

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Senate to Vote Again on H.R. 6331, Medicare Bill That Fell Short by One Vote

After opponents of H.R. 6331, the ‘Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008,’ were able to prevent the measure from coming up for a vote last week, the **Bush** administration moved on Monday to assure doctors that coming cuts in Medicare reimbursements would not kick in for a few days. Many Republicans oppose the bill because it would take away subsidies from Medicare Advantage private insurance plans. According to the publication *Politico*, the vote has Sen. **Arlen Specter** (R-PA) “scrambling to explain himself,” and GOP aides wondering why their party’s leadership has risked infuriating formerly loyal doctors. The measure would have passed if Sen. Specter, who had supported a similar bill earlier, had not voted against it after some “eleventh-hour dealing with the White House.” All sides say they want to forestall the physician pay cut. But paying for the fix has grown into a larger ideological battle over the direction of Medicare and how best to both rein in the costs of medical equipment and drugs and balance demands for private market alternatives to traditional government-run care for older Americans, according to *Politico*. In an attempt to “calm the waters,” the Bush administration announced Monday that Medicare will not be processing claims in the first half of July, in order to avoid having to factor in the 10.6% pay cut before Senate Majority Leader **Harry Reid** (D-NV) forces another vote when the Senate returns from recess on July 7. However, that hold will create a backlog in Medicare’s claims processing. “There is an awful lot of pressure on Sen. Specter and other Senators to do the right thing, look out for the best interests of retirees, and vote for H.R. 6331,” said **George J. Kourpias**, President of the Alliance. “Thank you to all the Pennsylvania Alliance members who e-mailed Senator Specter and advised him to reconsider when he has a chance to vote again.”

IRS Still Reaching Out to Millions of Potential Stimulus Check Recipients

The Internal Revenue Service has issued over 76 million checks together worth \$63.8 billion to Americans eligible for economic stimulus payments; however, the delivery of payments to retirees and disabled veterans remains incomplete. To issue a payment, the IRS needs to have a person’s 2007 income tax return. There are 20 million retirees and disabled veterans who do not normally file tax returns because their benefits are not taxable. The IRS has successfully contacted 74% of this elusive group, but 5.2 million retirees and disabled veterans have yet to send in the necessary information to the IRS. Later this summer, the IRS will send out a special letter containing information on stimulus payment eligibility and how to claim it, a sample tax form, and a real tax form that can be filled out and mailed back to the IRS. People who would not normally file a tax return should file Form 1040A. Recipients must have \$3,000 in qualifying income, which includes certain types of Social Security and Veteran Affairs benefits. “It is not too late to file your 2007 income taxes and get a stimulus check,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “October 15 is the absolute cut-off for filing.”

Ohio Alliance Member Speaks at “Bush Legacy Tour” Event

Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans Zone Coordinator **Dan Fonte** spoke at an Americans United for Change (AUFC) “Bush Legacy Tour” event in Canton, Ohio, on Monday. The tour consists of a biodiesel-powered bus with an interior full of interactive exhibits on Bush administration policy failures, such as its response to Hurricane Katrina and economic policies that favor the wealthy. At the event in Canton, Mr. Fonte discussed the toll that the Bush agenda has taken on workers and retirees. After asking whether the crowd was better off than it was eight years ago, Mr. Fonte answered his own question. “Let’s see: higher gas prices, higher food prices, higher home heating prices, higher electricity bills, more debt, record home foreclosures, school systems in trouble, and health care we can’t afford.” The cross-country tour will make 150 stops in 41 states.

Connecticut Re-Establishes Department of Aging

On Wednesday, July 9th, Connecticut Governor **M. Jodi Rell** and State Senator **Edith Prague** (D-S19) will hold a press conference announcing the re-establishment of an independent Connecticut Department on Aging as of July 1st, 2009. The state has not had such an agency since 1993, when it was absorbed into the Department of Social Services as the Elderly Services Division. Sen. Prague, who spearheaded the agency’s development as Vice Chair of the Select Committee on Aging, served as a Commissioner of that department prior to its move. The Connecticut Alliance for Retired Americans has long advocated for the creation of a separate aging agency, and has been invited by Senator Prague to attend this announcement. For more information, please contact Connecticut President **Kevin Lynch**, at (860) 523-8206 or kmblynch@sbcglobal.net.

Florida Alliance Goes to Court to Defend Free Speech

A hearing was held on June 25 in Miami to try to reach a settlement over a lawsuit between several Florida municipalities and the AFL-CIO, the Florida Alliance (FLARA), and several individuals who were harmed by police actions during a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) demonstration in 2003. A settlement was reached with the municipalities of Haileah, Miami-Dade, and Fort Lauderdale. However, FLARA President **Tony Fransetta** facilitated agreement among the co-plaintiffs that the offers from other municipalities were unacceptable, and the group will proceed to trial against others who harmed them.

Note to Political Convention Delegates

Are you a delegate to the national Democratic political convention in Denver or the Republican political convention in Minneapolis – St. Paul? The Alliance is keeping track of our members who will be in attendance for inclusion in related Alliance events. Please let us know you will be there by e-mailing arafridayalert@retiredamericans.org.

HAVE A HAPPY, SAFE FOURTH OF JULY HOLIDAY. THE NEXT *FRIDAY ALERT* WILL BE PUBLISHED ON JULY 11, 2008.