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Affiliated with the Rhode Island AFL-CIO



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Budget Agreement between Sen. Murray, Rep. Ryan Averts Shutdown, Still Much to Do

On Thursday, December 12, 2013, the House voted 332-94 to approve a two-year budget deal crafted by Sen. **Patty Murray** (D-WA) and Rep. **Paul Ryan** (R-WI). The legislation won the support of 169 Republicans as well as 163 Democrats, and now heads to the Senate, where it is likely to pass next week. President **Obama** has signaled that he would sign the bill into law. For a tally of the House vote, [Read Here](#)

The agreement will not cut earned Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits. However, it missed a key opportunity to close tax loopholes used by corporations and wealthy individuals to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. It also makes federal workers pay more for their pension benefits and cuts veterans' and military retirees' pensions. The Alliance issued a statement ([read statement](#)) that those cuts are particularly cruel considering the missed opportunity to generate more revenue. "Knowing that federal employees have received no pay increase the last three years makes \$6 billion in increased retirement contributions for new federal employees even more difficult to accept," said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance.

"There is an obvious benefit to avoiding a government shutdown, and Sen. Murray deserves credit for reaching a deal with Rep. Ryan, but sequestration cuts to services need to be repealed altogether - not just reduced and repackaged," said Alliance Executive Director **Richard Fiesta**.

Alliance Takes Action on the Budget

All year, Alliance members and coalition partners have joined Americans across the country participating in rallies and forums to protest cuts in vital services to the middle class. State and national leaders met up in Pittsburgh last Friday, in advance of the Murray-Ryan agreement, to "Keep Social Security and Medicare off the federal budget chopping block." Pennsylvania Alliance President **Wayne Burton** and State Senator **Jim Ferlo** were among the speakers.

Crowds of workers, families, and advocates also gathered in Greensboro, North Carolina and other cities this week, driving home the need to replace sequestration in its entirety with new revenues raised by closing corporate tax loopholes (<http://bit.ly/19EH4ZV>). On Wednesday, members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, the Alliance, Social Security Works, SEIU, Campaign for Community Change, and others held a press event on Capitol Hill to stress the need for progressive budget priorities which protect Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Alliance activists across the country then participated in a national call-in day yesterday, sending a strong message to their Senators, "Thanks for keeping Social Security and Medicare off the chopping block; we still need to close tax loopholes and protect the retirement security of federal workers and our veterans."

Also on Thursday, a small delegation of protesters from the Ohio Alliance, AFGE, and ProgressOhio went to deliver a lump of coal to House Speaker **John Boehner's** (R-OH) office in West Chester Twp. Their message echoed that of the Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and other state Alliance chapters. "Like many children, Boehner has cleaned up his act days before Christmas," said **Denise Gastesi**, a representative of the group and ProgressOhio worker. "We are pleased that a bipartisan budget seems to be on the horizon that doesn't touch Social Security or Medicare. However, we are disappointed that corporate tax loopholes remain in place."

Fire John DePetro



WPRO radio talk show host John DePetro is up to his old tricks once again. But his latest indiscretion is particularly infuriating, since it crosses the line of decency and morality while using the public airwaves as a vehicle for ignorance.

Just recently, DePetro referred to union members protesting outside of a political fundraiser as “whores” and “union hags.” Is this the kind of rhetoric that a broadcasting company such as WPRO wants to promote or endorse? That is clearly the message being issued if the company continues to employ a broadcaster such as DePetro, who continually steps over the bounds of decency while hiding behind the wall of the right to free speech.

But this is nothing new for a broadcaster who was fired from his radio position in Boston in 2006 for referring to a gubernatorial candidate as a “fat lesbian.” He was also sued for sexual harassment of a female co-worker in 2012. To say that this pattern of behavior is acceptable would not only be unprofessional but irresponsible on the part of WPRO.

It has now come to the point that apologies and retractions are not enough. How many instances of hate speech and vile language must occur before WPRO pulls the plug on a broadcaster whose agenda is to boost ratings through negative and insulting comments?

As a union leader, I was deeply offended and sickened to hear my union sisters being referred to as “whores” when they were exercising their rights and lawfully voicing their opinions at a rally. This is something we, not only as union members, but as Americans, have been doing for hundreds of years. His words were offensive, indecent and downright juvenile at best.

WPRO needs to take a page from Boston radio and take John DePetro off the air.

Armand E. Sabitoni
Providence

The writer is general secretary-treasurer and New England regional manager of the Laborers' International Union of North America.

Petition to Eliminate the Unfair GPO and WEP Provisions of the Social Security Act

The Rhode Island Alliance reminds us that the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) penalize people who have dedicated their lives to public service. Approximately 25% of public service retirees were employed in jurisdictions that do not participate in Social Security. This includes many teachers, firefighters and police officers. For them, Congress considers a portion of their public pension benefit to be Social Security-equivalent. As a result, the Social Security benefits they might get as the spouse of a participating worker, or because they had once worked in Social Security-covered employment, are subject to these two offsets that can severely reduce and even eliminate the Social Security benefit that has been earned. You can sign a MoveOn.org petition urging Congress to enact legislation, H.R. 3118 and S. 896, to repeal the GPO and WEP from the Social Security Act, and further request that President Obama sign the legislation, at the link below.

If you haven't already done so, PLEASE sign our Petition on the Elimination of the Unfair GPO and WEP Provisions of the Social Security Act to make sure the Congress of the United States enacts legislation, HR 3118 & S 896

ADD
YOUR
NAME

**Get The Message Out:
SIGN THE PETITION!!!!**

National Flu Vaccination Week Opens with Senior Citizens as Prime Targets

**60 percent of flu-related hospitalizations in the U.S. occur in senior age group;
learn about extra-strong vaccine for senior citizens**



National Influenza Vaccination Week opened Sunday and seniors are prime targets of the campaign by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Senior citizens – age 65 and older – last year recorded the highest flu-related hospitalization rates since the CDC began tracking this information during the 2005-2006 flu season.

An estimated 60 percent of flu-related hospitalizations in the United States occur in this senior citizen age group. One of the latest weapons to help seniors fight the flu is a high-dose flu shot made and approved specifically for people 65 years of age and older. The CDC,

however, says it has not determined if the stronger immune response results in greater protection for older adults. The CDC and its Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices have not expressed a preference for either vaccine.

Unfortunately, the burden of flu illness in people 65 and older was accompanied by reports that the flu vaccine did not work as well as expected to protect people in this age group against one particular flu virus last season. If that news left you asking yourself whether getting a flu vaccine this season is still worthwhile for people 65 and older, the answer is absolutely and unquestionably, “Yes!”

There are plenty of reasons for people 65 and older to get a flu vaccination this year, and vaccination remains the first, best and most important step in protecting against flu illness and its complications. For most people, getting the flu means feeling achy and feverish for a week or so, but for people 65 years and older, the flu can be much more serious. People in this age group are at high risk for severe flu illness and complications.

Seniors need high-dose flu shot

If you are in this age group, there are two flu vaccine options available to choose from this season: the standard flu shot and a high-dose flu shot made and approved specifically for people 65 years of age and older.

The high-dose vaccine contains more antigen (the part of the vaccine that helps your body build up protection against flu viruses) than the regular flu shot, and this extra antigen is intended to produce a stronger immune response in seniors. CDC does not have a preference for which vaccine seniors should get this season... [Read More](#)

Lung Cancer Screening with Low-Dose CT Produces Dangerous Overdiagnosis

False diagnosis may cause additional cost, anxiety, and sometimes death from cancer treatment

More than 18 percent of all lung cancers detected by low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) appeared to represent an overdiagnosis, according to a study of patients between the ages of 55 and 74 years published by *JAMA Internal Medicine*, a JAMA Network publication. Overdiagnosis cases represent an important potential harm because they incur additional cost, anxiety, and death associated with cancer treatment.



LDCT has been shown in recent clinical trials to be an effective screening tool in some patients, but some of the tumors it finds may be indolent (slow growing) or clinically insignificant. Overdiagnosis is the detection of a cancer with a screening test that wouldn't otherwise have become clinically apparent. It is a potential harm of screening because of the additional cost, anxiety and complications associated with unnecessary treatment, according to the study background... [Read More](#)

Protect Low-Income People with Medicare Urged by Aging, Disability, Faith-Based Groups

60 organizations call for Congress to make Medicare QI Program permanent



The National Council on Aging (NCOA) and 59 other diverse national organizations are urging Congress to make the low-income Medicare Qualified Individual (QI) program permanent as part of the Medicare physician payment (SGR) bill, scheduled to be considered by the Senate Finance and House Ways and Means Committees this week.

The QI program pays Part B premiums for Medicare beneficiaries with incomes of between 120-135% of poverty (about \$14,000-\$15,500 a year) and less than \$7,080 in assets. Without the QI benefit, these vulnerable seniors could be forced to drop their Part B benefit and lose access to their doctors—or pay over \$1,200 in new, additional premiums.... [Read More](#)

Medicare's Hospital Compare Introduces Information on Deadly Hospital Infections

CDC, CMS collaborate to advance public reporting of important hospital quality indicators deadly diarrhea and MRSA - see guide for finding info



Senior citizens, the most regular hospital patients, have long wanted more information about deadly infections that have been occurring to frequently in hospitals. Yesterday, the Medicare website Hospital Compare provided the first look at how their local hospitals are doing at preventing Clostridium difficile infections (deadly diarrhea) and methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) bloodstream infections.

The new data was gathered through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN). This information, as well as other hospital performance measures, is collected as part of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS) Hospital Inpatient Quality Reporting (IQR) Program and is publicly available on the Hospital Compare website...[Read More](#)

Congress Moves Closer To Changing How Medicare Pays Doctors

Almost as regular as Christmas in December of the last few years has been the congressional battle over how much physicians will be paid by Medicare. Long-standing legislation cut the pay each year and the doctors would have to spend heavily to convince Congress to give them a slight increase. But key House and Senate committees approved legislation Thursday to repeal the Sustainable Growth Rate, the formula officials use to pay doctors who treat Medicare patients. KHN's Mary Agnes Carey and Politico Pro's Jennifer Haberkorn discuss below.

MARY AGNES CAREY: Congress is one step closer to repealing the Sustainable Growth Rate, or SGR, Medicare's physician payment formula. Today key House and Senate committees approved legislation to repeal the formula and replace it with a different way to pay doctors who treat Medicare beneficiaries.



How Working After Retirement Age Effects Your Social Security Benefit

There are many ways to get Social Security information other than going to an office



Increasingly, older Americans are choosing to stay in the work force after retirement age. How does continuing to earn an income impact there Social Security benefit? Oscar Garcia, Informational Specialist with the Social Security Administration, has the answer in this week's Q&A on Social Security.

There is a lot of Social Security business that can be handled online. Just go to www.socialsecurity.gov. Here, you can handle much of your Social Security business quickly and securely from your home or office computer, or your tablet.

At the Social Security website you can apply for retirement, disability, spouse's, and Medicare benefits. You can also create a "my Social Security" account for quick access to your information, and you can get an instant, personalized estimate of your future Social Security benefits. You will be able to check the status of your benefit application....[Read More](#)

Seniors Obtain Budget Management Help from New EconomicCheckUp Online Tool

Free site by National Council on Aging helped seniors save \$250 a month in test run

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) has launched a new online tool, EconomicCheckUp, to assist America's senior citizens with budgeting, saving money, employment, and achieving greater financial security.

"Nearly half of all older adults are economically insecure, living one bad break away from economic crisis," said Ramsey Alwin, NCOA's vice president of economic security.

"EconomicCheckUp enables low- and middle-income seniors to understand their financial situation better and find personalized, appropriate solutions to save money."

EconomicCheckUp asks a series of questions to help older adults identify benefits and services that could save money; find ways to cut expenses; better utilize existing assets, such as wages and home equity; and develop a concrete plan to achieve greater economic security...[Read More](#)

