



Alliance *for* Retired Americans

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**Headlines:**

Marco Rubio Proposes Dismantling Medicare and Raising the Retirement Age

Gender Gap Continues for Female Workers in Retirement

Striking Fast Food Workers Stage Protests Across the Globe

States Refuse to Expand Medicaid and Still See Increased Enrollment

A Rose by Any Other Name...

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Here is your May 16 Friday Alert:

**Marco Rubio Proposes Dismantling Medicare and Raising the Retirement Age**

On Tuesday, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) gave a speech at the National Press Club in which he laid out his sweeping proposal to confront the nation's retirement security crisis through cuts to Social Security and Medicare. Rubio is widely viewed as a potential candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016. In addition to laying out policy changes involving retirement savings plans and incentives for older workers to remain in the workforce, Senator Rubio proposed raising the retirement age, a move that would force millions of Americans to work longer to collect the benefits they have earned. Although Senator Rubio cited the "rise in life expectancy" as the rationale for this change, his proposal would disproportionately harm low-income and minority seniors who have not seen their life expectancies rise in step with other workers.

Senator Rubio also used the speech to endorse Paul Ryan's (R-WI) proposal to end Medicare's guarantee by privatizing the program and converting it to a voucher system. Under the proposed changes, Medicare would be replaced by a system in which seniors would be given a voucher redeemable towards the purchase of either private insurance or a modified Medicare plan. Since these vouchers would likely fail to cover the full cost of coverage, seniors would be expected to make up the difference out of pocket. It is expected that adopting such a system would result in millions of seniors paying more for coverage. "If Senator Rubio really cared about strengthening retirement security, he would join the effort to expand Social Security benefits as Sen. Tom Harkin and Rep. Linda Sanchez have proposed. If he

really cared about addressing the retirement security crisis, and there is one, he would get on board with raising the minimum wage. Social Security benefits are based on wages. By calling Social Security 'outdated,' Senator Rubio shows how out of touch he is with the needs of current and future retirees," said Richard Fiesta, Executive Director for the Alliance. Read the Alliance's reaction to the speech at <http://bit.ly/1jxWqTU>.

### **Gender Gap Continues for Female Workers in Retirement**

A Congressional report on recent census data points out again that women lag behind men when it comes to financial security in retirement. The report shows the average median income for women over age 65 is around \$16000 a year – roughly \$11000 less than the median income for men of the same age group. Read more at <http://cnnmon.ie/1nOf6X6>.

Since Social Security ties benefits to lifetime earnings, retirement income for women is reduced by lower wages and a higher likelihood of spending time out of the workforce to care for children or sick family members. Of course, longer average life spans mean women are forced to stretch their savings over a longer period of time. Adding to the financial strain are higher average healthcare costs for women in retirement and higher rates of employment in part-time jobs that do not offer employer sponsored retirement benefits. "This makes it all the more important for Congress to take action to raise the minimum wage and expand Social Security – policies particularly important for easing the financial strain for retired women," said Barbara Easterling, Alliance President.

### **Striking Fast Food Workers Stage Protests Across the Globe**

On Thursday, fast food employees calling for higher wages, better working conditions, and the ability to unionize staged protests and one-day strikes in cities across the country. Although a series of one-day strikes have been organized over the last 18 months, this week's strikes were by far the largest yet. The strikes included thousands of workers in 150 American cities and support protests by fast food workers in more than 30 countries across the globe. Fast food workers in other nations often face similar corporate policies including low wages, part-time employment, and irregular hours. Organizers hope the strikes become a global movement that puts pressure on low-paying fast food employers to improve working conditions and allow employees to unionize.

These protests bring further attention to the debate about income inequality and ongoing efforts to increase the minimum wage. "These workers are working to feed and support their families. Higher wages mean enhanced economic security for workers and a stronger Social Security system. We need to stand with these striking fast food workers to fight for working families," said Scott Watts, President of the Nevada Alliance for Retired Americans. For more on the strikes, go to <http://on.msnbc.com/RGMt0>. For a look at information on how raising wages would improve Social Security protections for workers

and strengthen the system, check out the fact sheet from Social Security Works at <http://bit.ly/1hOqE5m>.

### **States Refuse to Expand Medicaid and Still See Increased Enrollment**

A new analysis of Medicaid enrollment numbers show that many of the states refusing to take part in the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion have still seen an increase in new enrollment. In total, 17 of the 26 states that declined to expand Medicaid coverage have seen a boost in enrollment totals. The uptick is seen as the result of a recent advertising and marketing blitz related to the rollout of the Affordable Care Act. Analysts suspect that outreach efforts encouraging people to sign up for coverage led many new enrollees in these states to discover that they were previously eligible for Medicaid even without the law's eligibility expansion.

"We continue to see an increasing number of positive benefits from the Affordable Care Act. Even in states where Republican-controlled legislatures are trying to stop citizens from accessing affordable healthcare, the rollout of the law is helping people better understand their options when it comes to getting coverage," said Ruben Burks, Secretary-Treasurer for the Alliance. For more, read the article at <http://onforb.es/QMS5Fv>.

### **A Rose by Any Other Name...**

A recently released survey from the state of Kentucky shows that while 56% of respondents in the state expressed dislike for "Obamacare," only 22% reacted negatively toward "Kynect," the state's own health exchange created as a result of the healthcare reform law. This perception gap is consistent with recent national polling showing approval for the "Affordable Care Act" at 7 points higher than approval for "Obamacare"; this despite the terms referring to the same set of reforms. Read more about the perception gap at <http://huff.to/1mrSgCl>.

For a printable version of this document, go to <http://bit.ly/1jQ6lck>.

For the Alliance's Spanish language page, which includes last week's Friday Alert in Spanish, go to [www.alianzadejubilados.org](http://www.alianzadejubilados.org).