

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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**October 23, 2009**

## **Bill to Keep Doctors' Pay from Being Dramatically Slashed Fails**

The Senate voted 47-53 against invoking cloture on a Medicare doctors' reimbursement bill on Wednesday, falling 13 votes short of stopping a filibuster. The bill, S. 1776, would have fixed a formula in Medicare that currently would have doctors' reimbursements cut 21% in 2010 and another 5% in years beyond 2010. All Republicans voted against the bill, as well as the following 13 Democrats: **Evan Bayh** (IN), **Robert Byrd** (WV), **Kent Conrad** (ND), **Byron Dorgan** (ND), **Russ Feingold** (WI), **Herb Kohl** (WI), **Joe Lieberman** (CT), **Claire McCaskill** (MO), **Bill Nelson** (FL), **Jon Tester** (MT), **Mark Warner** (VA), **Jim Webb** (VA), and **Ron Wyden** (OR). Congress for the last several years has stopped the cuts in a piecemeal fashion - often one year or 18 months at a time, and S. 1776 would have permanently fixed the problem. It is likely that the Senate will now go back and again do a one-year fix. Opponents wanted the bill "paid for" in budget terms, although this Congress had passed a resolution earlier this year exempting this and other crucial issues, like war funding, from the normal budget process. "Seniors need certainty and security to know that their doctor will always be there for them. This bill would have given seniors on Medicare the security they need," said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. The bill was especially important in smaller communities and rural areas, where there are fewer patients and where seniors need to make sure that there are enough doctors to treat them.

## **Alliance Leaders, Activists Speak out on Health Care from Coast to Coast**

Nevada Alliance President **Scotty Watts** joined U.S. Senate Majority Leader **Harry Reid** (D-NV) on two separate telephone press conference calls this week. The first was in support of the Medicare "Doctors Fix" (see previous article), and the second was to discuss retiree concerns such as Social Security, health care, and prescription drug costs. On Tuesday, Florida Alliance members were among 25 health care advocates who staged a protest at the Orlando office of Rep. **Suzanne Kosmas** (D-FL). Participants urged Kosmas to support a pro-retiree, pro-worker health care bill, including a strong public option, as an affordable alternative to private insurance. On the west coast, Ms. Easterling spoke at the California Alliance's convention, which was held Tuesday and Wednesday this week in Los Angeles. **Nan Brasmer** was re-elected as President; as were Community Vice Presidents **Maureen Allen**, **Rosario Holguin**, **Arnie Kasendorf**, **Michael Lyon** and **Diana Madoshi**. **Nancy Tilcock** and **Artist Gilbert** were elected new Community VP's. Easterling also spoke to a retiree group about health care and the 2009 Virginia governor's race at an event in Annandale, VA on Thursday, and Alliance Executive Director **Edward F. Coyle** traveled to Washington State to speak at the Washington Alliance's convention on Thursday.

## **Midwestern Alliance Chapters: Indiana, Missouri, and Iowa**

Indiana is ending its troubled \$1.34 billion deal with a team of vendors to automate the application process for food stamps, Medicaid and other benefits. The system has been highly criticized for

lost documents, slow processing times and a lack of face-to-face interaction between caseworkers and welfare recipients. The news came just two days after social services advocates, including Indiana Alliance members, held a news conference to say that Indiana needs viable public solutions to fix a crisis in public welfare. In Missouri, Alliance activists traveled to Humana's corporate office in Springfield, MO on Monday to lodge a formal complaint against the company. Missouri Alliance President **Dave Meinell** and three colleagues presented an open letter addressed to Humana's CEO, **Michael McCallister**, which read: "Both your mailings to Medicare Advantage recipients, as well as the current ads you are now running in Missouri with AHIP (America's Health Insurance Plans), falsely warn seniors that their benefits are at risk." In Iowa on Thursday - two days after UnitedHealth Group, the largest U.S. insurer, announced a 13% third quarter jump in profit to \$1.03 billion - seniors and leaders from the Iowa Alliance called on Senator **Charles Grassley** (R-IA) to stop putting the interests of big insurance ahead of Iowans and to support health insurance reform. The seniors descended on four of Grassley's offices, in Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, Sioux City and Waterloo, to urge him to stop lying to Americans about health reform. Activists brought a bar of soap, to be donated to a local shelter, to Grassley's offices, telling the Senator that he should have his mouth washed out with soap for his lies.

### **News from New England: New Hampshire and Maine**

Alliance Director of Government and Political Affairs **Richard Fiesta** and Director of Field Mobilization **Dani Pere** traveled to Concord for the New Hampshire Alliance's convention on Saturday. **Charlie Balban** was elected President; **Ron Geoffroy, Sr.** was elected Executive Vice President; **Audrey Buchanan-Swan** was elected Treasurer; and **John Mendolusky**, outgoing president of the NH Alliance, gave the **Thomas C. Deary Award** to **John Hoar, Sr.** The award is made in memory of Tom Deary, a tireless NH seniors advocate. Last Friday, the Consumers for Affordable Healthcare, a coalition of consumer advocates in Maine, presented its 2009 Consumer Advocate Award to **John Carr**, President of the Maine Council of Senior Citizens-Alliance for Retired Americans, in recognition of his commitment to quality, affordable health care.

### **Future Alliance Events: Conference Call, Las Vegas Convention**

You are invited to join Alliance members across the country for a national conference call and health care reform legislative update on Wednesday, October 28 at 2:00 pm EDT. To participate in the call, please RSVP by email to [araorganizing@retiredamericans.org](mailto:araorganizing@retiredamericans.org) or call 1-888-633-4435 to be sent the call-in details. RSVP's must be made by Friday, October 23<sup>rd</sup> at 5:00 pm EDT. Please join us to discuss the critical components that must be included in any successful health care reform legislation. The call will identify key legislators to contact; discuss advocacy strategies for November and December; and include questions and comments from the field. Also, mark your calendars for April 5-8, 2010 for the Alliance's National Convention in Las Vegas, where we will kick off our grassroots efforts for the important 2010 elections. We will have workshops and training sessions to strengthen our organizing and advocacy skills, and hear from leading experts in public policy, health care and aging, and the media. Convention attendees will be electing officers for the Alliance. Watch for more details in an upcoming Friday Alert.