

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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President Establishes Debt Commission to Look at Social Security and Medicare

Yesterday, President **Barack Obama** signed an Executive Order establishing a commission to tackle the federal debt. The commission's purpose is to reduce the federal budget deficit from 10% to 3% by 2015 and to propose ways to contain costs related to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. As co-chairs of the commission, the president named former **Bill Clinton** White House Chief of Staff **Erskine Bowles** and former Republican Senator **Alan Simpson**. Bowles, president of the University of North Carolina, worked to pass the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 with Republicans in Congress when he was White House Chief of Staff. He ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 2002 and 2004. Simpson served as a Wyoming senator from 1979 to 1997 and as Senate GOP Whip from 1985 to 1995. Alliance Executive Director **Edward F. Coyle** said yesterday, "Retirees fully support President Obama on the critical need to reduce our nation's budget deficit. Older Americans have always been uncomfortable with large debt, both in government and in their own families. We are, however, wary of the objectivity that Commission Co-Chair Alan K. Simpson will bring to this important assignment. As a Senator, Simpson referred to older Americans as 'greedy geezers' and launched bitter and protracted assaults against advocacy groups for seniors. Social Security benefits would have been cut under his plan to change the statistical formula used to calculate Cost-of-Living Adjustments." Mr. Coyle continued, "We believe that if the Commission takes a thorough and honest look at Social Security and Medicare, it will conclude that these vital programs should be strengthened, not weakened. Social Security and Medicare are two of our nation's greatest success stories, helping generations of seniors stay healthy and out of poverty." For Coyle's full statement, go to <http://bit.ly/cuCd7q>.

Congressional Retirements Abound

Indiana Sen. **Evan Bayh** will not seek reelection this year, he announced on Monday. He is the fifth Democratic Senator not seeking reelection, joining Sens. **Chris Dodd** (Conn.), **Byron Dorgan** (N.D.), **Ted Kaufman** (Del.) and **Roland Burris** (Ill.). Six Republicans are retiring: Sens. **Kit Bond** (Mo.), **George Lemieux** (Fla.), **Judd Gregg** (N.H.), **George Voinovich** (Ohio), **Sam Brownback** (Kans.) and **Jim Bunning** (Ky.). In addition, four U.S. House members - Republican Reps. **Vern Ehlers** (Mich.) and **Lincoln Diaz-Balart** (Fla.), and Democratic Reps. **Diane Watson** (Calif.) and **Patrick Kennedy** (R.I.) - announced their retirements last week, bringing the total number of House members not seeking re-election in 2010 to 32. Of those, 18 are Republicans, and 14 are Democrats. "The stakes keep getting higher for this fall's elections, so seniors need to be educated and active," said **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance.

Health Care Debate Wages On

White House officials are working with leaders in Congress on a health care proposal that could pass without Republican support if GOP representatives do not embrace bipartisan compromises

at President Obama's summit next week. According to the publication *The Hill*, the Progressive Change Campaign Committee has circulated a letter among House Democrats, which 119 of them have signed, calling for the reintroduction of the public option. Thirteen Democratic senators have signed a similar letter. The letter calls for the Senate to pass a series of "fixes" to the health care bill it passed in December under the budget reconciliation process, a maneuver that would avoid the 60-vote filibuster threshold in the Senate. House Majority Whip **James Clyburn** (D-SC) said in an interview yesterday that a public insurance option could be part of the final health reform legislation [<http://bit.ly/bsmNHX>]. He said that while it was dropped to garner 60 votes in the Senate, a fifty-plus-one vote could still carry the public option. It remains to be seen whether the controversial excise tax on high-end health plans will remain in a final bill.

The Alliance has held more than 20 events across the country during this week's Congressional recess, reminding lawmakers in their home districts that health insurance reform is still a national priority. Events have included meetings with Members of Congress, protests, and rallies. More action is planned for next week.

Billy Tauzin Retires as Head of Pharmaceutical Lobby

The president of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), **W.J. "Billy" Tauzin**, announced last Friday that he will be retiring on June 30 as head of the pharmaceutical industry's main lobbying group. The 2003 Medicare drug law, negotiated in part by then-Rep. Tauzin (R-LA) before he became a lobbyist, has widely been viewed as a financial windfall for the big drug companies - larger than even the most optimistic Wall Street analysts had predicted. In response to Mr. Tauzin's resignation from PhRMA, **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance, said, "After helping to negotiate the 2003 Medicare drug law, Billy Tauzin made millions as one of the top lobbyists in Washington, and the drug companies made record profits off the same deal. For too long, everyone else has been winning at the expense of the nation's seniors."

Suggested Resolutions Currently Being Accepted for Las Vegas Convention

On April 5-8, 2010 in Las Vegas, the Alliance will be holding its annual convention. The conference, which has the theme *Building Retiree Power*, will offer educational and training opportunities to improve both grassroots activism techniques and leadership skills. As part of the convention, any delegate registered to attend may offer or second a resolution for consideration. The resolution must pertain to a statement of the Alliance's position or policy on a specific matter. To be considered, please send your suggestions to 2010Resolutions@retiredamericans.org. Proposed resolutions, and seconds, must be received by the Alliance no later than March 15, 2010 in order for the Resolutions Committee, designated by the Alliance President, to review them. To register for the convention, please go to <http://bit.ly/1jIzz2>.

Did You Know...

Twenty-one percent of Americans take three or more prescription medications daily (*ABC News* and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.)