

Alliance Clips and Retiree News December 8, 2011

Medicare

Access to Widen on Medicare Data

John Carreyrou
Wall Street Journal
December 7, 2011

In an abrupt policy change, the Department of Health and Human Services will make its huge Medicare claims database more broadly available to the public, to help consumers and employers make better-informed decisions about medical care. Under the new rules, the agency is allowing a new category of organizations to obtain the data: community groups comprising doctors, health insurers, businesses, consumers and government that work to improve health care at the local level. These groups will be able to use the data to publish studies, such as report cards on certain procedures, hospitals or doctors. Although they will have to notify the subjects of their reports 60 days in advance, doctors won't be able to block publication. Patient information will remain confidential.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204319004577084883951644966.html>

House bill to raise Medicare premiums for wealthy

CBS News
December 6, 2011

House Republicans intend to propose a gradual increase in Medicare premiums for wealthy seniors to help cover the cost of renewing Social Security payroll tax cuts and benefits for the long-term unemployed, officials said Wednesday. The precise details remain to be worked out as the leadership consults with rank-and-file Republicans about the legislation, which has grown significantly in recent days and is expected on the House floor next week.

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501704_162-57338103/house-bill-to-raise-medicare-premiums-for-wealthy/

Medicare cuts may force nursing homes to close, analysis says

Sam Baker
The Hill
December 7, 2011

Nursing homes may not be able to weather the Medicare cuts that Congress is considering, according to a financial report conducted by the Moran Company, on behalf of the American Health Care Association. The Moran analysis says nursing homes' average profit margin in 2009 was 0.75 percent. Margins would likely be "mildly positive" going forward if existing payment

policies are left in place, the study said, but deep cuts could push the industry into negative territory.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/healthwatch/medicare/197805-medicare-cuts-may-force-nursing-homes-to-close-analysis-says>

Social Security

Hiding Behind Social Security

December 7, 2011

ThinkProgress War Room

The GOP argument is that by cutting the payroll tax that funds Social Security, we are undermining the solvency of Social Security. . That would be true, except for the fact that the plan explicitly replaces *every cent* of the payroll tax cut with funds from the government's general fund. Republicans claim to be the protectors Social Security, but they are the ones that are constantly looking for ways to privatize, cut, or otherwise destroy the program.

http://thinkprogress.org/progress-report/hiding-behind-social-security/?post_type=progress-report

Republicans are the real defenders of Social Security, Republicans say

Greg Sargent

Washington Post

December 7, 2011

Many Republicans and conservatives are telling voters that the payroll tax cut extension would deplete the Trust Fund without telling them that this money is replenished. And in the process, they're posing as the real defenders of Social Security. Rush Limbaugh, for instance, recently told listeners that "extending the payroll tax cut depletes the Social Security trust fund," and that this proves that Obama and Dems are the ones who want to kick seniors out of their houses.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/post/republicans-are-the-real-defenders-of-social-security-republicans-say/2011/12/07/gIQA37mlcO_blog.html

Labor

Voters warm to Jerry Brown's pension plan, poll finds

Los Angeles Times

December 8, 2011

According to a new poll, a majority of California voters like Gov. Jerry Brown's pension plan for state workers. In the Field Poll, 51% of respondents said the proposal to raise the retirement age for new workers and require many current ones to pay more for their pensions strikes the right

balance. Twenty-four percent said they think it goes too far, and 14% said they think it doesn't go far enough. 41% -- said they think public pensions are too generous, compared with 35% who said they think they're fine. The percentage who look unfavorably toward pensions has steadily risen.

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/california-politics/2011/12/jerry-brown-public-pension-poll.html>

Politics

Gallup Poll: Enthusiasm drops among GOP voters

Catalina Camia

USA Today

December 8, 2011

A new Gallup Poll shows 49% of GOP voters and independents that lean Republican are more enthusiastic than usual about voting in next year's election, down 9 percentage points since September. By comparison, the level of enthusiasm among Democrats is essentially unchanged (44%). That means the "enthusiasm gap" between the parties has narrowed -- and the level of energy is key.

<http://content.usatoday.com/communities/onpolitics/post/2011/12/republicans-enthusiasm-gap-presidential-election-/1>