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Seniors Watching to Ensure the 114th Congress Does Not Cut Their Earned Social Security and Medicare Benefits

Key Committee Chairs Scored 0% on Legislation Important to Seniors

The following statement was issued today by Richard Fiesta,

Executive Director of the Alliance for Retired Americans, as the first session of the 114th Congress convened.

“Retirees will be watching the 114th Congress this year to see if it protects seniors or instead follows a radical right-wing agenda and enacts legislation that cuts seniors’ earned Social Security and Medicare benefits. Retirees will have some very specific questions in mind. For instance:

- Will Congress “voucherize” Medicare and turn it over to private insurance companies?
- Will Congress pass Medicare legislation that shifts additional health care costs to seniors?
- Will Congress try to use fast-track authority to cut Social Security benefits?
- Will “Reform to Save” mean cuts to important safety-net programs such as Meals on Wheels?

Will Americans continue to pay the highest prescription drug prices in the world?

“Seniors certainly hope that the answers to these questions is ‘No,’ but there is reason to worry. According to the Alliance for Retired Americans’ most recent Congressional Voting Record (<http://tinyurl.com/kxfrped>), the House Majority Whip and key U.S. House committee chairs all scored 0% on legislation that was important to seniors in 2013.

“They include Majority Whip Steve Scalise (LA); Agriculture Committee Chairman Michael Conaway (TX); Budget Committee Chairman Tom Price (GA); Financial Services Committee Chairman Jeb Hensarling (TX); Judiciary Committee Chairman Robert Goodlatte (VA); Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz (UT); Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (FL); and Ways and Means Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (WI), whose policies have been studied in-depth by the Alliance when he was Chairman of the Budget Committee (<http://tinyurl.com/ow267fc>).

“In the Senate, both Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (KY) and Majority Whip John Cornyn (TX) scored 0% on seniors’ issues in the Alliance’s 2013 Voting Record – as did Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee Chairman Richard Shelby (AL); and Budget Committee Chairman Mike Enzi (WY).

“The Alliance for Retired Americans remains deeply supportive of the efforts of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (CA) and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (NV), each of whom scored 100% on the Alliance’s voting record in 2013. We remain confident in their ability and willingness to stand up for seniors and provide a firewall against attacks on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.”



Budget and Tax Plans Should Not Rely on “Dynamic Scoring” Estimates Are Highly Uncertain and Subject to Manipulation

By Paul N. Van de Water and Chye-Ching Huang

Dynamic Scoring – direct the Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Tax to use this method of scoring. This method is a way to cook the books and make tax cuts appear attractive. In essence, it could make tax cuts appear to grow the economy and therefore not increase deficits. [For more on Dynamic Scoring click here.](#)

[Dynamic Scoring, this was the first substantive act of the new, all-Republican Congress.](#)

Letter to Leader Pelosi Opposing DI Provision in Proposed House Rules

This is a letter that was sent to Leader Pelosi expressing the Alliance's opposition to a provision in the proposed House rules that would prohibit reallocation between the Social Security trust funds. This is a direct attack on the Social Security beneficiaries. Republicans are including this provision, as well as the following harmful provisions in their proposed House Rules for the 114th Congress:

January 6, 2015

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Office of Democratic Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the four million members of the Alliance for Retired Americans, we are writing in strong opposition to the provision in the proposed House rules that establishes a point of order prohibiting reallocation from the Old Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) trust fund to the Disability Insurance (DI) trust fund within the Social Security program. This procedural change to the House rules is unprecedented. It will have the effect of holding the DI trust fund hostage, and is a direct attack on seniors, disabled Americans and the Social Security trust fund.

As you may know, reallocation between the OASI and DI trust funds is common practice and has occurred 11 times in the past. In 1983, during the Reagan Administration, funding from the DI trust fund was temporarily reallocated to the OASI program to cover the anticipated shortfall. Similarly, temporarily reallocating funds from the OASI trust fund to the DI trust fund during the next few years would extend the solvency of the DI trust fund for almost two decades. This rebalancing would not endanger the OASI, since the solvency of the combined trust funds would remain at 2033.

Voting in support of this House rule constitutes a complete disregard for keeping the promise to hardworking Americans who have contributed to Social Security. The four million members of the Alliance for Retired Americans will be watching how Congress votes on this issue.


Sincerely yours,

Barbara Easterling, President • Ruben Burks, Secretary-Treasurer • Richard J. Fiesta, Executive Director

Pension Measure Seen as Model for Further Cuts

Sweetheart deal? Unions allowed to cut retiree benefits rather than fix underfunded pensions

By *Jeffrey Scott Shapiro* - *The Washington Times*

 The United Food and Commercial Workers Union is a heavyweight on the labor scene. It pays its president \$350,000 a year. It's holding its next executive board meeting in February at the Diplomat Resort and Spa beachfront resort in Hollywood, Florida. The hotel confirmed that the meeting is set for the first week in February. And it just doled out nearly \$8 million to influence the last election and lobby Washington.

But when it comes to standing by the obligation unions made to provide pensions to retirees, UFCW pleaded poverty in persuading Congress to let chronically underfunded union pension plans cut the benefits of workers, including those already retired.

Further angering opponents of the new law is that many of the unions that sought help for underfunded pension funds continue to spend graciously on politics, lobbying and their own top executives.

Mr. Hansen's last compensation of record in UFCW's official records was more than \$350,000 annually in 2013. His union spent \$7.7 million on election campaigns plus \$300,000 on lobbying this year, according to Federal Election Commission records and lobbying reports filed with the Senate.

Numerous other unions, many of them big spenders on the political front, also lobbied for the concession. Congress obliged in a last-minute deal approved by lawmakers as they fled town for Christmas break. On Dec. 15, President Obama signed the Multiemployer Pension Reform Act of 2014 into law, empowering any multiemployer pension fund — commonly managed by unions — to cut benefits for workers and current retirees if the plan is 20 percent or more underfunded...[Read More](#)

Numerous unions, including the Service Employees International Union, The Teamster, particularly the Central States Pension Fund, were in favor of the legislation. However, after getting a lot of negative feedback from members, they backed off.

Most cancers are just bad luck, others from bad genes, environment

Best way to eradicate these cancers will be through early detection, when they are still curable by surgery



Two thirds of cancers in adults are just bad luck and the rest are due to inherited genes and environmental factors, according to scientists from the Johns Hopkins Kimmel Cancer Center. They created a statistical model that measures the proportion of cancer incidence, across many tissue types, caused mainly by random mutations that occur when stem cells divide.

“All cancers are caused by a combination of bad luck, the environment and heredity, and we’ve created a model that may help quantify how much of these three factors contribute to cancer development,” says Bert Vogelstein, M.D., the Clayton Professor of Oncology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, co-director of the Ludwig Center at Johns

Hopkins and an investigator at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

“Cancer-free longevity in people exposed to cancer-causing agents, such as tobacco, is often attributed to their ‘good genes,’ but the truth is that most of them simply had good luck,” adds Vogelstein, who cautions that poor lifestyles can add to the bad luck factor in the development of cancer.

The implications of their model range from altering public perception about cancer risk factors to the funding of cancer research, they say.

“If two-thirds of cancer incidence across tissues is explained by random DNA mutations that occur when stem cells divide, then changing our lifestyle and habits will be a huge help in preventing certain cancers, but this may not be as effective for a variety of others,” says biomathematician Cristian Tomasetti, Ph.D., an assistant professor of oncology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and Bloomberg School of Public Health.

“We should focus more resources on finding ways to detect such cancers at early, curable stages,” he adds...[Read](#)

[More](#)

Eating more whole grains lowers mortality, especially cardiovascular

Just one slice of whole grain bread makes significant difference; whole grains may confer benefits toward longer life expectancy

We have all been encouraged to “eat more whole grains” and now there is proof that we should. Eating more whole grains – the more the better - appears to be associated with reduced mortality, especially deaths due to cardiovascular disease (CVD), but, unfortunately, not cancer deaths, according to a report published online by *JAMA Internal Medicine*.



Whole grains are widely recommended in many dietary guidelines as healthful food. However, data regarding how much whole grains people eat and mortality have before been somewhat inconsistent.

To clarify this obviously valuable information, Hongyu Wu, Ph.D., Harvard School of Public Health, and coauthors examined the association between eating whole grains and the risk of death using data from two large studies:

- 74,341 women from the Nurses’ Health Study (1984-2010) and
- 43,744 men from the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study (1986-2010).

All the participants were free of cancer and CVD when the studies began.

The authors documented 26,920 deaths.

After the data were adjusted for potential confounding factors including age, smoking and body mass index, the study found that eating more whole grains was associated with lower total mortality and lower CVD mortality but not cancer deaths.

The information of enough to enable the authors further to estimate that every serving (28 grams/per day) of whole grains was associated with 5 percent lower total mortality or 9 percent lower CVD mortality....[Read More](#)

[How to decipher labels and choose the healthiest bread](#)

By Elaine Magee, MPH, RD, WebMD Expert Column

Avocado a day may help keep bad cholesterol at bay

Individuals age 21 up to seniors age 70 on moderate-fat diet who ate an avocado daily had lower bad cholesterol than those on a similar diet without avocado



Eating one avocado a day as part of a heart healthy, cholesterol-lowering moderate-fat diet can help improve **bad cholesterol** levels in overweight and obese individuals, according to new research published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*.

Researchers evaluated the effect avocados had on traditional and novel cardiovascular risk factors by replacing saturated fatty acids from an average American diet with unsaturated fatty acids from avocados.

Forty-five healthy, overweight or obese patients between the ages of 21 and 70 were put on three different cholesterol-lowering diets. Participants consumed an average American diet (consisting of 34 percent of calories from fat, 51 percent carbohydrates, and 16 percent protein) for two weeks prior to starting one of the following cholesterol lowering diets: **Lower fat diet without avocado, moderate-fat diet without avocado, and moderate-fat diet with one avocado per day.**

The two moderate fat diets both provided 34 percent of calories as fat (17 percent of calories from **monounsaturated fatty acids**/MUFAs), whereas the lower fat diet provided 24 percent of calories as fat (11 percent from MUFAs). Each participant consumed each of the three test diet for five weeks. Participants were randomly sequenced through each of the three diets....[Read More](#)

Five fun reasons to start an indoor garden when life gets more restricting

Moving to smaller space, restricted mobility offer new opportunities for senior gardeners

by Arar Han, Certified Aging in Place Specialist

Gardening is hardly ever a casual hobby. Most 'green thumbs' regard the first time they were handed a spade with the same warm nostalgia as their high school graduation, wedding day, or the birth of their first child. If you are a gardener, you know it's true!

If you have recently moved into a smaller space or your mobility is not what it used to be, you may be nervous that you have to give up your favorite pastime. Not so! There are tons of plants that thrive indoors - and at least five reasons why planter gardening is actually superior to maintaining outdoor beds....[Read More](#)



Spanish Friday Alert now Available

The *Friday Alert* will now be available each week in Spanish! To see last week's *Alerta Semanal*, go to <http://tinyurl.com/mq7gpry>. For the Alliance's Spanish language page, which includes fact sheets and other translated documents from the main site, go to <http://tinyurl.com/nllcz6n>. More outreach from the Alliance to the Hispanic elder community will be coming in the next few months.

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

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

ADD
YOUR
NAME

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

Petition Subject: House Concurrent Resolution 67 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 26 to get power doors installed in Post Offices and other federal buildings.

ADD
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NAME

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

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 3118 & S 896

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