



Media Contact:

**Tom Butler /Stu Miller / Victoria Carman 212.685.4600
Butler Associates Public Relations
204 East 23rd Street, New York, NY 10010**

For Immediate Release:

Retirees Applaud GOP’s “Bill of Rights for Seniors” Proposal to Protect Retiree Healthcare

ProtectSeniors.Org, a non-partisan coalition of retirees from 285 companies, 36 unions, 76 municipal, state and federal retiree groups, is applauding and encouraging the Republican leadership call to ensure that seniors can keep their current healthcare coverage when considering any healthcare reform legislation. This must include both Medicare and employer-provided private insurance plans that retirees earned during their working years by accepting reduced wages and fewer other benefits.

“Millions of America’s retirees are terrified as to what will become of their existing healthcare coverage and how they will afford to pay for any new programs plus the accessibility and affordability of their supplemental healthcare programs,” said Jim Casey, President of ProtectSeniors.Org.

The Republican leadership has stated in its plan, “The Health Care Bill of Rights for Seniors” that America’s seniors should not be targeted by a government-run health care bill and forced out of their current coverage. America’s retirees and baby boomers agree and ProtectSeniors.Org members suggest that this can be the basis for a compromise between Democrats and Republicans. They are calling on the GOP leadership to adopt bipartisan legislation already in Congress, the Emergency Retiree Health Benefits Protection Act (H.R. 1322), which would prohibit employers from making post-retirement cancellations or reduction of benefits that retirees earned and were entitled to when they actually retired.

“There are currently an estimated 18.5 million American retirees and baby boomers with earned retiree health and supplemental health benefits being threatened by their former employers. If cancelled most would be unable to afford care and be forced into the already overburdened government healthcare rolls,” added Mr. Casey, himself a Verizon retiree. “In the last decade nearly 8 million other retirees have been forced into this boat without the health benefits they earned and paid for in their working years. If our leaders on Capitol Hill don’t protect America’s retirees and baby boomers even more are destined to be victimized.”

Paul Miller, Executive Director of ProtectSeniors.Org said, “What happens in healthcare reform if Congress and the President do not protect the millions of Americans who already earned and paid for their healthcare during their working years by accepting lower wages, less vacation and sick time? Will their health benefits be diminished or will they get a refund from their employers, some of whom are trying to use the current economic crisis to sidestep their financial obligations to the former employees?”

Mr. Miller points to Delphi Corporation which just dumped \$6.2 billion of its pension obligations to 70,000 workers and retirees onto the federal government’s lap, while the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation is placing liens on the company’s offshore affiliates that are in good financial shape.

“The legislation says that these companies, many of which lavished riches on executives, but are turning their backs on obligations to retirees, would be made to live up to the financial commitments made to their employees and retirees, and most importantly, would do so without placing mandates on the employers as to what health plans they provide or monetary ceilings on the amount of health benefits. America’s workers and retirees don’t want a handout. They expect both the Republicans and Democrats will protect what they earned.”

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