

RETIREE



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THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS RETIRED TEACHERS CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

Congress watch



The outcome of the Presidential election notwithstanding, Congress is where we should focus our attention for many of the issues on our legislative agenda. Much of the following material is gleaned from The Alliance of Retired Americans.

SOCIAL SECURITY REMAINS A TARGET OF POLITICAL ACTION.

Those who call it an “entitlement,” that is, an unearned gift to recipients, claim the program will be insolvent in roughly 30 years. Ideas abound on resolving the question of how to pay for Social Security benefits without bankrupting the government. We’ve seen some bad ones, such as President George Bush’s 2005 proposal to privatize Social Security. Bush wanted individuals to manage their own accounts. The economic collapse of 2008 proved how bad that particular idea would have been.

The notion that Social Security is in crisis has been refuted by experts on both sides of the political spectrum. Bruce Bartlett, who held senior policy roles in the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations and served on the staffs of Reps. Jack Kemp and Ron Paul, wrote in *The New York Times* in 2012: “To be sure, some restraint is needed in federal entitlement programs. But the idea that we are facing a crisis

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Message from Tom

BY TOM MURPHY, UFT/RTC CHAPTER LEADER

We lost big and must face the consequences of the loss. Those who won were clear about their intentions on a whole host of union and progressive achievements. Whatever issues or considerations convinced the electorate to vote as so many did, perhaps far removed from tangible issues and policies, their course of action now puts us on a collision course with them.



On the chopping block will be those hard-won gains in which we take such pride. Pundits in the coming days will analyze the factors contributing to the campaign that so many of us misjudged and got wrong. For now, my focus is on us. As we process the sweeping mandate delivered on Election Day, it is important for us to regain our moorings with clear thinking. We spent a year and a half doing what this union does best: political and social activism. How could we have done otherwise; it’s in our DNA as good unionists, educators and healthcare providers. We saw the worth in attempting to play our part in bringing about the best of all possible worlds. Since last January, we sent hundreds of volunteers out across the country for two-week assignments in battleground states; took bus trips to do door-to-door canvassing; had phone banks to Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Florida and elsewhere. On this morning after, it is hard to think of anything we could have done differently in promoting social, economic and political justice. So, while the natural tendency is to question whether we did enough, I think we went above and beyond in our commitment to activism.

Why did we rouse ourselves to do these things? In one of William Butler Yeats later poems, he stands at his doorway speaking to a band of irregular soldiers. He both longs to be with them in their ventures but also longs to go back inside his comfortable cottage. Many of us feel that push/pull in our retirement. We are committed to both action and repose. A crushing loss exacerbates that dynamic. But since we are who we are, in turn we do both.

This union will learn to navigate through the coming political battles. We are committed to preserving our earned benefits such as defined-benefit pensions, health coverage, professional and economic security and a century of creating a social safety network. We know that Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act and public education are in the crosshairs. The bad guys never go away and now in their moment of ascendancy, it will take all of our energies and renewed strength when the push for privatization once again rears its head. The Supreme Court will no doubt take up Friedrichs-like cases with the aim of gutting unions and public employees. All this and more.

Where will we get the energies and resources to once again enter the fray along with all the other good guys? Voltaire’s *Candide* went all over the globe

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is complete nonsense. Spending for Social Security, in particular, is very stable. Relatively modest changes, such as raising the taxable earnings base slightly, would be sufficient to put the program on a sound footing virtually forever.”

Now we'll have to be watching a group of Republicans who want to change the nature of Social Security. Sen. David Perdue (R-GA) is working with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Senate Budget Committee Chairman Mike Enzi (R-WY), and House Budget Committee Chairman Tom Price (R-GA) to lift the guarantee of Social Security benefits and allow Congress the power to vote on Social Security's spending each year.

They say the country needs this reform to reduce the federal deficit. They say programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid should not be automatically funded.

MEDICARE REFORM

The Huffington Post published an article that outlined the changes Medicare will undergo in 2017. Each year, small scheduled adjustments are made to Medicare in deductible costs and premiums.

- Without legislative fixes, Medicare Part B premiums will increase in 2017, especially for higher earners who aren't covered by the “hold harmless” clause that protects lower-income workers.
- Deductibles are scheduled to increase from \$166 to \$204 next year, increasing out-of-pocket costs for seniors.
- Similarly, Medicare Part D premiums will rise to \$40 for those earning less than \$85,000 or couples earning less than \$170,000 per year.

We need to hang tough against future increases. The miniscule increase in Social Security we will see in 2017 is effectively zeroed out by the increases outlined above.

CONTAINING HEALTH CARE COSTS

The U.S. Census Bureau reported that millions of Americans fall below the poverty line due to the cost of health care. The Supplemental Poverty Measure, which accounts for adjusted incomes and day-to-day expenses including medical bills, reveals that 11.2 million or 3.5 percent more people live in poverty once health care costs are taken into account. We must be mindful of our long-retired members whose pensions and Social Security are inadequate to today's cost of living.

If the Affordable Care Act is repealed, as predicted and promised, what will take its place? Will the replacement decrease out-of-pocket costs and increase access to medical care for under-served populations?

We also need to work for policies that hold a lid on prescription drug costs. Each U.S. citizen spent, on average, \$858 in 2013 for brand-name drugs, whereas the other 19 industrialized nations paid an average of \$400. We pay three times as much for the same drugs that our friends across the pond in Great Britain pay.

Many companies have exclusive patents with the Food and Drug Administration, so they charge whatever the market will bear. Medicare is not authorized to negotiate prices with drug companies as the Department of Veterans Affairs does. Despite covering over 40 million Americans and 29 percent of the country's drug expenditures, Medicare cannot lower drug prices. In fact, in 2003 when Medicare Part D was established, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services was expressly prohibited from setting prices – a common practice in other countries.

A SMALL INCREASE IN SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS WON'T OFFSET INCREASES IN HEALTH CARE COSTS

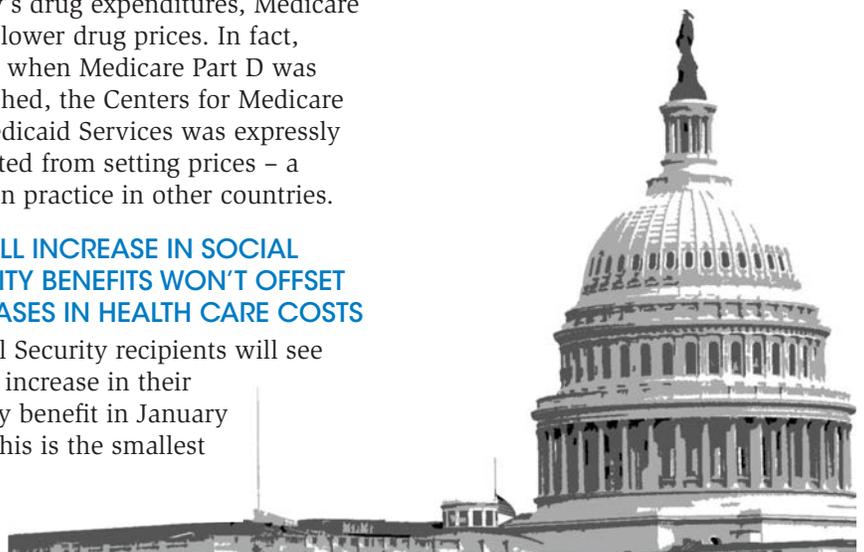
Social Security recipients will see a small increase in their monthly benefit in January 2017. This is the smallest

cost-of-living adjustment going back to 1975, with the exception of three years – 2009, 2010, 2015 – when Social Security beneficiaries received no adjustment at all.

To determine the annual COLA, Social Security uses the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), which takes into account a number of factors – transportation and fuel prices, apparel, and education – that disproportionately affect younger people.

The consumption patterns of seniors are different from those of younger people. Health care and housing are the greatest costs seniors face. It is why the UFT Retiree Teachers Chapter repeatedly has called for the COLA to be determined through the Bureau of Labor Statistic's CPI for the elderly. CPI-E, as it is known, was developed in the late 1980s. It continues to be classified as “experimental” by the BLS because the sample size is one-quarter the size of the CPI-W and therefore it has a higher rate of error.

This index takes into account the fact that older Americans spend roughly twice what younger Americans do on medical care as well as relatively more on shelter. Visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics for more information on this at www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2012/ted_20120302.htm.



THANKS FOR YOUR HARD WORK



Retiree Michael Eiron with Vice Presidential candidate Tim Kaine.



Randi Weingarten, AFT president with retirees at the phone banks in Las Vegas.



Sherry Friedman at the Hillary Clinton campaign in Orlando.



Joyce Magnus, Barbara Waldmann and Glenda Bryant-Bonas scanning door-canvassing sheets in Philadelphia.



Lauren Luchi, manager of the AFT Retirees Department and Kenneth Goodfriend, Florida coordinator of section and services, and greeting retirees in North Carolina.



Retirees on the bus trip to Philadelphia to campaign for Hillary Clinton.

Left to right: George Dunckhurst, VP NARA Laborers Union; Elizabeth Shuler, AFL-CIO secretary treasurer; Tom Bird, president of NARA, Janet Miller, UFT retiree, Richard Miller, VP AFT/UFTWF Las Vegas section coordinator/NARA and Congresswoman Dina Titus CD#1 at the Las Vegas labor seminar.



AFT official speaking with members at a labor seminar in Tampa.



THE GENEROSITY OF THE RETIREES

Every October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

and the UFT is a strong supporter of the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer. This year, thousands of in-service and retired UFT members raised money and walked in the five boroughs, Long Island and New Jersey.

The Retired Teachers Chapter had its own fund-raising effort during September and October. Donations were made at RTC meetings and luncheons in New York City, New Jersey, Atlanta, North Carolina, Nassau County and at the Si Beagle Learning Center sites. Staten Island retirees crocheted scarves for the survivors.

The chapter raised \$7,400. Thanks everyone for your support!

Grace Imbrogno, 89, of La Mesa, California taught at P.S. 93 and P.S. 75 in the Bronx. She retired in October 1982 and has given to COPE since May 2004. Because she believes in a strong UFT, Ms. Imbrogno will leave \$25,000 to UFT/COPE upon her death. We thank her for her generosity toward her colleagues.



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pursuing the best of all possible worlds. Adventures, misadventures, joys and catastrophes were doggedly met till finally he wound up home in his own little society. When all hands tried to figure out whether all those past and current efforts had meaning, Candide advised "...let us take care of our garden."

In the face of a big setback, each of us must determine what we must take care of. To me, the garden is small and large. It went from a classroom to the broad union and from there to a broader commitment to social justice. And political activism. We can spend some time reflecting but then we have to get back to work.

Sincerely,
Tom Murphy
UFT Retired Teachers
Chapter Leader



UFT RETIREE

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