

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Latest Information on Premiums Can Help Seniors Choose Their Drug Plan

A new report has just been released by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) on the rising cost of prescription drug plans under Medicare Part D. CEPR's report includes a state-by-state breakdown on the changes in the average Medicare Prescription Drug Plan premium and deductible from 2007 to 2008. Nationally, the average premium rose by 24.5 percent, or \$57.70. Premiums increased the most in New Jersey, California, Connecticut, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont. The full report is available at www.cepr.net/content/view/1370/8/. "This information comes at a crucial time, while seniors are choosing plans for next year," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

Medicare Advantage Overpayments Stand in the Way of Other Medicare Funding

The Senate Finance Committee is tentatively scheduled to mark up a Medicare package next Wednesday. According to *Congress Daily*, the Congressional Budget Office is evaluating many proposals, some involving changes to the private Medicare Advantage program. Several Republican panel members, including Finance ranking member **Charles Grassley** (R-IA), oppose Medicare Advantage cuts. Meanwhile, House members who wrote a broad set of Medicare changes as part of the State Children's Health Insurance Program bill are waiting to see if any of those provisions make it into the Senate Medicare bill. House provisions most likely to make it into the Senate package include low-income subsidy expansions under Medicare Parts B and D as well as other changes to Part D. Other provisions from the House bill that advocates hope will be folded into the Senate package involve mental health parity for seniors, medical screenings and Medicaid payments for adult daycare facilities. "I hope the House provisions make it into the Senate bill, but that is not a given," said **Edward Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance.

Western Regional Conference to be National Alliance's First of 2008

The Alliance for Retired Americans invites Western Region members to attend its Western Regional Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, March 24-26, 2008. The meetings will provide a forum to work with other activists in the region to learn how to increase grassroots advocacy, get seniors and retirees registered and voting, and educate federal, state and local legislators on the issues that concern retirees and seniors, including prescription drugs, Medicare, Social Security and retirement security. Join us to set the course for the Alliance and for a country that cares about workers, retirees and their families. Details for the other Regional Conferences are as follows: Northeastern Regional Conference, April 17-18, 2008 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Midwestern Regional Conference, April 28-29, 2008 in St. Louis, Missouri; and Southern Regional Conference, June 4-5, 2008 in Orlando, Florida. To obtain copies of the official registration form for any of the four regional conferences, either call 1-888-373-6497, email **Joni Jones** at jjones@retiredamericans.org, or visit our website at www.retiredamericans.org.

Bill Collectors Seizing Social Security Funds

According to a recent article in *Yahoo! Finance*, more and more seniors and people with disabilities are having their accounts frozen by bill collectors, despite the federal government's expressly exempting funds such as veterans' benefits and Social Security from such action. The freezes can leave seniors without access to their accounts for months at a time; even in the best cases when the bank and creditors agree a mistake was made, it may still take weeks to fix the error. Additionally, some banks are profiting from non-refundable fees of \$100 to \$150 for freezing accounts, as well as overdraft charges when consumers, unaware of the hold, pay bills. The problem continues to grow with increasing consumer debt, and new technology making seizing bank accounts simpler and cheaper than ever before. In September, the Senate Finance Committee held hearings on the issue, and is investigating the extent of this problem.

Got a Good Story? Alliance Seeking Health Care Spokespersons

The Alliance is working with the AFL-CIO's "In America No One Should Go Without Health Care" campaign to identify compelling first-person accounts of people struggling to afford their health care and prescription drug needs. Bad experiences with insurance companies are also welcome. Those interested must be willing to speak with the media and/or participate in other public events in 2008. For more information, contact us at arafridayalert@retiredamericans.org.

Alliance Charters its 28th State: New Hampshire!

On November 17th, the New Hampshire Alliance for Retired Americans (NHARA) held its founding convention, with members electing **John Mendolusky** from the United Food and Commercial Workers as their President. Speakers included New Hampshire State AFL-CIO President **Mark MacKenzie**. Alliance Executive Vice President **Judy Cato** and Government and Political Affairs Director **Rich Fiesta** gave an overview of the national Alliance's resources. The NHARA also implemented an annual **Tom Deary** award called "Fighting the Good Fight," which was given to NHARA Senior Advisory Committee member **Eva Sartwell**.

Iowa Leader Receives Lifetime Achievement Award

Also on November 17, at a banquet attended by 500 colleagues, friends, and family members, **Dick Fallow** of Davenport received the East Central Iowa-Northwestern Illinois AFL-CIO Hall of Fame's first Lifetime Achievement Award. Among the crowd that gathered to honor his lifetime of activism were four U.S. Congressmen he helped to elect - Reps. **Bruce Braley** (D-IA), **Phil Hare** (D-IL), and **David Obey** (D-WI), and keynote speaker Rep. **George Miller** (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. The lifetime achievement award, which will be named after Mr. Fallow if it is ever given again, recognizes the actions of a retiree who continues his activism beyond expectations. While officially retiring in 1988, Mr. Fallow continues his work not only with the Alliance, but also the National Federation of Labor, Quad City Federation of Labor, International Association of Machinists Local 1191, and the American Federation of Musicians Local 67. "I have known Dick for a very long time, and there is no better advocate for workers and retirees," said **George J. Kourpias**, President of the Alliance. "He continues to inspire others to work for change."