

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

815 16th Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20006

202.637.5399 • www.retiredamericans.org • arafridayalert@retiredamericans.org

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Response to President's Health Care Plan and Summit: Three Things You Can Do

In order to bridge the differences between the U.S. House and Senate-passed health care bills - and continue to move reform forward - **President Obama** unveiled his Administration's own health plan on Monday. The plan contains several major steps toward improving the well-being of current and future retirees. "President Obama's plan recognizes the millions of seniors who are struggling to afford to see a doctor or get a prescription filled," said **Edward F. Coyle**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "For retirees, continued inaction would be devastating. Medicare premiums and out-of-pocket costs would soon eat up more than one-third of a retiree's Social Security benefits." For the Alliance's comparison of Obama's health reform bill with those passed by the U.S House and Senate, go to <http://bit.ly/aMvKTJ>. On Thursday, President Obama led a televised health care reform summit, which focused on discussing ideas and grievances about the proposed health care bill from both parties. White House officials named 21 lawmakers the president wanted to attend the summit: the top leaders in the House and Senate and of the committees with jurisdiction over the health legislation. Obama also invited the top four leaders to invite four more lawmakers each, bringing the total to 37; 20 Democrats and 17 Republicans. For a specific list of the attendees, go to <http://bit.ly/bSlCs6>. As a follow-up to the summit, concerned senior activists are encouraged to do 3 things:

- 1) Contact your U.S. House member and two Senators by calling 202-224-3121. Tell them that President Obama's proposal would close the "doughnut hole" coverage gap in Medicare Part D; finally end the \$3.60 per month every senior pays in higher premiums to subsidize the big insurance corporations that run Medicare Advantage; and make long-term care more affordable for middle-class families.
- 2) Write a letter to the editor of your local paper reiterating the need for reform. You may find it helpful to use the language at <http://bit.ly/8YMsgI> as a guide; and
- 3) Share Alliance materials like the comparison chart above and the fact sheet at <http://bit.ly/a1qtC8> with your friends and neighbors.

Further evidence of the need for reform came last Friday, with the release of a study by a major consulting firm showing that spiraling costs are a problem even for seniors with solid insurance. The Avalere Health study found that premiums for private Medicare Advantage plans offering medical and prescription drug coverage jumped 14.2% on average for 2010. Some 8.5 million seniors and disabled Americans who signed up for the private plans will therefore be facing sharp premium increases this year, following an increase of 5.2% last year.

More Debt Commission Appointees Named

Senate Majority Leader **Harry Reid** (D-NV) on Tuesday appointed Senate Majority Whip **Dick Durbin** (D-Ill.), Senate Budget Committee Chairman **Kent Conrad** (D-ND) and Senate Finance

Committee Chairman **Max Baucus** (D-MT) to serve on the President's fiscal panel tasked with developing a plan to bring down the \$12.3 trillion national debt. The President said that the commission can consider everything, including new taxes, spending cuts and changes to Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid, in order to reach his goal of balancing the federal budget except for debt interest payments by 2015. Obama is asking Congress to consider the panel's recommendations. Obama will appoint six people to the 18-member panel and up to four can come from the same party. Leaders in Congress will choose the other 12 members, with three coming from the Republican and Democratic caucus in each chamber. Reid is the first congressional leader to announce his picks. The majority leader said that he would make sure that the panel's recommendations, which are non-binding, receive votes in the Senate. Both Baucus and Conrad are noted centrists, a group of lawmakers that has made debt and deficit issues a priority. Obama last week selected former Clinton Chief of Staff **Erskine Bowles** and former Sen. **Alan Simpson** (R-WY) to head the panel. Today, the president named former Clinton White House budget director **Alice Rivlin**; Service Employees International Union President **Andy Stern**; former Young & Rubicam Brands CEO **Ann Fudge**; and Honeywell CEO and Chairman **David Cote** to fill remaining slots, an administration official said. "I would like to say to the panel: Social Security's long-term solvency can be resolved by relatively modest adjustments, and without cutting benefits," stressed **Barbara J. Easterling**, President of the Alliance. To see the Alliance's latest document on Social Security, which refutes opponents' charges that today's budget problems are due to Social Security, go to <http://bit.ly/c68Nom>.

Requests for Heating Assistance Rise By 15%

As the winter wears on, the number of households applying for home heating assistance has risen to record levels for the third straight year, rising by 15% to include 8.8 million households. The majority of these applicants are low-income seniors, disabled people, and families living beneath the federal poverty line. Under LIHEAP (the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program), states provide grants of about \$500; however, due to increased demand, many states have had to cut the grants or applications to stretch funds, leaving many in the lurch. "While several states forbid the cut-off of utilities during the winter, struggling retirees often put off payments and build up debt," said **Ruben Burks**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "In the spring, seniors may find themselves lacking gas and electricity as companies seek payment."

Sign Up By March 2 to Get Special Room Rate for the Las Vegas Convention!

As 2010 political campaigns heat up, retirees need to begin learning more about elections that will see the entire U.S. House, one-third of the U.S. Senate, and 36 gubernatorial races on the November ballot. A great place to start is this year's Alliance National Convention, April 5-8 in Las Vegas, which will feature noted speakers and training workshops on mobilizing retirees for electoral success. Alliance members will elect a president and secretary-treasurer, and community members will elect six community-based board members. Hotel reservations must be made by contacting Bally's Las Vegas directly at 1-800-358-8777. To guarantee the low room rate of \$89, you must make your hotel reservation by March 2, 2010. To register for the convention itself, please go to <http://bit.ly/ljIzz2>.