AFSCME Retiree Strong!

Through AFSCME Strong we have been building our union to ensure we are ready for the fight ahead – signing up non-members, organizing new members and engaging activists. And the AFSCME Retirees have been organizing too! We organized thousands of new AFSCME Retirees, across the country, from New York to Texas to Washington. All joined our ranks to help fight to preserve health and retirement security for workers and retirees.

We are building on our retiree organizing successes this year. “As more and more workers retire, it is our job to make sure they stick with the union,” said Gary Tavormina, chair of the AFSCME Retiree Council. “We need your help to reach out to your former co-workers as they retire and make sure they know that the AFSCME Retirees is their retirement union.”

We also need the AFSCME Retirees members’ tireless activism like never before. “The attacks on working people and retirees under the new administration and in statehouses across the country will be like never before,” said Ann Widger, director of the AFSCME Retirees. “Retirees are a vital part of AFSCME’s army, who will stand up and fight back against those who are working to take away the health and retirement benefits we’ve earned.”

Now is the time to get active and make sure we are AFSCME Retiree Strong! If you want to help organize retirees or get active in your local chapter email retirees@AFSCME.org . Contact information for your local chapter can be found at AFSCME.org/directory.

Check us out at:
Facebook.com/AFSCMEretirees
The Affordable Care Act Repeal: A Disaster for Older Americans

If Congress repeals the Affordable Care Act (ACA), some 4.5 million retirees and older Americans age 55 to 64 could lose their coverage — more than doubling (to 19 percent) the share of those in that age bracket who are now uninsured.

“Stripping away the ACA will take our nation backwards and put these older Americans without Medicare coverage at great risk,” said Ann Widger, AFSCME Retiree Department director. “In the past, seniors who didn’t have coverage cost Medicare the most because they may have gone a decade or more without needed care. This was wrong. The ACA makes a real difference in their lives and helps control costs under Medicare.”

Prescription drug discounts, free preventative services, coverage for early retirees, and investments in better primary care are among the protections made possible by the ACA that could be reversed — or eliminated altogether — if the ACA is repealed.

HIGHER COSTS, LESS PROTECTION

Nearly 12 million people with Medicare have saved more than $26 billion on prescription drugs since 2010. “Re-opening the donut hole means even more costly medicines,” said Widger.

The $700 in covered drug costs the average senior now enjoys would vanish. Those most ill could face an additional $3,600 in out-of-pocket expenses. Also, ACA’s investment in fighting fraud and abuse would disappear.

Repeal could undo consumer protections for people enrolled in Medicare Advantage, leading to less care and higher premiums. Other harmful impacts could include having to pay out-of-pocket costs for certain cancer screenings.

“A full repeal of the ACA would increase Medicare spending by $802 billion over the next decade,” undermining its financial stability, said Widger. “President Trump may claim he said he would not touch Medicare, but repeal of ACA will hurt seniors and Medicare. We cannot let this happen.”

Congress and Trump’s Plans for Medicare and Medicaid

Republican congressional leaders have made clear that they will seek to restructure Medicare and Medicaid and dramatically cut federal funding for both. Based on previous plans, they will try to cut funding for Medicare by $500 billion over 10 years and cut funding for Medicaid by $1 trillion. They want to end the guarantee of specific benefits under Medicare. Older Americans are also at risk from cuts to Medicaid. That’s because the most costly expenditures in state Medicaid budgets are for long term care services for seniors and people with disabilities, and assistance with Medicare cost sharing for low-income seniors.

As a result, long term care services and help with cost sharing are both likely targets of significant spending cuts.

“I have no crystal ball on repeal or replace plans,” said Ann Widger, AFSCME Retiree Department director. “However, House Speaker Paul Ryan and Tom Price, MD (Health and Human Services Secretary nominee) have led the charge for turning Medicare into a voucher program.”

Costs will be shifted to retirees and other beneficiaries if those benefits, guaranteed under Medicare, are taken away. Vouchers would buy less and less coverage each year, forcing seniors to pay more and more out-of-pocket.

Speaker Ryan has pressed for raising the age of Medicare eligibility to 67. This would force seniors to shoulder more costs, and raise the price tag on some retirement plans.

“Block grants or other mechanisms to cap federal funding for Medicare would gut state budgets and hospital funding. It could mean if a senior needed nursing home care they would be out of luck,” said Widger. “AFSCME retirees will fight to protect Medicare and Medicaid.”
2017 Public Pension Outlook

In 2016, many states and cities chose to protect and preserve their defined benefit pension plans. The city of Palm Beach, Florida, moved back to a defined benefit plan from an unpopular hybrid plan. Wisconsin expanded pension access for certain municipal workers. Now that 2017 legislative sessions are underway in many states, there may be new attacks on workers’ retirement. In Pennsylvania and Michigan, we expect to see new attempts to abandon pensions for state employees and teachers. Some states, like Iowa and Oklahoma, are debating conversions to 401(k)-style plans, while others, like New Hampshire and Alabama, are considering other unfavorable alternatives to pensions. Illinois continues to try to resolve its funding troubles on the backs of public employees. To stay informed or share your pension story go to the National Public Pension Coalition website at protectpensions.org.

CHAPTER ROUNDUP

CALIFORNIA
The United Nurses Association of California/Union of Health Care Professionals (UNAC/UHCP) Retiree Chapter 1199U held its convention in San Diego last fall, prior to the 37th UNAC/UHCP Convention. Attendees were addressed by National Union of Hospital Health Care Employees (NUHHCE) Pres./International Vice Pres. Henry Nicholas and various staff on the importance of retiree health care. The chapter held officer elections and passed several resolutions. Reelected Pres. Sonia Moseley and other leaders are excited to grow the chapter and protect retirement and health security.

PENNSYLVANIA
The Golden Age Club, Retiree Chapter 2, held their chapter elections November 17. Pres. Eddie Williams, Vice Pres. Paul Miller, Sec.-Treas. Joyce Hobbs and Recording Sec. Betty Robinson were all reelected. The chapter held a runoff election for the trustee positions December 8. With the full board in place for the chapter, they will continue to organize and fight for their members’ retirement security in the face of continued attacks from anti-worker politicians.

WISCONSIN
Delegates gathered in Madison to hold the Annual Convention of Retiree Chapter 32 last fall. Some highlights from the meeting include the progress of Council 32 working members and the retiree chapter on streamlining the process to actively identify retired members for organizing. In conjunction the Council will pay the first year dues for all retiring members. Chapter elections were held were Pres. Sue Conard won reelection.
Dave Jacobsen is the current chair of the Florida AFSCME Retirees Political Education Committee (FARPEC). FARPEC’s mission is to educate and mobilize AFSCME Retirees across Florida to support pro-retiree and pro-worker candidates and policies.

PrimeTIME (PT): What’s the first order of business for FARPEC in 2017?

Dave Jacobsen (DJ): Our first order of business is mobilizing and educating our members to fight the Trump agenda. During the election, President Trump made several campaign promises to strengthen our retirement safety net by not gutting Social Security and Medicare, and in fact, promised to make them stronger. Unfortunately, like so much else of what he said during the campaign, his actions and appointments don’t match his statements as Members of his transition team want to privatize Social Security and Medicare.

(PT): What role did FARPEC members play in the past election cycle and how did the outcome affect the committees’ strategic planning?

(DJ): During the campaign, we phone banked, held membership meetings and canvassed doors to fight against the election of Donald Trump. The new plan is to call members of Congress and be as active as possible in rejecting any retirement benefit cuts. Donald Trump campaigned on the promise to make America great and now he has to prove that he can deliver the goods. The only way that we can hold Donald Trump accountable is by being agitators for our benefits.

(PT): What advice would you give other retirees who are upset with the election results and are looking for motivation to remain strong in this political climate?

(DJ): Prepare for a long fight, but a fight that we will win. I urge all retirees to tell their elected representatives to stand with retirees and keep “hands off of our benefits.”

CONSUMER TIME

National Parks Senior Pass

Looking to plan a fun and adventurous spring break excursion for you and your grandchildren? What about filling those weekends (brought to you by unions) with a visit to one of the many federal recreation sites across the nation? Did you know that the National Park Service has a Senior Pass? This lifetime pass gives you access to over 2,000 locations which includes National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges and National Forest Lands.

The pass is only available to U.S. residents who are 62 years of age or older and can be ordered three ways: online, by mail for an additional service fee of $10 or from any park without the additional fee. How much would such an amazing offer cost? Currently the pass is only $10! Included in that low fee are additional discounts on things like camping and access for guests traveling with the pass owner. Discounts vary widely across the many different types of recreation sites.

You can access the National Park Service website at nps.gov/planyourvisit/passes.htm to plan your visit.