

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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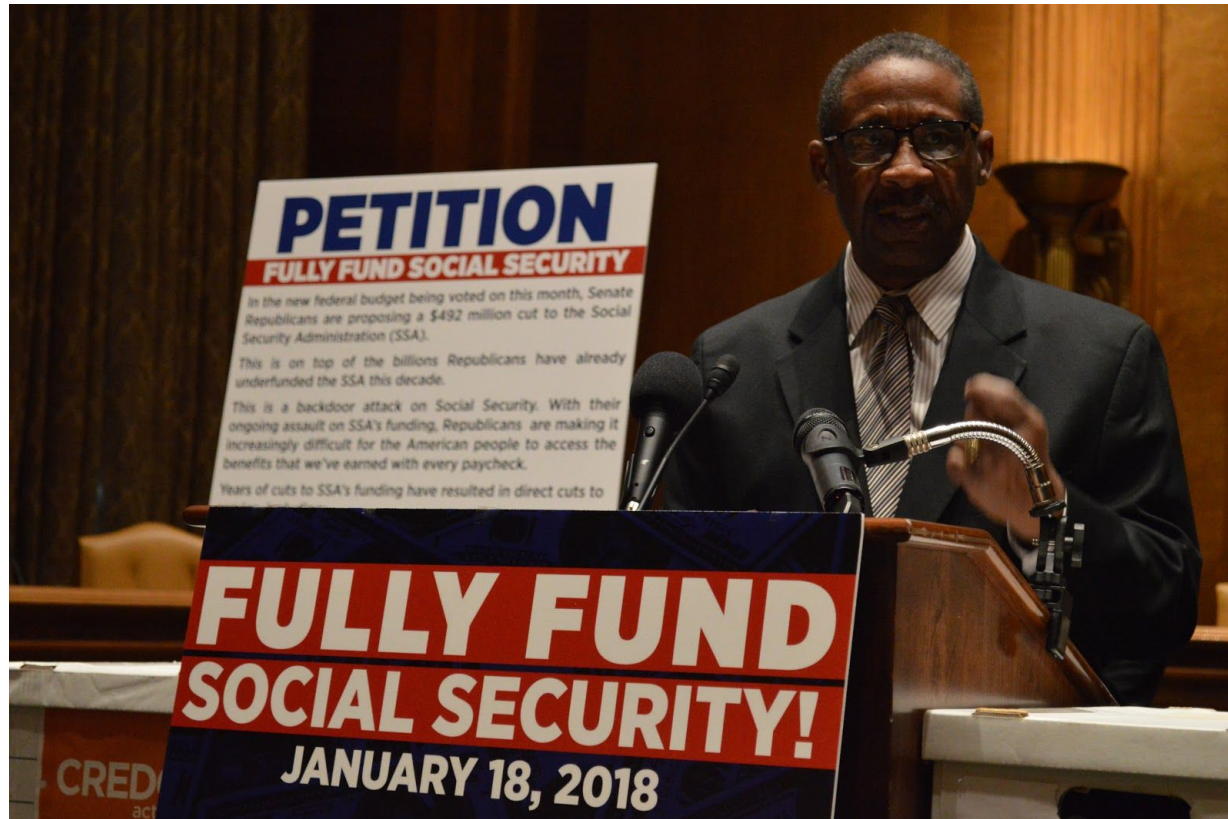
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January 19, 2018

Senators Casey, Sanders, Warren Join Advocates in Opposing Cuts to Social Security Administration

On Thursday Senators **Bernie Sanders** (I-VT), **Bob Casey** (D-PA) and **Elizabeth Warren** (D-MA) [joined](#) Alliance President **Robert Roach, Jr.**, advocates and seniors for a press conference opposing Republican plans to cut \$492 million from the Social Security Administration's (SSA) budget in the upcoming government funding bill. Advocates and seniors then delivered 250,000 petition signatures opposing the cut to Senate Majority Leader **Mitch McConnell** (R-KY).

The petition signatures were collected by the Alliance, Social Security Works, CREDO Action, the Economic Policy Institute, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), and the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare.



President Roach on Capitol Hill Thursday

Since 2011, baby boomers have been retiring at the rate of 10,000 a day, expanding the population that SSA serves. In recent years, the agency has had to close 64 field offices due to budget constraints.

"We demand that Congress fully fund the Social Security Administration in the upcoming federal budget and stop this attack on seniors and the disabled community," said President Roach. "We have seen attempts, led by House Speaker **Paul Ryan**, to cut Social Security benefits many times in the past. By reducing services, Republicans are just coming at us from a different direction."

Since the end of fiscal year 2016, SSA has lost over 1,000 field office staff, bringing the total loss since 2010 to 3,500 employees. The number of pending disability benefit cases had been shrinking until 2011, but then climbed nearly 60 percent, to about 1.1 million in 2017. The average wait for a hearing decision reached an all-time high of 21 months in 2017. The Capitol Hill press event drove home the need to fully fund SSA, not subject it to cuts that make it increasingly difficult for Americans to access their hard-earned benefits.

Hospital Systems Join Forces to Combat High Drug Prices

For years, essential drugs like heart medicines have become scarce, and prices have skyrocketed because investors manipulated the market. Now, a group of large hospital systems plans to create [a nonprofit generic drug company to battle the shortages and high prices](#) by going into the drug business themselves.

Intermountain Healthcare, a nonprofit Salt Lake City hospital group, is spearheading the effort. Several major hospital systems, including Ascension, the nation's largest nonprofit hospital group, plan to form the new nonprofit company that will provide generic drugs to the hospitals. According to *The New York Times*, the group includes about 300 hospitals, with more expected to join.

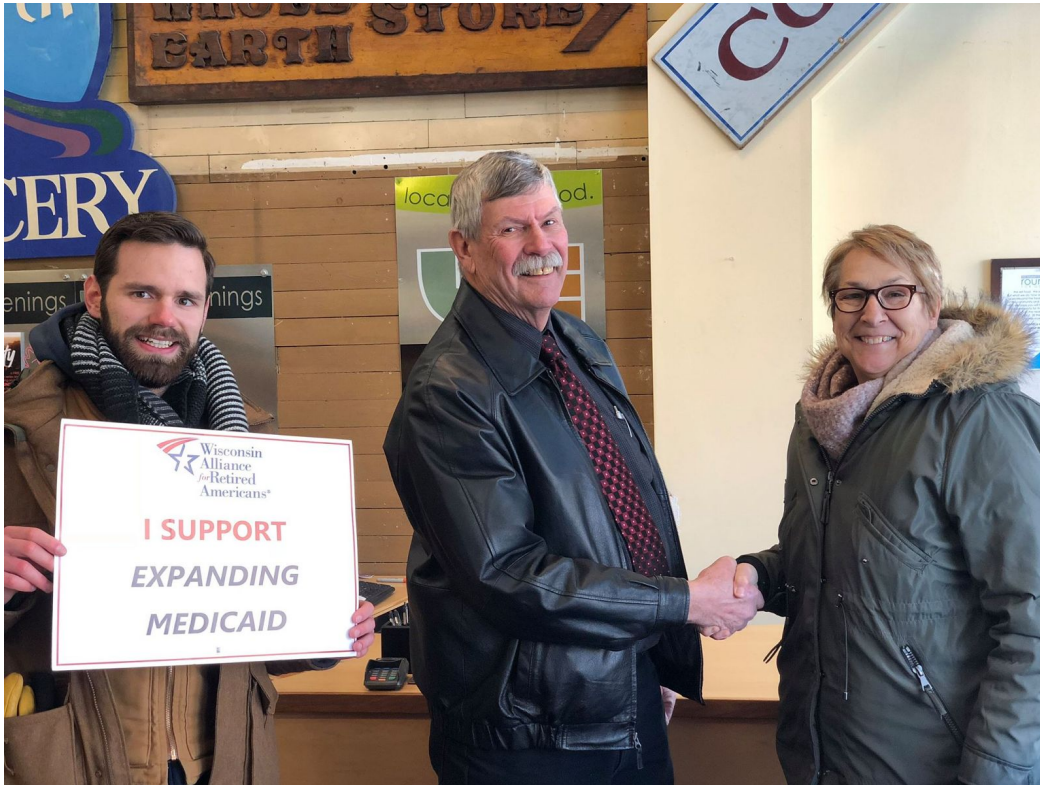
Hospitals have often experienced shortages of drugs like morphine or seen sudden price increases for old, off-patent medications. The new entity will challenge the industry players who have bought up monopolies of old, off-patent drugs and then sharply raised prices. The most notorious example is of **Martin Shkreli**, the former hedge fund manager who raised the price of a decades-old drug, Daraprim, from \$13.50 a tablet \$750 in 2015.

Hospitals have also struggled to deal with shortages of hundreds of drugs, including injectable morphine. The shortfalls are made worse when only one or two manufacturers make the product. Executives said the new operation will focus on drugs that have risen sharply in price or that have been in short supply. It will initially focus on selling to hospitals, but officials said they may eventually expand to offer the products more broadly.

"This is a very promising development," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "It addresses severely overpriced medications that are both brand-name and generic."

Democrats Score an Upset Victory in Special Election for Wisconsin State Senate Seat

On Tuesday, Democrat [Patty Schachtner](#) won a special election for a state Senate seat in Wisconsin. This victory was a major upset for the party in a district that President **Trump** captured in the 2016 election by 17 points. The district includes a swath of five counties between Eau Claire and Superior along the Minnesota border.



A special election was triggered when Gov. **Scott Walker** (R) chose a state senator who had held the seat since 2000 to become his agriculture secretary. On Tuesday, Ms. Schachtner won by nine points.

“I want to give a big thank-you to the Wisconsin Alliance staff and members who helped Ms. Schachtner win,” said Richard Fiesta, Executive Director of the Alliance.

Patty Schachtner with supporters

Kaiser Health News: Home Care Agencies Often Wrongly Deny Medicare Help to the Chronically Ill

Colin Campbell needs help dressing, bathing and moving between his bed and his wheelchair. He has a feeding tube because his partially paralyzed tongue makes swallowing “almost impossible,” he said.

Campbell, 58, spends \$4,000 a month on home health care services so he can continue to live in his home just outside Los Angeles. Eight years ago, he was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or “Lou Gehrig’s disease,” which relentlessly attacks the nerve cells in his brain and spinal cord and has no cure. The former computer systems manager has Medicare coverage because of his disability, but no fewer than 14 home health care providers have told him he can’t use it to pay for their services. (Click to read the full story [here](#)).

The Alliance for Retired Americans is a national organization that advocates for the rights and well-being of over 4.4 million retirees and their families.