



## Blame the Unions, "Senator Mitch McConnell Does"



**Mitch McConnell. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)**

After spending the better part of a decade obstructing majority rule in the US Senate, and preventing the Congress from acting on fundamental issues that are of concern to the great mass of Americans, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has figured out who is to blame for mistrust of government: public employees and their unions.

Declaring that he wants to open up a "serious national debate" about public-sector unions, the Kentucky Republican came out swinging at a Friday event with the American Enterprise Institute. "They are the reason so many state and local municipalities are flat broke," he said of unions that represent public employees at the local, state and federal levels of government. "They're behind the unsustainable expansion of public pensions. They're a major problem."

McConnell even went so far as to suggest that unions are to blame for inappropriate targeting for extra scrutiny of requests for charity exemptions

from groups with Tea Party ties.

Referring to the National Treasury Employees Union, which represents Internal Revenue Service workers, the senator asked: "Why would we even expect a public employee-whose union more or less exists to grow the government-to treat someone who opposes that goal to a fair hearing?"

The senator has also suggested that President Obama's criticisms of conservative groups influenced choices made by IRS employees.

But when he is pressed on the issue, McConnell backs off-trying to have it both ways with a line about how: "The president and his political allies encouraged this kind of bureaucratic overreach by their public comments. But that's quite different from saying they ordered it. I think with regard to who's actually responsible for it we need to find out, and that investigation will go on for quite some time."

So why is McConnell bashing the NTEU?

As NTEU President Colleen Kelley told The Hill, the senator "has long...opposed the existence of public sector unions." NTEU is not the only target of McConnell's wrath. He's

generally upset with public-sector unions: the American Federation of Government Employees; the National Weather Service Employees Organization; the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; the International Association of Fire Fighters... you name it.

On this point, McConnell is blunt, declaring that "public sector unions are a fifty-year mistake."

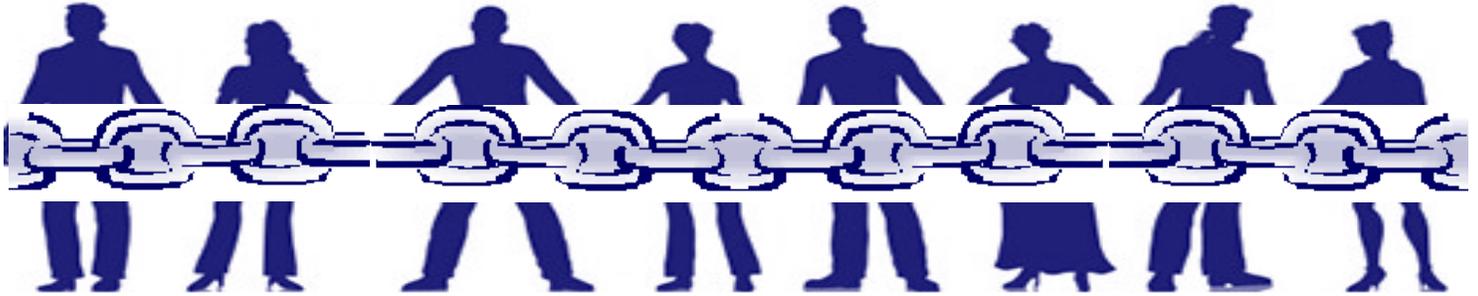
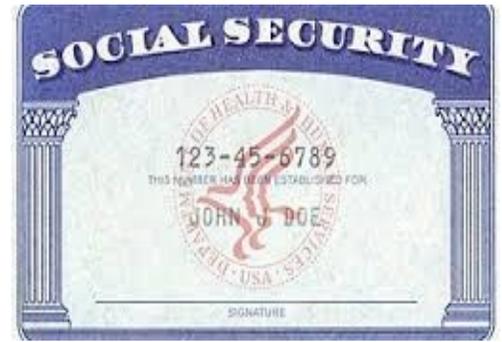
Charging that elected officials who accept the endorsements of public-sector unions-including, presumably, a number of his Republican colleagues-are responsible for "the fleecing" of taxpayers through a vast expansion of government, the Senate minority leader said: "That's what happens when politicians start competing for the support of public-sector unions: they stop serving the interests of the people who elected them and start serving the interests of a government they're supposed to be keeping in check."

McConnell says that public-sector unions, such as the NTEU, don't care about "how well government works, or how well it's serving the public."

In fact, the NTEU recently led the fight on a host of high-profile customs and border security issues, seeking to

maintain operations at US airports, seaports and land border crossings in this period of sequestration. The union has fought to maintain the federal Food and Drug Administration's "vital, complex public health responsibilities, that include safe food, medicine and medical devices, cannot be accomplished with this level of funding." It has campaigned for cost savings by seeking approval of a plan to "reduce substantially the amount taxpayers have to pay in salary reimbursements for government contractors." And it's been in the forefront of efforts to protect whistleblowers and to promote transparency.

It is true that NTEU and other federal, state and local public-sector unions defend the interests of their members. That's what labor organizations do. But when McConnell and his minions imagine that federal unions have no concern for the public interest, they miss the reality that these unions are often the loudest and most determined defenders of programs that most Americans consider to be vital.



**Some Cuts Never Heal  
Stand With Us &  
Senator Sheldon Whitehouse  
Congressman James Langevin  
Against the Chained CPI  
Social Security Benefit Cut**

**National Day of Action  
Tuesday, July 2, 2013 • 10:30 AM**

**Salvatore Mancini Activity & Resource Center  
2 Atlantic Blvd., North Providence, RI  
Contact John A Pernorio, RI ARA President  
401-722-2770 • [riarajap@hotmail.com](mailto:riarajap@hotmail.com)**

## Chained CPI or another Topic on Your Mind?

### Write a Letter to the Editor, Win a Pen!



With the July 2 Human Chain events fast approaching, Alliance members have an excellent opportunity to write a letter to the editor in their local paper. If you want others to know about the chained CPI or another topic, take a moment and write that letter. If it is published, the Alliance will send you a free, union-made “Retirees with the Write Stuff” pen. Most recently, **Edward Corrigan, Teresa Ewbank, Lynda Fainter, Gary Hall, Janice Laue, Bob Laurence, Jewel Littenberg, Al Mumm, Lester Newton, William Stevens, and Ron Thompson** contributed to their local papers. Please e-mail [aracommunications@retiredamericans.org](mailto:aracommunications@retiredamericans.org) if you have had a letter published. “Letters to the editor are a cost-effective way to get our message out,” said Mr. Burks.

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## WHY 2014 COULD BE THE YEAR OF THE SENIOR

*Doug Schoen, Forbes*



For both Democrats and Republicans, the good news is that the senior vote is still gettable.

However, a good portion of voters over 65 pay close attention to policy specifics, making it more important to ensure that both parties recognize this. Preserving programs that work, while prioritizing seniors’ long-term interests, will yield significant political dividends in 2014 and beyond.

Neither side can afford losing them...[Read More](#)

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## Alliance Members Join Leader Pelosi, Secretary Sebelius at Capitol Hill Press Event

On Wednesday on Capitol Hill, Alliance members and political leaders celebrated the one-year anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling on the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act and marked the countdown - fewer than 100 days left - until the next provision of the law is implemented on October 1, 2013. The event noted the re-launch of web sites [www.HealthCare.Gov](http://www.HealthCare.Gov) and [www.CuidadoDeSalud.Gov](http://www.CuidadoDeSalud.Gov), which offer in English and Spanish, respectively, new tools that will help Americans understand their choices and select the coverage that best suits their needs when open enrollment in the new Health Insurance Marketplace begins October 1.

The event featured U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary **Kathleen Sebelius**; House Minority Leader **Nancy Pelosi**; Minority Whip **Steny Hoyer**, Assistant Democratic Leader **James Clyburn**, and a score of other Representatives. Maryland/DC Alliance members **Annie Leach, Audrey Bell, and Minnie Jacobs**, all of Suitland, Maryland, joined the government officials on stage. Ms. Leach spoke about taken advantage of a free wellness check-up; initially she had received a bill, but an ally, **Tara Maxwell**, informed the doctor on her behalf that the Affordable Care Act covered it. For video footage of the event, go to <http://tinyurl.com/op2rqau>. For photos, go to <http://tinyurl.com/q38pgfj>.

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## Two New Reports From Economic Policy Institute Blast Rhode Island Pension Changes

**Report 1** - Rhode Island’s New Hybrid Pension Plan Will Cost the State More While Reducing Retiree Benefits  
This issue brief begins by comparing RIRSA with the pension plan it replaced. It then analyzes RIRSA’s impacts on Rhode Island state employees, as well as on the state’s finances. Key findings include:...

[Read the Full Report](#)



## SUPREME COURT

### Supreme Court's "Defense of Marriage Act" Decision to Affect Gay Seniors Greatly

On Wednesday, June 26th, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a key provision of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), meaning that the spousal benefits of Social Security and Medicare will be extended to married, same-sex couples. The Administration on Aging estimates that there are between 1.75 million and 4 million Americans over the age of 60 who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). Many LGBT seniors who live in states with legalized same sex marriage have wed. Until Wednesday, due to DOMA, these seniors did not have the same federal benefits and protections as heterosexual couples. This had particularly broad implications with regard to Social Security. The Social Security spousal retirement benefit allows the partner in a couple with the lower earnings record to receive an amount equal to 50% of their spouse's Social Security benefits. The survivor benefit allows surviving spouses to receive Social Security equivalent to what their spouse with a higher earnings record received..[Read More](#)

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### JUSTICES BLOCK GENERIC DRUG LIABILITY LAWSUITS

*Lawrence Hurley and Bill Berkrot, Reuters*

The Supreme Court ruled on Monday, June 24, 2013, that generic drugmakers cannot be sued under state law for adverse reactions to their products, a decision that consumer advocates called a blow to patient safety.

In a 5-4 vote, the court ruled for Mutual Pharmaceutical Co, owned by Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd, overturning a multimillion-dollar jury award to a badly injured patient in New Hampshire who alleged a generic drug she had taken was unsafe based on its chemical design...[Read More](#)

### SUPREME COURT STRIKES DOWN KEY PART OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT

*Adam Liptak, New York Times*

The Supreme Court on Tuesday effectively struck down the heart of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by a 5-to-4 vote, ruling that Congress had not provided adequate justification for subjecting nine states, mostly in the South, to federal oversight.

The court divided along ideological lines, and the two sides drew sharply different lessons from the history of the civil rights movement and the nation's progress in rooting out racial discrimination in voting. At the core of the disagreement was whether racial minorities continued to face barriers to voting in states with a history of discrimination...[Read More](#)

### Supreme Court Bolsters Gay Marriage With Two Major Rulings

*Adam Liptak, New York Times*

WASHINGTON — In a pair of major victories for the gay rights movement, the Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that married same-sex couples were entitled to federal benefits and, by declining to decide a case from California, effectively allowed same-sex marriages there...[Read More](#)

## SURGERY COST CAPS SAVE PENSION FUND 19% WITHOUT HURTING HEALTH

*Alex Nussbaum, Bloomberg*



The nation's largest pension fund and health insurer WellPoint Inc. (WLP) cut medical costs 19 percent by capping the price of some surgeries, in the latest sign payers are taking a tougher line against rising hospital claims.

The California Public Employees Retirement System saved \$5.5 million under a pilot project it started with WellPoint in 2011, according to a study released by the Indianapolis-based insurer yesterday at a Baltimore health conference. Retirees proved at least as healthy as those who didn't opt for the lower-cost procedures, WellPoint said...[Read More](#)

## AS HOSPITALS BUY PHYSICIAN PRACTICES, COSTS RISE, MEDICARE REPORT FINDS

*Letitia Stein, Tampa Bay Times*

As they buy up physician practices, hospitals promise to streamline patient care and cut costs. But just the opposite is happening, warns a federal Medicare advisory panel.

The same services cost the government's Medicare program much more when performed on an outpatient basis at a hospital, rather than at a doctor's office.

A common type of echocardiogram can be done in a doctor's office for \$188. But for the same procedure in a hospital setting, the total payment is \$453, reported the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission.

A 15-minute evaluation visit nets \$72.50 in a doctor's office — \$58 paid by Medicare and a \$14.50 patient co-pay. But as a hospital outpatient evaluation, that same visit is worth 70 percent more, or a total of \$123.38...[Read More](#)



## CURE FOR AFFORDABLE MEDICAL DEVICES

*Jonathan Blum, Politico*



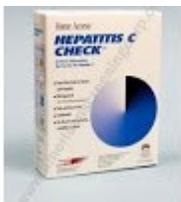
For years, Medicare has been paying sky-high prices for basic equipment like wheelchairs and walkers based on outdated and overpriced payment rates. It was a great deal for the industry, but not a great one for taxpayers and people with Medicare. These inflated Medicare payment rates also helped fuel the rampant proliferation fraud, waste and abuse of durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics and supplies — or DMEPOS — benefit.



In 2011, as required by law, CMS implemented a DMEPOS competitive bidding program to bring prices for certain medical equipment and supplies in line with the current market, and to help limit fraud and abuse in the Medicare program. The program has saved more than \$400 million in its first two years of operation in only nine areas of the country without diminishing beneficiary access to quality equipment or resulting in negative health outcomes for beneficiaries. This program is a great example of a successful bipartisan initiative passed by a Republican Congress in 2003 and ultimately implemented by the Obama administration to put the brakes on runaway DMEPOS spending...[Read More](#)

## HEPATITIS C TEST FOR BABY BOOMERS URGED BY HEALTH PANEL

*Andrew Pollack, New York Times*



An influential health advisory group has reversed itself and concluded that all baby boomers should be tested for hepatitis C, meaning that under the new health law many insurance plans will have to provide screening without charge to patients.

The group, the United States Preventive Services Task Force, announced its [change of heart](#) on Monday, saying there was likely to be some benefit from such screening...[Read More](#)