

# FRIDAY ALERT



**Alliance for Retired Americans**

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## New Congress Includes 208 Alliance-endorsed Members of the House and Senate

The 116th Congress was seated on Thursday after Democrats took the majority in the U.S. House of Representatives in November. In their first act, the Democrats elected **Nancy Pelosi** to serve as Speaker, returning the gavel to her eight years after she last held it.



Alliance Legislative Representative Eva Dominguez (left) is pictured on Thursday with Rep. Linda Sanchez (CA), who co-introduced the "Strengthening Social Security Act," H.R. 6929, with Rep. Mark Pocan (WI) in September.

The new Democratic caucus is extremely diverse compared to previous ones, with over 100 women taking office.

"We congratulate Nancy Pelosi on becoming Speaker once again," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "We can proudly say that the Alliance endorsed 208 pro-retiree Senators and Representatives during the last election cycle. That bodes well for achieving our goals, which include bringing prescription drug prices down and making health care more accessible and affordable."

## Take Action to End the Government Shutdown

The House voted to end the partial government shutdown Thursday. The Senate has no plans to take up the bill, because the legislation did not include additional funding for a wall along the Mexico border. Congressional leaders left a meeting with President **Trump** about the shutdown earlier in the week without coming any closer to an agreement, and he has invited them back Friday for another briefing.

Seniors are affected by the shutdown in a number of ways. [Please take action today to end the shutdown immediately!](#)

The distribution of Social Security benefits will continue during the shutdown, since the earned benefits are part of a permanent appropriation. The Social Security Administration (SSA) will

remain open, since Congress passed the Labor, HHS appropriations bill, which funds the agency, in August 2018.

That said, other government functions that affect seniors might be impacted. For instance, the U.S. Department of Agriculture funds SNAP, formerly called food stamps, and Agriculture is one of the cabinet agencies that has been shut down. Officials in Tennessee said Tuesday that SNAP is funded through January; however, [no determination has been made beyond that point](#).

“The Senate must allow a vote on legislation to end the shutdown and pay all federal employees immediately afterwards, and the President needs to sign it,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “This is not just because many employees put their lives on the line to perform their duties. The public also has a right to a government that they know will function properly.”

Officials with the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), many of whom work at SSA, noted in a [lawsuit](#) that employees are not getting paid but still need to pay childcare expenses, buy gas, and incur other expenses to go to work every day.

[\*\*You can take action NOW to address this situation. Please sign this petition telling Congress and the President to fund the government TODAY!\*\*](#)

## **Drug Companies Kick off the New Year with Price Hikes**

Drugmakers started off 2019 with price increases in the United States on more than 250 prescription drugs, including the world's top-selling medicine, Humira. According to a Goldman Sachs analysis, [prices were raised on about 27% of the top 500 branded drugs](#).

The average list price increase was 4 percent, half what it was in 2018. However, many analysts who follow the industry anticipate that pharmaceutical companies will wait to raise drug prices until after the first week of January to avoid the spotlight.

Allergan was particularly aggressive. It raised list prices on more than 50 drugs, and more than half of those by 9.5 percent. Because the United States leaves drug pricing to market competition, Americans pay higher prices than in other countries where governments directly or indirectly control the costs. As a result, the United States is the world's most lucrative market for manufacturers, to the detriment of consumers.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has proposed policy changes aimed at lowering drug prices and passing more of the discounts negotiated by health insurers on to patients. However, those measures are not expected to provide substantial relief to consumers in the short-term and fail to provide government health agencies with the authority to negotiate or regulate drug prices.

“We will not see drugs truly become more affordable in this country until we allow Medicare to use its power to negotiate prices with drug corporations,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Taking lesser, inadequate measures but not doing so is like putting a band-aid on a major wound.”

## Majority of Workers Over Age 50 are Forced Out of Their Job Before They Want to Go

A new analysis shows that [more than half of older U.S. workers are pushed out of longtime jobs before they choose to retire](#), suffering financial damage that is often irreversible.

ProPublica and the Urban Institute analyzed data from the Health and Retirement Study, or HRS, a widely respected source of quantitative information about aging in America. Since 1992, the study has followed a nationally representative sample of about 20,000 people from the time they turn 50 through the rest of their lives.

As of 2016, the analysis found that between the time when older workers enter the study and they leave paid employment, 56 percent are laid off at least once or leave jobs under such financially damaging circumstances that it's likely they were pushed out rather than choosing to go voluntarily.

Only one in 10 of these workers ever again earn as much as they did before their employment setbacks, the analysis showed. Even years afterward, the household incomes of over half of those who experience such work disruptions remain substantially below those of workers who do not.

“This study illustrates the devastating effects of job loss for people over the age of 50, as well as anyone who cares about them,” said President Roach. “For starters, anyone not yet eligible for Medicare should be especially concerned about health care costs, since the age for Medicare eligibility is 65.”

Of people aged 55-64, [84%](#) have a pre-existing condition, making private insurance frequently difficult to afford.

“The data also show the danger of any attempts to further increase the Social Security retirement age or the Medicare eligibility age,” President Roach continued. “That would make a serious problem even worse.”