

**CWA Local 4250 RMC
Steve Tisza, President**



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Medicare at 45: Health Reform Means New Benefits for Seniors

July 30 is the 45th anniversary of Medicare, a milestone for a true American success story that has helped reduce senior poverty by two-thirds.

This year is an especially happy birthday for Medicare because the new health reform law makes it easier for seniors to afford to see a doctor, fill a prescription, and receive free preventive screenings and tests for serious diseases.

But as the President of the Alliance for Retired Americans, I am concerned that too many retirees remain skeptical and unaware of these new benefits. This is the shameful legacy of sustained scare tactics and falsehoods aimed at older Americans during the health care debate.

So forget about Sarah Palin and the 'death panels' she warned you about. Here are a few facts about the new health law:

- It lowers drug costs by providing a \$250 rebate in 2010 for those in the Medicare "doughnut hole," and it begins to close this loophole that has been financially devastating for many seniors;
- It ends co-payments and deductibles for annual physicals, mammograms, colonoscopies, and other preventive screenings;
- It helps early retirees age 55-64 better afford and keep their private health insurance through financial assistance programs, and also by prohibiting insurance companies from discriminating against those with pre-existing medical conditions;
- It helps middle-class families afford the high costs of long-term care through a new insurance plan known as the CLASS Act; and
- It strengthens the fiscal solvency of the Medicare Trust Fund by ending wasteful taxpayer subsidies to private insurance companies who operate Medicare Advantage programs at a cost 14 percent higher than if Medicare directly provided these same services.

The Alliance for Retired Americans has prepared an extensive series of fact sheets on these new benefits. They are available at www.RetiredAmericans.org

To me, the best way to celebrate Medicare's 45th birthday is to educate our friends and neighbors on how this new health law can help them live longer, healthier lives.

Barbara J. Easterling is president of the Alliance for Retired Americans. She was previously the secretary-treasurer of the Communications Workers of America. For more information, visit www.retiredamericans.org or call 1-800-333-7212.