

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## Two D.C. Events Spotlight Bush Budget Cuts for Seniors

The Alliance joined the American Federation of Government Employees and Americans United for Change on Monday in calling on lawmakers to fully fund the Social Security Administration (SSA) and pass legislation giving Congress more control over the agency's operations. H.R. 5110, the "Social Security Customer Service Improvement Act," introduced by Rep. **Brian Higgins** (D-NY), would eliminate the President's power to change SSA's budget request, demand justification for the closure of Social Security offices 180 days before the shutdown occurs, and require Congress to be notified 90 days before the agency's workforce plan is changed. The bill would also provide SSA with Commissioner **Michael Astrue**'s full funding request, as **President Bush**'s proposed budget shortchanged the agency by \$100 million. "We must keep local SSA offices open to offer easy access to seniors who can't travel longer distances or deal with the maze of automated phone calls," said **Edward Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance. On Tuesday, Alliance Executive Vice President **Judy Cato** spoke at a U.S. Capitol event with Senators **Kent Conrad** (ND), **Robert Menendez** (NJ), and **Debbie Stabenow** (MI), as well as students. Ms. Cato articulated multiple problems with the Bush Budget which will affect seniors, including: Medicare cuts of \$556 billion over ten years; Medicare means-testing; and only funding LIHEAP, the low-income home heating assistance program, at approximately half of its authorized funding level. "Means-testing undermines the social insurance nature of the Medicare program, raising costs for seniors who are dependent on it. Over time, that would lead to more middle-class seniors like myself paying higher premiums," said Ms. Cato.

## President Bush Signs Stimulus Bill; Rebate Checks Begin in May

The President signed a multibillion-dollar economic package on Wednesday that means \$300 to \$1,200 rebates for many American households. Rebates are set to go out beginning in May, and will include seniors living on Social Security. Most taxpayers will receive a check of up to \$600 for individuals and \$1,200 for couples. Seniors earning at least \$3,000 and who owe little or no taxes would get \$300 for singles, \$600 for couples. Those making more than \$75,000 and couples with income over \$150,000 will get smaller checks. Rebates to seniors and disabled vets were scaled down from \$500 under the original Senate package after the president personally lobbied against including them, according to Sen. **Max Baucus** (D-MT) and the publication *Politico*.

## HHS Secretary Leavitt Warns of Future Medicare Cuts

The President is planning to propose legislation to revamp not only Medicare, but health care generally, in response to a statutory requirement that it submit a plan to Congress to rein in Medicare spending. The Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) established a "trigger" requiring that when the Medicare trustees project the program will be more than 45% funded by general government revenue, as opposed to Medicare's trust fund, for two years in a row, the President

propose legislation to reduce Medicare spending. The trustees issued their second consecutive warning in April, and Health and Human Services Secretary **Michael Leavitt** told a House panel at a Wednesday hearing that the proposal required by the trigger provision would be submitted before February 21. Democrats at the hearing angrily accused the administration of trying to kill off the Medicare program, according to *CQ HealthBeat*. “You suggest we rely on the private sector, but conveniently fail to point out that system costs taxpayers far more than traditional Medicare,” said Rep. **Pete Stark** (D-CA), Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee.

### **Alliance Backs Campaign to Improve Retiree Housing**

The Alliance continues to support the Building Justice campaign, led by the Sheet Metal Workers and Painters unions, which seeks to improve the quality of new homes and the working conditions for those who build them. The campaign is targeting Pulte, a builder whose Del Webb "active adult" communities account for 45% of the company's overall revenues. A new report, available at [www.poorlybuiltbypulte.info](http://www.poorlybuiltbypulte.info), seeks to call attention to the impact of poor working conditions. Last summer, representatives of the company sprayed high-power water hoses on community activists picketing an Arizona worksite. “Many of these properties are targeted at senior consumers - this is an opportunity for retirees committed to social and economic justice to demand a higher standard,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

### **Alliance Loses Two Great Friends: Rep. Tom Lantos, Marge Gullett**

**Rep. Tom Lantos** (D-CA), 80, a guardian of human rights around the world since his election to Congress in 1980, died of esophageal cancer on Monday. The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and founder of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Rep. Lantos was the only Holocaust survivor ever to serve in Congress. “Tom Lantos had a 100% lifetime voting record with the Alliance; he was a fierce advocate for the rights of seniors, and he always stood strong for what he believed in,” said **George J. Kourpias**, President of the Alliance. We are also sad to report that **Marjorie (Marge) Gullett**, wife of Illinois Alliance president **Hal Gullett**, died on February 7 after a struggle with cancer. She was 77. “She was a beautiful person and loving wife and mother. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Gullett family,” continued Mr. Kourpias.

### **Regional Conferences Rapidly Approaching**

The national Alliance will hold its first regional conference of 2008, March 24-26 in Las Vegas, NV. The Western Regional Conference 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. For copies of the official registration form for any of the four regional conferences, call 1-888-373-6497, email **Joni Jones** at [jjones@retiredamericans.org](mailto:jjones@retiredamericans.org), or visit our website at [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org). Locations and dates for later conferences are: Northeastern Regional Conference, April 17-18, 2008 in Philadelphia, PA; Midwestern Regional Conference, April 28-29, 2008 in St. Louis, MO; and Southern Regional Conference, June 4-5, 2008 in Orlando, FL.