



# MONDAY ALERT

New York State Alliance *for* Retired Americans

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March 17, 2025

**NYS AFL-CIO and NYSARA  
Oppose Retiree Health Care Cuts  
Part U of S3005/A3005  
Public Protection and General Government Executive  
Budget Bill**

The New York State AFL-CIO, representing 2.5 million union members, retirees, and their families, oppose the above- referenced part of the executive budget proposal.

This proposal would eliminate the state's share of retired state employee Income Related Monthly Adjustments (IRMA) beginning on January 1, 2025. This proposal has been repeatedly rejected by the legislature as it is an unfair increase incost for those who can least afford it.

This proposal follows health insurance increases already put in place for retirees over many years. The vast majority of retired public employees live on modest and/or fixed incomes. Changes like this proposal can result in financial instability and in some cases poverty.

This federation not only urges the legislature to reject this proposal, but we urge the passage of legislation that would protect all public-sector retiree health insurance from such budgetary attacks in the future. School district employees already have such protections, and it is time we enact the same law for all other public-sector workers.

Therefore, this Federation urges this part of the executive budget proposal to be defeated. For further information, contact the Legislative Department at 518-436-8516.

**AMIDST THE WORST INFLUENZA SEASON IN A DECADE,  
GILLIBRAND DEMANDS ANSWERS ON CANCELLATION AND  
POSTPONEMENT OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON  
VACCINATIONS**

***Cancellation of Meetings Puts Vulnerable New Yorkers at Risk***

U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D/NY) sent a letter to Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, expressing concern over his decision to cancel the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) meeting, which was scheduled to determine influenza vaccine strains for the upcoming flu season. Additionally, the letter also expresses concern over the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) decision to postpone its Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) meeting in February to review, among other issues, the safety and effectiveness of the flu vaccine. The cancellations and postponements were announced with no plans to reschedule, which could endanger the lives of older adults and even hinder the capacity of New York hospitals to treat patients.

The letter requests answers on how the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) plan to address the impact of meeting cancellations and postponements for at-risk populations who depend on timely vaccination and what alternative measures will decide the selection of influenza strains for vaccine production. The letter also expresses concern for hospital staff in New York's health systems whose emergency rooms and

intensive care units may be overwhelmed, diverting resources from other essential care needs.

The senator notes that “New York State... recorded 432,000 flu cases so far this season, which already far surpasses the total from last year’s flu season. The escalating severity of influenza underscores the critical need for robust and timely vaccine development and deployment. Any slowdown in this process will exacerbate the risks faced by the American public.”

She continues, “New York State’s current flu outbreak is its worst in at least 15 years. At one point in January, only 13 percent of hospital beds in New York were available due to the surge in influenza, along with other seasonal illnesses. This surge in demand not only jeopardizes the quality of care for influenza patients but also impacts the overall capacity of our health care infrastructure, potentially leading to preventable deaths across various medical conditions.”

### **EPI has launched Federal Policy Watch**

This is an online tool to document actions by the Trump administration, Congress, federal agencies, and the courts that affect working people. Maintained by a team of economists and lawyers, Federal Policy Watch will serve as a one-stop shop for cataloguing and analyzing legislation, regulations, executive orders, and court rulings as they unfold. [You can find this tool by clicking here](#)

### **How to Enroll in Medicare if you are Turning 65**

From our Friends at Medicare Rights

Most people become eligible for Medicare when they turn 65. Your Medicare enrollment steps will differ depending on whether or not you are collecting retirement benefits when you enter your [Initial Enrollment Period \(IEP\)](#).

- If you are receiving Social Security retirement benefits or [Railroad Retirement benefits](#), you should be automatically enrolled in both Medicare Part A and Part B.
- If you are not receiving Social Security retirement benefits or Railroad Retirement benefits, you will need to actively enroll in Medicare.

If you are eligible for automatic enrollment, you should not have to contact anyone. You should receive a package in the mail three months before your coverage starts with your new Medicare card. There will also be a letter explaining how Medicare works and that you were automatically enrolled in both Parts A and B. If you get Social Security retirement benefits, your package and card will come from the Social Security Administration (SSA). If you get Railroad Retirement benefits, your package and card will come from the Railroad Retirement Board.

If you are 65 but are not receiving Social Security retirement benefits or Railroad Retirement benefits, you will need to actively enroll in Medicare.

### **Signing up for Medicare**

Follow the steps below if you need to actively enroll in Medicare.

If you decide to enroll in Medicare during your Initial Enrollment Period, you can sign up for Parts A and/or B by:

- Visiting your local Social Security office
- Calling Social Security at 800-772-1213
- Mailing a signed and dated letter to Social Security that includes your name, Social Security number, and the date you would like to be enrolled in Medicare

- Or, by applying online at [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)

If you are eligible for Railroad Retirement benefits, enroll in Medicare by calling the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) or contacting your local RRB field office.

Keep proof of when you tried to enroll in Medicare, to protect yourself from incurring a Part B premium penalty if your application is lost.

## **New Fact Sheet: Elon Musk and Donald Trump's Biggest Lies About Social Security**

This week, the Alliance is releasing [a new fact sheet](#) debunking the biggest lies being spread about Social Security by billionaire **Elon Musk**, President **Donald Trump**, and others in his administration as they systematically weaken the Social Security Administration.

"We must always speak truth to power about our earned benefits and the hard-working staff at the Social Security Administration," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "The stakes are incredibly high, and every American who relies on Social Security needs us to keep the focus on them."

## **Essential Social Security 1-800 Number Services Appear Safe ... For Now**

On Wednesday, *The Washington Post* [reported](#) that the Social Security Administration (SSA) was considering eliminating its widely used phone services and requiring Americans to interact with the agency online or at a field office. In fiscal year 2024, the SSA received nearly 80 million calls through its 1-800 number.

*The Post* said the proposal was being pushed by the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by **Elon Musk**. The Trump

administration and DOGE have already announced plans to reduce the SSA workforce by at least 15% and eliminate some field offices.

By Wednesday evening, the SSA stated that the reports were “inaccurate” and that core phone services would remain. However, the agency noted it would make changes to procedures for updating beneficiaries’ direct deposit bank accounts.

**Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance for Retired Americans, strongly condemned the proposal. “While it appears phone services are safe for now, we must remain vigilant and stop Elon Musk from dismantling Social Security and undermining the benefits that millions of Americans have worked their entire lives to earn.”

“The 4.4 million members of the Alliance will hold President Trump and Congress accountable,” Fiesta continued. “Our members will let them know—face to face, online, and everywhere else we can make our voices heard—that they must protect Social Security. It’s time for any politician who has ever said they care about Social Security to act now before the system is irreparably harmed.”

## **CMS Nominee Oz Faces Tough Questions at Senate Confirmation Hearing**

Dr. **Mehmet Oz** faced intense questioning from Democratic senators during his confirmation hearing to lead the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) today.

Throughout the hearing, **Oz** refused to answer a number of questions directly. He would not fully commit to stopping Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) overreach within CMS or extending Affordable Care Act tax credits. When asked by Sens. **Maggie Hassan** (NH), **Elizabeth Warren** (MA), and **Ben Ray Lujan** (NM) whether he would oppose cuts to Medicaid, he refused to provide a yes/no answer. He also would not rule

out support for the House Republican budget proposal, which calls for sweeping Medicaid cuts.

Senator **Catherine Cortez Masto** (NV) pointed out how devastating these cuts would be and expressed alarm that Medicaid fraud might be used as a smokescreen to slash benefits. "It's not people milking the system," said Senator **Cortez Masto**. "Cutting Medicaid – which my Republican colleagues want to do – would close nursing homes in Nevada, it would close hospitals."

Oz conceded that Medicare Advantage plans generally cost more money and are a source of inefficiency and fraud. But he did not provide assurances that he would sever his own personal ties to pharmaceutical and corporate healthcare investments.

"I am happy to work with Republicans to go after waste, fraud and abuse, but let's cut out waste, fraud, and abuse where it actually occurs, like upcoding in Medicare Advantage," said Senator Warren. "Republicans cutting healthcare for seniors or babies or people with disabilities while the waste and fraud just roll right along for a multibillion dollar insurance company is sickening."

On Thursday, *NBC News* [obtained a memo](#) prepared by Democrats on the Senate Finance Committee. According to the memo, which outlined a review of Oz's tax returns from 2021, 2022, and 2023, Oz paid no Medicare or Social Security taxes in 2023 and "negligible" amounts in 2022. The review alleges that Oz underpaid his Self-Employment Contributions Act (SECA) taxes, a tax on net earnings from self-employment, from income through his media entity, Oz Property Holdings LLC.

"Older Americans earn their Medicare benefits over a lifetime of hard work, and millions also rely on Medicaid to pay for long-term and nursing care," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "We continue to

have deep reservations about his nomination and believe he is the wrong person to lead CMS at this important time.”

## ***KFF Health News: Under Trump, Social Security Resumes What It Once Called ‘Clawback Cruelty’***

**By David Hilzenrath and Jodie Fleischer, Cox Media Group**

A year ago, a new head of Social Security set out to stop the agency from financially devastating many of the people it was meant to help.

The agency had long made it a practice to reduce or halt benefit checks to recoup billions of dollars in payments it sent recipients but later said they never should have received.

Martin O’Malley, then the Social Security Administration commissioner, announced in March 2024 the agency would no longer cut off people’s monthly old-age, survivors, and disability checks to recoup money they had allegedly been overpaid — a pattern he called “clawback cruelty.” Instead, it would default to withholding 10% of monthly benefits. The new policy allowed people who already live on little to pay their rent and keep food on the table.

Last Friday, the Trump administration reversed that policy.