

November 14, 2016 E-Newsletter

Social Security is in Grave Danger



Although Americans Are United in Support of Expanding Social Security

"As divided as our country is in many respects, there are some fundamental values that unite us, including rewarding hard work and caring for our parents, children, and neighbors," said Nancy Altman, founding Co-Director of Social Security Works. "Social Security embodies those values, so it is no surprise that Americans of all stripes are united around expanding Social Security."

The polling found that expanding Social Security is supported by:

- ◆ 75 percent of men and 69 percent of women
- ◆ 69 percent of whites, 82 percent of

African-Americans, and 79 percent of Latinos

- ◆ 70 percent of 18-29 year olds, 65 percent of 30-45 year olds, 76 percent of 46-65 year olds, and 70 percent of Americans over 65
- ◆ 87 percent of Democrats, 73 percent of Independents, and 51 percent of

However Now Social Security is in Grave Danger

(Washington, DC) — The following is a statement from Nancy Altman, founding co-director of Social Security Works:

"With Republicans soon to be in full control of Congress and the White House, Social Security and Medicare are at greater risk than they have been for a long time. Speaker Paul Ryan has spent decades working to cut, privatize, and dismantle these vital programs. We fully

expect him to redouble these efforts during Donald Trump's administration.

During the presidential campaign, Trump promised that he would not cut Social Security or Medicare. While we were skeptical of this pledge, it showed that he understands the politics of Social Security very well – Americans of all ages, races, genders, and political affiliations are **overwhelmingly opposed** to cuts.

We hope that the President-Elect's pledge is one he will honor. In standing up to Ryan and other powerful Republicans, he would be standing up for the American people. Our job will be to hold Trump accountable to his "no cuts" pledge, and convince him to work with Democrats to expand Social Security. If he violates his pledge, we will make sure the American people know it."

California voters turn down drug pricing initiative

Even when we have a chance to beat big PhRma, we don't. Sad.

The California Drug Price Relief Act, also known as Proposition 61, sought to limit state health programs from paying more for medications than the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which receives the steepest discounts in the country.

As of Wednesday morning, with more than 99 percent of precincts partially reporting from Tuesday's election, the vote was 46 percent in favor of the measure and 54 percent opposed, according to California's Secretary of State.

"The pharmaceutical companies spent a lot to defeat this," said Stuart Schweitzer, professor of health policy and management at the University of California, Los Angeles Fielding School of Public Health. "They wanted to draw a

line in the sand."

The measure's defeat "reaffirms the power of the biopharma lobby," Jefferies analyst Brian Abrahams said in a note to investors on Wednesday.

The rising cost of prescription drugs came under attack during the U.S. presidential campaign. Both President-elect Donald Trump and Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton called for cost-trimming measures including allowing Medicare, the federal health plan for seniors, to negotiate prices with drugmakers.

Shares in pharmaceutical and biotechnology shares, under pressure in recent weeks, soared on Wednesday as market fears of a win by Clinton and Democrats gaining power in Congress receded. The Nasdaq Biotechnology index .NBI advanced 7 percent and was on track for its biggest single-day gain in

about five years.

Proposition 61's opponents, led by global drugmakers such as Pfizer Inc and Amgen Inc, spent around \$106 million.

They argued that it would benefit only 12 percent of Californians, while putting the other 88 percent, and veterans across the country, at risk of higher drug costs.

Supporters, led by the AIDS Healthcare Foundation and AARP, which advocates for seniors, said only drug companies themselves can raise prices for veterans or other consumers. Vermont Independent Senator Bernie Sanders also campaigned in support of Proposition 61, calling on voters to "stand up to the greed of the pharmaceutical industry."

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Seniors Suffer Amid Widespread Fraud By Medicaid Caretakers



An Alaska man developed gangrenous toes. A Philadelphia woman froze to death on the street. An Illinois woman died emaciated, covered in excrement.

These patients suffered as their government-paid caretakers neglected them, collecting paychecks under a Medicaid program that gives elderly and disabled people non-medical assistance at home. In some cases, the caretakers

convicted of neglect were the victims' own family members.

The Personal Care Services program, which exceeded \$14.5 billion in fiscal year 2014, is rife with financial scams, some of which threaten patient safety, according to a recent report from the Office of Inspector General at the Department of Health and Human Services.

The OIG has investigated over 200 cases of fraud and abuse since 2012 in the program, which is paid for by the federal government and administered by each

state. These caretakers, often untrained and largely unregulated, are paid an average of \$10 per hour to help vulnerable people with daily tasks like bathing, cleaning and cooking.

The report exposes vulnerabilities in a system that more people will rely on as baby boomers age. Demand for personal care assistants is **projected to grow** by 26 percent over the next 10 years — an increase of roughly half a million workers — according to the U.S. Department of Labor... [Read More](#)

News of Charges in Price-Fixing Inquiry Sends Pharmaceuticals Tumbling

The generic drug industry was jolted on Thursday as shares of many major companies tumbled after a news report said that a federal inquiry into drug price-fixing was wider than previously believed and could lead to charges by the end of the year.

Shares in **Teva Pharmaceuticals**, the world's largest generic drug maker, fell more than 9 percent, and the stock of competitors like **Mylan, Endo Pharmaceuticals** and Impax Laboratories had similar declines.

The report, **from Bloomberg**, said that the investigation, being done by the Justice Department, was looking at more than a dozen companies, and that the

prices of about two dozen drugs were involved.

A spokesman for the Justice Department declined to comment. Several of the companies either did not respond or declined to comment beyond statements they had previously made about the inquiry, which began about two years ago.

But investors were clearly not waiting for any additional confirmation.

In a note on Thursday, David Maris, an analyst for Wells Fargo, said the potential impact of such an investigation could shadow the industry well past next week's election and into the new presidential administration..

"We are less concerned about the financial impact of fines, although they could be significant, but rather how items like this can bring calls for controls and oversight," he said.

Some generic drug companies, including Teva, Mylan, Endo and Impax, have said that they received a subpoena. Mylan, for example, **said** that it had received a subpoena last December from the Justice Department related "to the marketing, pricing and sale of our generic doxycycline products and any communications with competitors about such products..." [Read More](#)



Tell Congress: No TPP in the Lame Duck

STOP THE TPP

Despite widespread public opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the big business interests that helped write the TPP are now

pushing extremely hard to have a vote on it during the "lame duck" session of Congress after the election.

It's crucial that our Members of Congress hear from us loud and clear that they must oppose TPP during the lame

duck session.

Enter your phone number and zip code and we will call you to connect you to your Member of Congress. You may also dial 1-888-659-7351 to connect.

Millions Could Lose Medicaid Coverage Under Trump Plan

Millions of low-income Americans on Medicaid could lose their health coverage if President-elect Donald Trump and a Republican-controlled Congress follow through on GOP proposals to cut spending in the state-federal insurance program.

The biggest risk for Medicaid beneficiaries comes from pledges by Trump and other Republicans to repeal

the Affordable Care Act, which provided federal funding to states to expand Medicaid eligibility starting in 2014.

Thirty-one states and Washington, D.C. did so, adding 15.7 million people to the program, according to the government. About 73 million are now enrolled in Medicaid — about half are children.

Reducing the number of people in Medicaid while ensuring that only the most needy — such as children and pregnant women — remain eligible will be a goal for Trump and the new Congress, said Brian Blase, senior research fellow at the conservative Mercatus Center at George Mason University in Virginia... [Read More](#)



Deadly Superbug Linked To Four Deaths In The U.S.



A deadly new drug-resistant fungus has been linked to the deaths of four hospital patients in the U.S., according to a report released Friday from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The fungus, called *Candida auris*, preys on the sickest patients and can spread in hospitals. Although doctors have been concerned about the spread of antibiotic-resistant bugs for many years, this fungus is relatively new on the world scene. It was first identified in Japan in 2009 and has since spread around the globe,

emerging in South America, the Middle East, Africa and Europe, according to the CDC.

The CDC first identified the fungus as a potential threat in 2013, based on a possible case in the U.S., and has been on the lookout for the fungus since June. In its new report, the CDC said the fungus has been detected in a total of 13 patients since May 2013; the agency provided details on the first seven cases, which were reported in New York, Illinois, Maryland and New Jersey.

All of the patients had serious underlying medical conditions, including cancer, and had been hospitalized an

average of 18 days when they tested positive for the fungus. Two patients had been treated in the same health care facility and had nearly identical fungal strains. Doctors can't say for sure if the patients died from the fungus or their underlying health problems.

But health officials say the nation's hospitals need to be on alert.

"We need to act now to better understand, contain and stop the spread of this drug-resistant fungus," said Thomas Frieden, director of the CDC. "This is an emerging threat, and we need to protect vulnerable patients and others..." [Read More](#)

What Did You Say? Coping With Hard-Of-Hearing Aging Parents

It can be very frustrating for family and friends when an older person won't get or wear hearing aids. Everyone around them struggles to communicate with them but they still seem either stubborn or unaware that it is a problem. It becomes more obvious at family gatherings. The older person keeps asking those around her to repeat things. And it's hard to be patient.

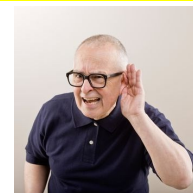
One in three people 60-plus and two-thirds of people 70-plus have hearing loss. Among Baby Boomers, 15% are already affected. In my family, my mother in law, then 92 kept saying "what?" to most of those who spoke with her, but it didn't seem to dawn on her that it was a problem. Finally at a dinner with two of her friends, my husband and I asked her how much of the conversation she thought she might miss because of not hearing all of it. She

estimated about 10-20%. I then asked her friends how much they thought she missed in conversation with her. Their estimate: as much as 80%. We finally persuaded her to get her hearing tested. Testing was followed by a recommendation for hearing aids, though the loss was still "mild".

She finally did get them and it made things much better for her and for everyone else. As long as she wears them, that is. Sometimes she forgets to put them in her ears. Sometimes she finds them uncomfortable and just decides not to wear them. Then she doesn't hear the phone ring and I'm sure a lot of other things go unnoticed too.

You'd think that if one couldn't hear well you would want to get help. But so often aging parents refuse what seems like a relatively straightforward solution.

There are a lot of reasons why parents or even our own colleagues and friends don't realize that their hearing is declining as they reach 65 or beyond. It can be the all too common denial of aging. It can be pride. We don't want to look "old". For some it is the expense—something not covered by Medicare and it costs thousands of dollars. It can be the discomfort of having a device in one's ear that is an unaccustomed feeling. It can itch or feel unpleasant for some. Background noise can be distorted. But if the older person understands that it is a burden for those they care about that might be a selling point to persuade them to get their hearing tested. Test results can be convincing. ... [Read More](#)



FDA's Drug Approval Team Copes With 700 Unfilled Jobs As Industry Lures Staff



The Food and Drug Administration has more than 700 job vacancies in its division that approves new drugs, and top officials say the agency is struggling to hire and retain staff because pharmaceutical companies lure them away.

"They can pay them roughly twice as much as we can," Janet Woodcock, who

directs the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER), said at a rare-diseases summit recently in Arlington, Va.

The FDA has been under fire for taking too long to approve new drugs, despite approving a record number of generic drugs in 2015. Although it met its goal of hiring 1,000 new employees to help clear the backlog of unapproved generics, that program had nearly 200 job vacancies as

of Sept. 30. And CDER itself had 711 openings out of 5,525 positions at the end of September, according to spokeswoman Theresa Eisenman — meaning that more than 1 out of 8 positions were empty.

Most openings have occurred as the result of new laws or initiatives increasing the FDA's workload and creating new positions. help fill the breach. ... [Read More](#)

How To Spend Your Final Months At Home, Sweet Home



There's no mystery about what older adults want when they become seriously ill near the end of their lives.

They want to be cared for at home. For as long as possible.

It's easy to understand why. Home represents familiarity, safety and identity — the place where we belong.

Yet health systems aren't rewarded financially for making "time at home" a priority like they are for reducing the number of patients readmitted to hospitals.

Researchers from the Dartmouth

Institute for Health Policy and Harvard Medical School argued that should change recently in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Health systems should focus on "outcomes that matter to patients," they wrote, citing a new national analysis of terminally ill patients.

Where these patients — most of them older adults — spent their last 180 days varied significantly across the country. People had the most time at home in Mason City (145.82 days) and Waterloo, Iowa (144.61 days), and the least time at home in Idaho Falls, Idaho (118.83), and Shreveport, La. (119.15 days).

Multiple factors contributed, including

the availability of medical and social services and seniors' financial and caregiving resources.

Do a few more weeks spent at home matter? Yes, if what patients truly value is taken seriously, the researchers asserted.

They describe a patient who had been in the hospital six weeks and finally returned home accompanied by a family member. "Just to see familiar photos on the wall made us feel we could breathe again," that family member said.

What's needed to make care at home possible during the last six months of life? ... [Read More](#)

Elderly Hospital Patients Arrive Sick, Often Leave Disabled

SAN FRANCISCO — Janet Prochazka was active and outspoken, living by herself and working as a special education tutor. Then, in March, a bad fall landed her in the hospital.

Doctors cared for her wounds and treated her pneumonia. But Prochazka, 75, didn't sleep or eat well at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center. She became confused and agitated and ultimately contracted a serious stomach infection. After more than three weeks in the hospital and three more in a rehabilitation facility, she emerged far weaker than before, shaky and unable to think clearly.

She had to stop working and wasn't able to drive for months. And now, she's

considering a move to Maine to be closer to relatives for support.

"It's a big, big change," said her stepdaughter, Kitty Gilbert, soon after Prochazka returned home. "I am hopeful that she will regain a lot of what she lost, but I am not sure."

Many elderly patients like Prochazka deteriorate mentally or physically in the hospital, even if they recover from the original illness or injury that brought them there. About one-third of patients over 70 years old and more than half of patients over 85 leave the hospital more disabled than when they arrived, research shows.

As a result, many seniors are unable to care for themselves after discharge and need assistance with daily activities such

as bathing, dressing or even walking.

"The older you are, the worse the hospital is for you," said Ken Covinsky, a physician and researcher at the University of California, San Francisco division of geriatrics. "A lot of the stuff we do in medicine does more harm than good. And sometimes with the care of older people, less is more."

Hospital staff often fail to feed older patients properly, get them out of bed of sleep by placing them in noisy wards or checking vital signs at all hours of the night... [Read More](#)



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

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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

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