



South Carolina

Senate Says “Bah Humbug” to Seniors

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On Christmas Eve, the U.S. Senate slid through its own version of the healthcare reform bill. The bill fails to protect the earned post-retirement health care benefits of tens of millions of American retirees like me. Unjustly, this legislation financially penalizes corporations that do the right thing by continuing to provide prescription drug benefits they promised to their former workers.

This appears to be an effort to pass healthcare reform regardless of its impacts on the public. This should offend everyone, not just retirees, who will once again be the biggest losers in this whole debate.

I spent 20 years working for Verizon as a computer operator. Aren't my lifelong dedication and the wages I contributed over many decades in exchange for retirement healthcare coverage worth protecting? There are 18.5 million American retirees in the same boat as me who took less in wages and less vacation over decades so their employer could sock those funds away to pay for our healthcare benefits in retirement. If the Senate version of the healthcare reform bill strips it from us, we deserve answers now from our senators on Capitol Hill.

The Senate's health reform bill lacks provisions of the original House of Representatives bill, which includes key protections contained within another vital bill, The Emergency Retiree Health Benefits Protection Act (H.R. 1322). H.R. 1322 prohibits employers from making post-retirement cuts or eliminating the earned health benefits of people after they retire.

The amended Senate legislation requires a change in the tax status of payments for retiree health benefits that would negatively impact many companies' earnings statements and therefore encourage them to drop drug benefits for millions of retirees. Many leading corporations and unions have complained loudly about this and say they intend to lobby against the Senate action.

The anti-retiree and anti-baby boomer legislation that passed the Senate just as Santa mounted his sled was nothing more than a lump of coal in the stockings of millions of older Americans. It encourages corporations to reduce benefits. Ironically, those of us who have already earned health benefits by making sacrifices during our working years now have to fight our own elected officials.

Let's be clear, none of us are asking for a handout, just a guarantee that the new federal healthcare reform bill treat us fairly and not cancel the benefits we earned over a lifetime.

With both houses of Congress currently working towards combining their individual healthcare reform bills, now is the time to act for the protection of earned retiree healthcare benefits.

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