

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Call to Action for Low-Income Medicare Beneficiaries is Coming Soon

The Senate is moving quickly to craft a bill that will address a scheduled cut in Medicare payments to physicians, and the bill is also likely to include other Medicare changes. At a meeting with doctors earlier this month, Senate Finance Committee Chairman **Max Baucus** (D-MT) outlined a package of Medicare legislation that would delay for 18 months a 10% Medicare physician payment cut that is scheduled to take effect July 1, *CQ Today* has reported. The measure would prevent the cuts until 2010 and could also increase payments by 1.1%. The bill would cost about \$8.4 billion over five years; halting the cuts without the increase would cost about \$8 billion. The legislation is expected to reach the Senate floor in early May. Alliance members will be asked to weigh in on this legislation. A message will be spelled out that urges Senators to include benefits for low-income seniors, not just providers, and to curb subsidies for Medicare Advantage private insurance plans. The Alliance will be providing: a letter you can e-mail to your Senators; a toll-free call in phone number; suggested talking points; and details concerning which Senators are being targeted. “This could be a tough fight, but it is also an excellent opportunity for Alliance members to be heard,” said **George J. Kourpias**, President of the Alliance.

More Geriatric Health Care Providers Will be Needed as Baby Boomers Grow Older

The Medicare legislation that is being considered follows the release of a report stating that the number of older patients with complex health needs increasingly outpaces the number of health care providers able to adequately care for them. An Institute of Medicine committee released the report, *Retooling for an Aging America, Building the Health Care Workforce*, last week. The report says that the nation faces an impending health care crisis when the 78 million baby boomers soon begin turning 65. The institute, an arm of the National Academy of Sciences, also reported that there are not enough specialists in geriatric medicine; that sufficient training for health care providers is unavailable; and that the specialists who currently exist are underpaid. It stated further that Medicare may even hinder seniors from getting the best care, due to: low reimbursement rates; a focus on treating short-term health problems rather than managing chronic conditions; a lack of coverage for preventive services; and a lack of coverage for health care providers' time spent collaborating with a patient's other providers. The report found there are about 7,100 doctors certified in geriatrics in the United States, one per every 2,500 older Americans. While today's seniors tend to be healthier and live longer than previous generations, people over 65 often have health care needs that are more complex than those who are younger.

Older Voters Play Key Role in Presidential Primaries

Older voters played an important role in Pennsylvania's Democratic presidential primary on Tuesday, which was won by Sen. **Hillary Clinton** (D-NY). The state is second only to Florida for

the greatest proportion of residents over 65, and 58% of registered Democrats are over 45, an age that has been a dividing line in the race. According to *The New York Times*, age has been a more reliable predictor of voter choice than gender, income or education; race has been the only stronger indicator, and then only if the voter is African-American. Seniors have consistently favored the 60-year old Clinton over Sen. **Barack Obama** (D-IL), age 46. Exit polls conducted by Edison/Mitofsky in the primary states before Pennsylvania have shown 57% of voters 65 and older supporting Clinton, with 36% supporting Obama. The reverse was true for those under 30, with 59% for Obama and 38% for Clinton. “Older voters are the most consistent group to show up at the polls,” said **Edward Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “No matter who wins the Democratic nomination, we will continue to vote with full force in November to elect a President who truly cares about seniors.”

Senator Baucus Speaks Out Against Social Security Privatization

In response to a report on Social Security reform released last week by the Treasury Department, Senate Finance Committee Chairman **Baucus** reiterated that privatization is still not a solution. The fourth in a series of briefs on the issue, *Social Security Reform: Mechanisms for Achieving True Pre-Funding*, available at www.ustreas.gov/press/releases/reports/ss_issuebrief_no.4.pdf, details proposals that would divert a portion of current workers’ Social Security payroll taxes into private accounts. “**President Bush's** private accounts plan would increase debt held by the public by \$5 trillion over the first 20 years in operation,” said Baucus. “I am convinced that private accounts are a bad idea, and examining this report only confirms my view. I will do everything I can to make sure that private accounts are not enacted into law.” Added **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance, “Americans have spoken loudly and clearly against privatization – we defeated Bush’s plan once, and will ensure Social Security remains the reliable safety net that it was intended to be.”

Midwestern Regional Meeting Just Around the Corner

The national Alliance will hold its third regional meeting of 2008 next week, April 28-29 in St. Louis, Missouri. The Midwestern 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. 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 either of the remaining regional conferences, call 1-888-373-6497, email **Joni Jones** at jjones@retiredamericans.org or visit www.retiredamericans.org. The Southern Regional Meeting, the last of the four, will take place on June 4-5, 2008 in Orlando, Florida. The Western Regional meeting took place in March, while the Northeastern Regional Meeting took place earlier this month.

Did You Know...

The Employee Benefit Research Institute’s 2008 survey, conducted in January, recorded the sharpest one-year decline ever in the public’s confidence about having a financially secure retirement (*FOX Business News*).