



FRIDAY ALERT

Alliance *for* Retired Americans

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Headlines:

**Sherrod Brown to Introduce Harkin Bill to Expand Social Security in 114th Congress;
House Passes \$1.1 Trillion Spending Bill;
“Right to Work for Less” Legislation Rears its Ugly Head in Several States;
The American City County Exchange (ACCE): ALEC Horror Movie, Part 2;
Activists Protest Meeting of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Negotiators;
Bertha Carlton to Retire after 43 Years;
Obituary: Maryland/DC Alliance Member Annette Hartenstein, 1935-2014**

Here is your December 12 Friday Alert:

Sherrod Brown to Introduce Harkin Bill to Expand Social Security in 114th Congress

Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) has announced plans to reintroduce Sen. Tom Harkin’s (D-IA) Strengthening Social Security Act in the next Congress. The bill would change the Social Security benefit formula, ensuring that cost of living adjustments adequately reflect the living expenses of retirees, and improve the long term financial condition of the Social Security Trust Fund. The legislation is designed to immediately increase current benefits by about \$800 annually. More at <http://tinyurl.com/m8cawku>. Sen. Harkin, retiring this month, said, “I could not be more pleased that Senator Brown has decided to champion this legislation in the next Congress. Senator Brown’s commitment to Social Security is unrivaled, and seniors should be thrilled to have an ally like Senator Brown on their side.”

House Passes \$1.1 Trillion Spending Bill

The U.S. House passed a \$1.1 trillion-plus funding bill Thursday night that will keep the government open into next year. After a lobbying blitz by President Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, and other White House officials, dozens of House Democrats broke with Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and backed the legislation, despite controversial provisions on Wall Street and campaign finance. The final vote, which came after a day of high drama, behind the scenes arm twisting and vote counting, was 219 to 206. For a tally of the vote, go to <http://tinyurl.com/oju89ln>. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), however, warned that the massive spending package may not pass the Senate until Monday. More from Politico at <http://tinyurl.com/nmnw74n>.

“Right to Work for Less” Legislation Rears its Ugly Head in Several States

Following the 2014 elections, one of the most immediate threats to unions comes from so-called right-to-work legislation, which allows employees to opt out of joining a labor union even when that union negotiates business for their benefit. According to The Washington Post, Republicans in at least five states — Wisconsin, New Mexico, New Hampshire, Ohio and Missouri — have introduced or plan to introduce versions of the law in legislative sessions that will begin in January. Wisconsin appears to be the most likely battleground between business interests and labor unions. Legislators in Colorado, Kentucky, Montana and Pennsylvania are all likely to push similar laws, though Democratic governors in each state can act as firewalls. More at <http://tinyurl.com/on8mxaf>.

“By limiting workers’ earnings during their years in the workforce, right-to-work laws hurt those same workers’ retirements later,” said Alliance Executive Director Richard Fiesta. “The better you work, the better you retire.”

The American City County Exchange (ACCE): ALEC Horror Movie, Part 2

From ALEC to the Heritage Foundation, a group of anti-labor stalwarts is looking to turn cities and counties into right-to-work zones. The American City County Exchange (ACCE) is a new offshoot of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and seeks to replicate ALEC’s state-level successes at the local level. One major goal of the group: passing right-to-work laws at the local government level in non-RTW states. More from The Nation at <http://tinyurl.com/o7sy8p9>.

Activists Protest Meeting of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Negotiators

This week, negotiators met in Washington, DC for another round of negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and activists who are opposed to the deal rallied on Monday outside the office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Among the chants at the rally: “No Fast Track now, no Fast Track ever – the TPP is a lost endeavor!”

“The Alliance strongly opposes this so-called ‘free trade deal’ because it has the potential to ship jobs overseas, further endanger the quality of our food supply - and make prescription drugs more costly,” said Ruben Burks, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

The Medicaid Drug Rebate Program requires drug manufacturers to have a national rebate agreement with the Secretary of Health and Human Services in order for their products to be covered by Medicaid programs. The rebates are set by federal statute and range from 13% to 23% of the manufacturer’s average price. Because the rebates are set by federal statute, drug companies could use the TPP to challenge the discounts for not being based on market-derived prices or for failing to appropriately recognize the value of the patent. Drug manufacturers could also use the TPP to challenge future rebates in the Medicare program for low-income beneficiaries. Learn more about the TPP by watching this new video: <http://tinyurl.com/oojtyn2>.

Bertha Carlton to Retire after 43 Years

After 43 years in the retiree movement, including thirteen with the Alliance, Bertha Carlton will be retiring at the end of the year. As leader of the Alliance's Membership Department, Ms. Carlton's institutional knowledge became a valuable resource for Alliance staff and members alike. "Bertha's cheerful singing and smile have brightened the days of others thousands upon thousands of times," said Barbara J. Easterling, President of the Alliance. "Many of our members relied on her to learn about our organization and verify their own status with us. Through the decades, she has been a key piece of the puzzle in our collective efforts to preserve and strengthen Social Security and Medicare." See the pictures from her going-away party at <http://tinyurl.com/pvzdslu>.

Obituary: Maryland/DC Alliance Member Annette Hartenstein, 1935-2014

Beloved Maryland/DC Alliance member Dr. Annette Hartenstein died on Monday after a courageous battle with cancer. Her funeral was held on Thursday, December 11th. She served as Vice President of the Maryland and DC AFL-CIO and was active in the Maryland and DC Chapter of the Alliance for Retired Americans. She spoke in support of Medicare in July of this year before a U.S. House of Representatives assembly at the celebration of the 49th anniversary of Medicare. Her travels took her to more than 100 countries. A graduate of CCNY, Dr. Hartenstein earned advanced degrees at the University of Chicago and University of Southern California. Among her survivors is her husband of 30 years, fellow Alliance member David Waugh, of Maryland.

"We will always remember Annette for her intelligence, kindness, and devotion to making seniors' lives better," said Mr. Fiesta.

For a printable or two-page pdf version of this document, go to <http://tinyurl.com/p6bay89>. For the Alliance's Spanish language page, which includes last week's Friday Alert in Spanish, go to www.alianzadejubilados.org.