

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Capitol Hill Tax Stalemate Hurts Medicare

The congressional deadlock over extending payroll tax cuts – sparked by a revolt of House Tea Party Republicans – will hurt seniors on Medicare unless a resolution is reached quickly. Seniors with incomes below \$15,000 per year are at risk of losing access to critical medical services through the Qualified Individual (QI) program. The program, which is set to expire on December 31, pays for Medicare Part B premiums that cover physician and other outpatient services, as well as the low income subsidy for Part D prescription drug coverage. The QI benefit represents an average savings of \$5,199 per year for these low-income seniors. Without an extension of the program by Congress, states would have the right to terminate benefits on January 1.

Also caught in the crossfire are reimbursements to nearly 650,000 doctors who care for Medicare patients. According to the *Associated Press*, Medicare sent an alert to doctors to say that they will hold up paying claims for the first 10 business days of the new year, but without congressional action it would then be forced to implement a 27.4 percent cut in reimbursement rates, which may prompt physicians to refuse to see Medicare patients.

Romney Stumbles on Medicaid, Iowa Alliance Members Protest GOP Plans for Seniors

Discussing Medicaid at a recent campaign event in Iowa, Republican presidential candidate **Mitt Romney** said he was not familiar with the program before he entered government at age 55, adding parenthetically, “by the way, I’m concerned about the poor.” Speaking on a conference call with reporters, Alliance Executive Director **Edward F. Coyle** said, “Today’s comments show how badly out of touch Mitt Romney is with seniors. For a majority of seniors, Medicaid is the only way to afford nursing home and long-term care. It may not mean much to someone like Mitt Romney, but for seniors, it is literally a matter of life and death.”

Iowa Alliance members joined with local labor activists outside the final candidate debate before the January 3 caucuses, protesting the forum participants’ stances on Social Security. These include raising the retirement age, cutting benefits, and giving Wall Street firms a prominent role in a privatized Social Security system. The protest was covered by local media (view tv coverage at <http://bit.ly/sOgILD>). For the latest on where the GOP candidates stand on Social Security, visit <http://bit.ly/tswZ0Q> for a new fact sheet prepared by the Strengthen Social Security campaign, a coalition in which the Alliance plays a leading role.

Commenting on what the elections mean for retirees, Alliance President **Barbara J. Easterling** wrote in this week’s *Huffington Post* that, “the current field of GOP presidential candidates offers little solace to seniors who are worried that their Medicare and Social Security, or that of their kids and grandkids, will be sacrificed to pay for even more tax breaks for those least in need.” Please share the column, “*When the Going Gets Tough, Seniors Must Get Voting*” at <http://huff.to/sW4gDp>.

Walmart's Health Insurance Changes Bad for Older Workers

Responding to published reports that Walmart will be significantly increasing the burden of health care costs it places on associates, Ms. Easterling recently wrote to the company's CEO, **Mike Duke**. "I am particularly concerned about older workers who have yet to reach the Medicare eligibility age. People in this age group are often beginning to see medical problems develop or worsen. I worry that these increased health care costs will keep many from seeing a doctor, and make these health problems more serious and costlier. Just think how our nation's health care costs would go down if those in this age group were to have more affordable, preventive medical care during this critical period of their lives," she said in her letter (read at <http://bit.ly/tiGqk9>). The Alliance encouraged Walmart to meet with OUR Walmart <http://forrespect.org/>, an employee organization, to hear their concerns and respond to their proposed solutions for improving working conditions at the nation's largest private sector employer.

84 year-old Loses Right to Vote, Sues to Block New Voter ID Law

Under a new law pushed by Wisconsin Governor **Scott Walker**, 84 year-old **Ruthelle Frank** of Brokaw, WI (pop. 107) has lost the right to vote. According to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Frank does not have a driver's license, and lacks a birth certificate needed to get a state identification card. She does however have Social Security and Medicare cards, as well as a baptism certificate. Even if she were to pay \$20 to get a birth certificate, her maiden name was misspelled by the attending physician at her home birth. To rectify this, she would need to petition the courts and pay a \$200 fee. Frank, an elected member of her Village Board since 1996, recently became a plaintiff in a lawsuit to block the new law, which is similar to proposals in other states. "Our generation, and those who came before us, fought and died for the right to vote. We cannot let politicians take this away," said **Ruben J. Burks**, Alliance Secretary-Treasurer. For the latest developments on voting rights, visit http://www.lawyerscommittee.org/projects/voting_rights.

Happy Holidays from the Alliance

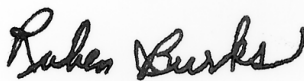
In our final edition of *Friday Alert* until January 6, we would like to extend our warmest wishes for the holiday season and thank you for your outstanding activism in 2011.

In 2011 we once again faced strong threats to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. But thanks to the powerful voice of activists across the country, seniors were spared from terribly unjust and painful cuts to these programs by the deficit reduction "Super Committee" on Capitol Hill. Please see our website www.retiredamericans.org for photos and videos of all you did this year.

As we head into the 2012 elections and a new session of Congress, we will need to be as educated and active as we can to protect and strengthen all that we have helped to achieve. Thank you for all you do to help your fellow retirees. We look forward to working with you in 2012.



Barbara J. Easterling
President



Ruben J. Burks
Secretary Treasurer



Edward F. Coyle
Executive Director