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RI ARA

*Affiliated with the Rhode Island AFL-CIO
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December 7, 2015 E-Newsletter

Senator Warren & Congresswoman Duckworth

Companion Bill to Sen. Warren's Legislation Providing Seniors One-time Payment of \$581 Introduced in House



Senator Warren

On November 5th, Sen. Elizabeth Warren introduced S. 2251, the Seniors and Veterans Emergency (SAVE) Benefits Act. This bill would help seniors and veterans by providing a one-time benefit of \$581 to offset last month's announcement by the Social Security Administration that, despite rising costs of many necessities, there would be no cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for beneficiaries next year.

Yesterday, Rep. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) introduced H.R. 4144, the companion legislation in the U.S. House.

Passage of this bill would help bring our economy into balance and make an important statement about fairness. The payment amount equals 3.9% of the average Social Security benefit, and 3.9% is the average increase in pay last year for the nation's top 350 CEOs.

It is entirely appropriate that these one-time payments to Social Security beneficiaries would be funded by eliminating the CEO performance pay tax break. The revenue gained from closing the tax loophole would then be dedicated to Social Security, strengthening the long-range projected solvency of the Social Security Trust Fund.

Passing this bill is one step we can take to improve our retirement security. Congress should also require the Social Security Administration to base future COLAs on the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E), which much more accurately reflects the cost of things retirees purchase, such as health care and housing.

The Alliance and other groups including the AFL-CIO, AFSCME, and Social Security Works are among the many organizations who have already endorsed the legislation.

We applaud Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) for introducing companion SAVE Act legislative (H.R. 4144) in the House of Representatives.

RI Senator Whitehouse has signed on as a Co-Sponsor to S. 2251.

RI Congressmen Langevin & Cicilline have signed on as a Co-sponsor to H. 4144.



Congresswoman Duckworth

ORGANIZATIONAL SIGN-ON LETTER OPPOSING THE TPP

Living & Learning BloggerDear friends:

Thank you to the more than 750 organizations who have already joined the sign-on letter below opposing the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). If your group hasn't joined yet, can you please help us break 1,000 by adding your organization's name today?



As might be expected from a trade agreement negotiated behind-closed doors with the aid of hundreds of corporate advisors, while the public and press were shut out, the recently-revealed TPP text shows the pact to pose significant threats to jobs and wages, the environment, food safety, public health and democracy itself. We need everyone to come together now with a unified voice against the TPP.

Please click here now to add your organization's name to the organizational sign-on letter below.

Time is of the essence. Next Monday, December 7th, we will evaluate how many groups have signed on and make a decision about whether to close the letter for signatures. If you haven't already, please sign now to ensure your group is included. Any help forwarding this to other groups and appropriate listservs is also very much appreciated.

Many thanks, Arthur Stamoulis, Executive Director, Citizens Trade Campaign

Old Age Isn't So Old Anymore

A new study confirms that boomers are changing what aging means

By *Bryce Kirchoff*



Boomers have always done things a little differently — including how they age. Bolstered by medical advances extending physical mobility and activity and the widened horizons brought on by the Internet era and **social media connectivity**, this generation is proving that getting older has never looked so good.

A **new German study released last week confirms** that older adults can expect to age better than ever. On average, the study says, today's 75-year-olds are cognitively much fitter than the 75-year-olds of 20 years ago. Those involved in the study also reported higher levels of well-being and greater life satisfaction.

"The gains in cognitive functioning and well-being are considerable, and of great significance for life quality in old age," said Ulman Lindenberger, director of the **Center for Lifespan Psychology** at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development.

The study was run by a team of researchers representing several major universities and research centers in Germany, including Lindenberger's. Its findings are based on data gathered from 708 adults aged 60 and over.

The study will be published soon in the scientific journal **Psychology and Aging**.

Senate Investigates Pharmaceutical Company Charging \$84,000 for Hepatitis C Drug

An 18-month bipartisan Senate investigation examined Gilead Sciences' Hepatitis C drug, Sovaldi, for its \$84,000 price tag for a 12-week course of the medication. However, that price tag is only the beginning of the story, as its successor drug, Harvoni, costs patients \$94,500 for a 12-week course. On Tuesday senators came down hard on Gilead for the prices it set for its treatment by releasing a scathing report.

A recent Kaiser Health tracking poll found that 7 out of 10 people surveyed across party lines feel that government intervention to lower prescription drug prices should be a top priority.

"This is only one example of greed by the pharmaceutical industry, but this one is beyond the stratosphere," said Richard Fiesta, Executive Director of the Alliance. "Baby Boomers represent 81% of the nearly 3 million Americans chronically infected by hepatitis C. If these companies are left unchecked, what happens when Alzheimer's or Diabetes cures are introduced to market?" ...**Read More**



Senate Votes to Repeal Obamacare during Vote-a-Rama



The U.S. Senate voted on multiple amendments on Thursday as part of the annual budget reconciliation process. The day is informally known as vote-a-rama day, when each amendment is discussed and voted on in just 10 minutes. Past 'vote-a-ramas' went into the wee hours of the morning.

The Senate voted to repeal key provisions of Obamacare, passing the bill 52-47. Two moderate Republicans — Susan Collins of Maine and Mark Kirk of Illinois — joined Democrats in opposing it. The legislation still must be approved by the House, which passed a different version in October. The White House said Wednesday that President Obama will veto the bill if it reaches his desk.

The bill would eliminate federal subsidies to about 6 million low- and moderate-income Americans buying their own health insurance. And it would halt Obamacare's expansion of Medicaid for the economically disadvantaged, which has been adopted by more than 30 states. Those two provisions would take effect in two years, giving Republicans until after the 2016 election to come up with a new plan to replace the existing program. It would also gut other key sections of the health care law, including the mandate for individuals to buy health insurance and for employers with more than 50 workers to provide it.

"Fortunately, President Obama has a veto pen or this would be a disaster," said Joseph Peters, Jr., Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "If we implemented Obamacare's Medicaid expansion in all 50 states, rather than eliminated it, an additional **21.3 million** Americans could gain health coverage by 2022."

Aid-In-Dying advocacy group ready for battles after California victory

Check map to see if your state is considering aid-in-dying or already has it

By *Phil Galewitz, Kaiser Health News*



Fresh off a political triumph in California, the nation's chief advocacy group for physician-assisted suicide laws, Compassion & Choices, is mobilizing for many more battles on behalf of terminally ill patients.

Since **Gov. Jerry Brown signed** California's end-of-life options bill last month, a new chapter is starting for **Compassion & Choices**, a Denver-based nonprofit that led the campaign for the measure and has pushed for such laws for nearly 19 years. California is the fifth state, and largest by far, to allow physicians to prescribe lethal doses of drugs to patients who want to end their lives in their last stages of terminal illnesses.

Aid-in-dying bills were introduced this year in 23 state legislatures, plus in the District of Columbia, up from four last year, according to Compassion & Choices. Despite formidable opposition from the Catholic Church, disabled-rights groups and parts of the medical community, the group sees its strength growing.

Contributions and grants reached \$17.1 million in the 2013-2014 fiscal year, more than double the previous five years' average, its latest IRS filings on **Charity Navigator** show. A \$2 million contribution from billionaire financier George Soros' Open Society Foundations was the third largest from more than 50,000 donors.

Compassion & Choices' volunteer force has tripled since mid-2014, numbering about 3,500 now, according to the group. The shift in statehouse sentiment is powered by polls measuring a sizeable boost in public support for doctors helping terminally ill patients die – 68 percent favored it in 2015, a 17-point swing in two years, **according to Gallup**.

The polling firm credits the impact of the national spotlight on **Brittany Maynard's death** one year ago on Nov. 1. A California newlywed with terminal brain cancer, Maynard chose to end her life on her terms in Oregon where the state allowed physicians to prescribe lethal drugs. Compassion & Choices connected with Maynard through a friend, and then worked to publicize her story, assisting in producing two widely-watched video interviews on YouTube and helping line up a People magazine article that put her on **the cover** shortly before her death at age 29.

Maynard spoke movingly about why she chose to control the timing of her death and spare herself and her family the added pain of waiting for a natural death. Her story put a compelling human face on an emotionally sensitive national debate that Compassion & Choices played an influential part in shaping.

"Brittany was young and full of life and saw her life horribly interrupted by brain cancer," said Jessica Grennan, national political advocacy director for the group. "She could talk about what her wishes were and do so eloquently ... and that really made everyone question what they wanted at the end of their life." ... **Read More**

Need for palliative care highlighted by new aid-in-dying laws

Contrary to some patients' fears, palliative care doctors are not there to hasten death

By *Anna Gorman, Kaiser Health News*

More times than she can count, Dr. Carin van Zyl has heard terminally ill patients beg to die. They tell her they can't handle the pain, that the nausea is unbearable and the anxiety overwhelming.

If she were in the same situation, she too would want life-ending medication, even though she doubts she would ever take it. "I would want an escape hatch," she said.

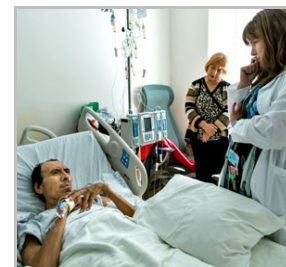
Earlier this month, California law became the fifth — and largest — state to allow physicians to prescribe lethal medications to certain patients who ask for it.

Yet van Zyl can't see herself as one of those doctors.

"This is my life's work, to relieve suffering," said van Zyl, head of palliative care medicine at Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center. To her, that does not mean cutting short a life.

"I can't imagine pulling the trigger," she said.

Weeks after California Gov. Jerry Brown signed the "end-of-life option act" into law, palliative care physicians like van Zyl are trying to come to terms with what it means for them and their terminally ill patients. ... **Read More**



Dr. Carin van Zyl talks to patient Jose Garcia Flores about his treatment. (Photo by Heidi de Marco/KHN)

Smart Walker robot to help elderly increase mobility funded by NIH

Two other robots on tap to help visually impaired; promote curiosity and determination in children



A four-legged robot that enhances mobility, so that the elderly can remain physically active and enjoy a healthier life with reduced reliance on the assistance of caregivers or expensive home renovations has been announced as A new project of the National Robotics Initiative (NRI), the National Institutes of Health.

The Smart Walker for senior citizens is one of three innovative co-robots - robots that work cooperatively with people announced today. Two of the robots, including the walker, will improve health and quality of life for individuals with disabilities, and the third will serve as a social companion for children that inspires curiosity and teaches the importance of hard work and determination.

Funding for the NIH projects will total approximately \$2.2 million over the next five years, subject to the availability of funds.

“When the general public thinks about the research that NIH supports, they don’t usually imagine robots. But robots have a tremendous potential to contribute to the health and well-being of our society, whether they are helping an elderly person engage in physical activity or promoting the curiosity of a child,” said Grace Peng, Ph.D., program director of Rehabilitation Engineering at the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering, part of NIH.

“These three highly innovative projects demonstrate the power of encouraging leaders in the field of robotics to focus their attention on solving issues that pertain to health.”

This is the fourth year the NIH has participated in the interagency NRI initiative. The National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of Defense also supported the development of new co-robots this year....[Read More](#)

New Guidelines Boost Diabetes Screening For Overweight Adults

By Michelle Andrews

More people who are overweight or obese may get screened for diabetes under [new guidelines](#) released this week by a panel of prevention experts. Those whose blood sugar is higher than normal now can be referred to nutrition and exercise counseling without paying anything out of pocket for it.

“Obesity and overweight have been risk factors all along for diabetes,” says Dr. Wanda Filer, president of the American Academy of Family Physicians. “But we haven’t had guidelines that actually said, ‘Screen those folks.

[The new guidelines update](#) the task force’s 2008 recommendation, which advised screening asymptomatic adults if they had high blood pressure....[Read More](#)



The New England ARA state affiliates are actively pursuing these Petitions.

Petition Subject: Observation Status: “Current Hospital Issues in the Medicare Program”

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

Petition Subject: House Concurrent Resolution 37 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 12 to get power doors installed in Post Offices and other federal buildings.

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Petition Subject: 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.973 & S.1651

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