958, 1964, 1974, 1986 and 2006, is possible. Of the open Republican Senate seats, Democratic victory seems very likely in Virginia, where Democratic former Gov. **Mark Warner** now has 55% of the vote, while fellow former Republican Gov. **Jim Gilmore** stands at 37%, and New Mexico, where Democratic Rep. **Tom Udall** takes 53% to GOP Rep. **Steve Pearce's** 37%, and 57% to Republican Rep. **Heather Wilson's** 36%. In Colorado, Democratic Rep. **Mark Udall** has a narrow lead over Republican **Bob Schaffer** (45-42%). In addition, three GOP senators trail their Democratic challengers: Alaska's **Ted Stevens** is behind **Mark Begich**, 47-45%. **Elizabeth Dole** trails **Kay Hagan** in North Carolina, 48-47%. And **Jeanne Shaheen** is well ahead of **John Sununu** in New Hampshire, 51-43%. Overall, Morris sees a likely Democratic pickup of five seats, with an eight-seat gain possible, and, in a partisan wipeout, a 12-seat shift. Driving the GOP's "imperiled Senate situation" are President **George Bush's** 28% approval rating and a massive shift in party identification.

## **State Alliances Rally Around Medicare and Social Security**

State Alliances participated in a number of events this week to call attention to the particular importance of Medicare and Social Security for seniors in a poor economy. On Tuesday, members

of the Arizona Alliance for Retired Americans protested the privatization of Social Security outside the Phoenix Convention Center, causing a **John McCain** fundraiser originally scheduled to be held at the site to be moved to a private home nearby. Alliance members took similar action on Wednesday in Nevada and Thursday in Wisconsin, around the same time Senator McCain held events. Also in Wisconsin, state Alliance members joined a coalition of organizations on a conference call with media on Wednesday to discuss hardships caused by the ailing economy.

### **Iowa and Nevada Alliance Events Educate Fellow Seniors**

Members of the Iowa Alliance for Retired Americans delivered their 2007 Congressional Report Card to Rep. **David Loebsack's** Cedar Rapids office on Wednesday, and they are delivering one to Rep. **Leonard Boswell's** Des Moines office on Friday (today). The first report card gave Rep. Loebsack an "A+" for a 100% pro-retiree voting record during the 2007 Congressional session. "On issues of importance to retirees and seniors, Congressman Loebsack had a perfect freshman year," said Alliance Board Member and Cedar Rapids resident **Joyce Hermanstorfer**. Added Iowa Alliance Founding Committee member and Des Moines resident **Don Brown**, "As part of the new Congress, Boswell voted to improve health care, reduce Medicare drug prices, and end taxpayer overpayments to private insurance companies who operate Medicare Advantage programs. He also voted to stop oil price gouging and abusive mortgage practices." Members of the Iowa Alliance will deliver 2007 report cards to other members of Iowa's Congressional delegation in the next few days. Earlier in May, marking Older Americans Month, the national Alliance released the 2007 voting record of every U.S. Senator and Representative on key issues affecting current and future retirees. The document is available at [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org).

Last Friday, the Nevada Alliance educated retirees at the Senior Spectrum Senior Fest in Reno. Hundreds of people – including some caught in the Medicare Part D "doughnut hole" - stopped by the Alliance booth to ask questions about such senior issues as assisted living and health insurance. Nevada Alliance Vice Presidents **Bill Birkmann** and **Sam Lumpe**, as well as Nevada Alliance Sergeant at Arms **George Nelson**, participated in the five-hour event.

### **Southern Regional Meeting is Next Week**

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 to work with other activists in the region to learn how to increase grassroots advocacy and get seniors and retirees registered and voting. Please call **Joni Jones** at 1-888-373-6497 or e-mail [jjones@retiredamericans.org](mailto: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 the American Medical Association, MedPAC, Congress' advisory commission on Medicare, found that 30 percent of Medicare patients seeking a new primary care physician have trouble finding one (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*).