

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## **As SCHIP Funding Deadline Nears, Obstructionists Still Standing Together**

The Senate on Thursday held its latest vote on the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and the outcome was similar to past roll calls. The Senate voted to pass H.R. 3963, 64-30, and President Bush immediately vowed another veto. To see how your Senator voted, click [here](#). H.R. 3963 passed the House last week, but supporters were shy of the two-thirds majority needed to override Bush's threatened veto. "In a situation of unusual political complexity, Republicans dictated the decision to pass the legislation speedily. It appeared their goal was to short-circuit attempts by supporters of the bill to reach a compromise that could attract enough votes in the House to override Bush's veto," the *Associated Press* reported. Funding for SCHIP would expire on November 15 unless Congress and the President act to extend the program. Two Senators at the forefront of the battle, **Max Baucus** (D-MT) and **Charles Grassley** (R-IA), have been meeting with a handful of House Republicans to thrash out a possible compromise. Sen. Baucus, Chairman of the Finance Committee, later said the group reached "an agreement in concept," on some issues, and is close to a deal. Democratic aides said they fear aides to Minority Leader **John Boehner** (R-OH) and Minority Whip **Roy Blunt** (R-MO) have pushed their way into talks on the children's health bill to block a deal with wavering Republicans, not seal one.

## **Administration Appeals Ruling on Release of Medicare Data for Doctors**

The Bush administration has appealed a federal judge's ruling favoring Consumers' Checkbook, a non-profit organization suing for detailed Medicare claims data to be released for use in rating individual doctors. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the information is found in claims paid by Medicare, and includes data on types of procedure performed, year, diagnosis, and the doctor identification number. Consumers' Checkbook intends to use the information to produce a website to help patients make informed decisions about choosing a physician, such as researching how many times a doctor has performed a procedure or how closely treatment recommendations are followed. "Retirees need and demand all the facts possible," said **George J. Kourpias**, President of the Alliance. "Why does the Administration feel the need to hide this information?"

## **GAO Report Recommends More Seniors be Included in Clinical Drug Trials**

A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, released recently by House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman **Henry Waxman** (D-CA) and Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chairman **Edward Kennedy** (D-MA), sheds light on the issue of seniors not being included in new drug studies. Those 65 and older use drugs at a higher rate than younger people, in part because seniors experience higher rates of certain diseases - such as cancer, Parkinson's disease, and heart disorders. Older people are also more likely than younger adults to experience complications when taking some prescription drugs. As a result, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has noted that it is important that drugs be studied for use by older people during the clinical drug trials - that is, those drug studies conducted by drug sponsors before they

submit an application to have a drug approved for marketing. Failing to include sufficient numbers of seniors in clinical drug trials may make it less likely that safety concerns and effectiveness outcomes unique to older people will be detected during the clinical drug trials. The GAO report suggests that, when necessary, exclusion criteria focus on more relevant issues, such as either the presence of an illness that could make participation in the clinical drug trial dangerous or the person's inability to provide informed consent, rather than on age alone. FDA officials said that the agency expects their medical officers to assess the safety and effectiveness of a drug for older people when they review data; however, these expectations are not currently conveyed in agency guidance.

### **Health Care Industry Giving to Democrats More Than Republicans**

Unlike in previous Presidential elections, Democrats are raising far more money in health care industry campaign contributions than Republicans. According to a recent article in *The New York Times*, Democratic presidential candidates have received approximately \$6.5 million from doctors, drug makers, hospitals and insurers, while Republicans have collected about \$4.8 million. The difference in giving occurred despite several candidates proposing significant changes to the country's health care system. Experts see the contributions as a "defensive measure," as the industry tries to ensure that their concerns about reform are heard. With health care considered a priority issue for voters, Democrats have offered plans to reduce prescription drug prices and insurance premiums, control overall health costs and expand medical coverage. The number of contributions has increased as such ideas have been given more attention by both the candidates and the media. "This change in giving by the health care industry demonstrates, in part, the Democratic presidential candidates' strong showing in polls," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

### **Grandparents Continue to be Important Voice for Other Generations**

Grandparents continue to help other generations and act as an important voice for children, as two national organizations have partnered to promote "family-friendly child welfare policy" and keeping families together. The National Committee of Grandparents for Children's Rights (NCGCR) and the National Association of Former Foster Care Children of America, Inc. are collaborating to advocate for policies that focus on placing kids in homes of relatives and nurturing stronger family ties through visitation in child welfare cases where there is an absence of parental support. **Brigitte Castellano**, Executive Director of the NCGCR and an Alliance community-based board member, said, "It is an association where our focus is the same – supporting the needs of children who lack parental support."

#### **Did You Know...**

Americans over age 55 make up the fastest-growing segment of health-club members. There were 8.5 million in 2006, up from 1.5 million about 20 years ago, according to the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association (*Wall Street Journal*).