

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Have a Voter Rights Issue? Call 1-866-OUR-VOTE

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 requires all polling sites to have at least one voting system designated for use by disabled voters. However, one disabled voter in Missouri has had to spend two hours at the polls each time she voted in 2006, 2007, and again this past Tuesday, because the machines never worked. That voter is not alone. In Arizona, a 97-year-old retired schoolteacher and onetime traveling showgirl who has voted in every presidential election since 1932 might not be able to vote this year - she simply can't prove her citizenship, as required by a 2004 law approved by Arizona voters. The Arizona Advocacy Network and other activist groups filed a lawsuit challenging the voter identification requirements. A federal judge held a hearing last month in Phoenix and is expected to rule soon. Early rulings have gone the state's way, and a U.S. Supreme Court ruling upholding Indiana's voter ID law was a blow to Arizona's challengers. Fortunately, Election Protection officials stand ready to help with many of these and other voting problems, just one phone call away, at the toll-free number 1-866-OUR-VOTE. "We need Congress to provide funding for new machines that meet the revised standards," said **George J. Kourpias**, President of the Alliance. "In the meantime, seniors should know about the Election Protection hotline, which will be available through the election, to help with voting problems."

GAO Report: Medicare Fraud is Highest in South Florida

A recent study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that Medicare sometimes seems more intent on paying claims quickly than verifying them first. According to the study, the government is putting millions of Medicare dollars at risk – with losses at approximately \$11 billion annually – by authorizing fictitious claims for wheelchairs, glucose monitors and other medical supplies. Medicare fraud is particularly rampant in South Florida, where medical equipment and HIV-treatment schemes alone add up to at least \$7 million daily. In response to the study's findings, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) officials say that they have instated new oversight procedures that require medical suppliers to be certified. However, investigators note that concerns over oversight date back to at least 2001, and CMS has made promises since at least 2005 to fix problems in its supply program. "It is vital that CMS act on its word and ensure that Medicare dollars go to those who deserve them – seniors and the disabled," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

Some Pension Funds Drained in Order to Fund Executives' Benefits

An examination by *The Wall Street Journal* finds that a range of companies have been quietly converting their pension plans into resources to finance their executives' retirement benefits and pay. By moving some of the obligations for supplemental pensions into rank-and-file pension plans, companies capture tax breaks intended for pensions of regular workers and use them to pay for executives' supplemental benefits and compensation. Companies using this tactic have included Intel Corp. and CenturyTel Inc. In addition to being a dubious use of tax law, the practice risks

harming regular workers: It can drain assets from pension plans and make them more likely to fail. Ultimately, taxpayers are helping finance executive compensations while companies grow richer. With the current bear market in stocks weakening many pension plans, the maneuver could put more plans in jeopardy.

Policy Makers Turn to Ohio Alliance

Ohio Alliance members made their voices heard, speaking to policy makers at events this week. On Saturday, **Bruce Bostick**, a 59-year-old retired steelworker, spoke at the Democratic National Party Platform Committee hearing in Cleveland about losing his health care, his struggle to survive and the reality of aging in America today. Asked what it means to him to be “aging in America,” Bruce described a time of growing insecurity where he feels demeaned by his circumstances and can no longer combat rising food and gas prices. He spoke about the loss of his pension and benefits after the steel mill he worked at for 30 years declared bankruptcy, and the saving graces Medicare and Social Security have been for his parents. Also in Cleveland, U.S. Senator **Sherrod Brown** spoke with over 165 retirees from across Ohio at the “Senior Voice!” community forum: “Making Medicare Real Healthcare, Not Heartaches, Headaches, and Hardships for Seniors.” As the keynote speaker, Sen. Brown addressed some of the recent changes to Medicare and its prospects for the future, taking questions and reading from constituent letters. The senator stressed that retiree advocacy is essential to keep the pressure on and prevent the privatization of Medicare.

Alliance Events Take Place in Arizona, Indiana, and Florida

Members of the Arizona Alliance took part in the Americans United for Change "Bush Legacy Tour Bus" event last Friday in Phoenix and Tucson. The bus is a mobile museum focusing on the failures and missed opportunities of the current administration, with exhibit topics including the economy, health care, and workers. In Indianapolis on Thursday, Alliance members joined Rep. **Andre Carson** (D-IN) as he discussed a new report by the Institute for America's Future, which contains updated estimates on the number of Hoosiers who would be negatively affected by a dismantling of Social Security. **Elmer Blankenship**, President of the Indiana Alliance, commented, “While Social Security is one of our country’s most successful programs, a debate on its future continues. **President Bush** and **Senator McCain** have proposed privatizing the program.” In Tallahassee the previous Thursday, Florida Alliance Secretary **Barbara DeVane** spoke at a “Millionaire McCain” protest, calling Sen. McCain out of touch with retirees. The event brought together many of those who believe that Sen. McCain puts America’s wealthy ahead of the middle class.

Did You Know...

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, La Paz County, Arizona is the county that has the nation's oldest population, with 32% of its residents 65 years of age or older (*USA Today*). The county is located on the California border and is home to the Colorado River Indian Reservation.

This message is being sent to you as a member of the Alliance for Retired Americans. The Alliance is a nationwide membership organization organized under Internal Revenue Code 501 (c) (4) and dedicated to educating all Americans about and advocating on behalf of retirees and seniors. The Alliance is responsible for the content and has paid all costs associated with the preparation and distribution of this message.