

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Alliance Members Tell John McCain Social Security is not “A Disgrace”

Alliance members from coast to coast spent the last week combating Sen. **John McCain**'s recent comment that Social Security is an “absolute disgrace” and calling on the Senator to return his own Social Security checks. Speaking at a July 7 town hall meeting in Denver, Sen. McCain said, “Americans have got to understand that we are paying present-day retirees with the taxes paid by young workers in America today. And that's a disgrace. It's an absolute disgrace, and it's got to be fixed.” Yet, media accounts reveal that despite McCain's views toward Social Security, he received \$23,157 in Social Security benefits in 2007, an average of \$1,929.75 each month. “Forty-two million Americans receive Social Security benefits – these are our nation's elderly, our widows and widowers, and our young children who have seen a parent die. Helping them is not a disgrace,” said Alliance Executive Director **Edward F. Coyle** in a telephone press conference with leaders of labor and other progressive groups to discuss Sen. McCain's statement. “Social Security has kept millions out of poverty, and is one our nation's greatest success stories.”

Earlier this week, the Alliance also launched a television advertising campaign responding to the comment; the ads can be viewed on the Alliance's website, at www.retiredamericans.org. The issue ads ran this week in Wilkes-Barre, Scranton, and Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, coinciding with Sen. McCain's visit to Wilkes-Barre on Wednesday; the Pennsylvania Alliance, working with area seniors and community groups, held a protest event that day to spotlight the Senator's position on Social Security. Alliance members also mobilized with events in Ft. Lauderdale and Orlando, Florida; Phoenix, Arizona; Columbus, Ohio; Henderson, Nevada; and Portland, Oregon to denounce McCain's comments and call on elected officials to say whether they agree Social Security is a “disgrace.” Coyle added, “The Alliance intends to make McCain's comments a major issue for every elected official in 2008. We will keep you updated as more events are planned, and we encourage members everywhere to join us in standing up for Social Security.”

General Motors Cuts Health Benefits for Salaried Retirees

This week, General Motors Corp. (GM) announced to its 97,400 salaried retirees that group health benefits will no longer be provided to those eligible for Medicare. The changes, which go into effect January 1, will not affect the retirement benefits of hourly wage retirees. GM is working with San Francisco-based Extend Health to assist these retirees in choosing Medicare plans. Beginning on September 22, appointments will be available to speak with “certified benefits counselors.” Other resources being offered to the retirees include: an extended open enrollment for Medicare beginning one month early on October 15; private information sessions which insurers will be prohibited from attending; and a \$300 taxable contribution to their pension plans to help offset the cost of the new plans. According to *The Washington Post*, other auto

manufacturers are likely to make similar changes to retiree health benefits in the near future. Additionally, GM may try to cut the same plans for hourly retirees when their next union contract is negotiated in 2010. “The Alliance will fight for our retirees with every tool in our chest,” said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “We will be watching, and stand ready to defend our brothers and sisters if manufacturers try to erode benefits further.”

No Surprise: Obama and McCain to Target Specific Age Groups in Swing States

Recent polls reported in *U.S. News and World Report* show that voters continue to be divided significantly by age group in choosing the next President, with younger voters now significantly less likely to say they will vote than they were in March. In general, the presumed Democratic nominee, Sen. **Barack Obama**, leads the presumed Republican nominee, Sen. **John McCain**, almost entirely due to his performance among younger voters – a lead of as much as 2-1. The nominees are likely to work especially hard to court seniors in six swing states with unusually high percentages – 25% or more – of voters ages 60 and up: Florida, Pennsylvania, Iowa, South Dakota, Montana, and North Dakota. “Because seniors go to the polls so reliably, their votes will matter wherever they live,” said **George J. Kourpias**, President of the Alliance.

Community Advocacy Network Flourishes More than Ever

Sarah Meek has joined the Alliance as the Community-Based Field Organizer, working with the Field Mobilization Department to support and grow the Community Advocacy Network (CAN) groups throughout the country. Ms. Meek comes to us from Atlanta, Georgia, where she worked with the Georgia Council on Aging, developing collaborations with grassroots rural and urban seniors, organizing actions at the state capital, presenting trainings for grandparents raising grandchildren, and fundraising for new projects. Among the community-based leaders with whom she will be working are three recently recognized Alliance Executive Board members: **Reverend Louis B. Jones** is the Pastor of the Pilgrim Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. His church has taken the lead to revitalize Washington, and conducts a number of programs to provide job training assistance and other community services. **Rosario Holguin** currently serves as California Alliance Vice-President representing Community-Based Organizations. She has also worked on a number of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) efforts to target Latino and Women’s political education. **Jo Etta Brown** has a lifetime of community-based leadership, and has had extensive experience in advocating for affordable housing and community development.

IRS Urges Retirees and Veterans to File for Economic Stimulus Checks

Starting on Monday, the IRS began sending a second set of information packets to 5.2 million people who may be eligible for an economic stimulus check, but who have not yet filed for their payment. The Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 includes funds for seniors who do not earn income through current employment, if their Social Security benefits, Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits, and railroad retirement benefits totaled at least \$3,000 in 2007. Those who qualify for a stimulus check will receive one by the end of 2008, as long as they file a tax form by October 15, 2008.