Retiree’s Testimonials

Seniors share their stories about life in retirement: the broken promises by their former employers, the importance of Social Security, Medicare, pensions and their concerns over the high costs of health care and prescription drugs.
To: Members of Congress and Staff

On behalf of the more than 2 million retirees from 168 U.S. corporations and public entities whose interests are represented by the National Retiree Legislative Network (NRLN), I want to thank you for taking the time to learn about our concerns.

Retirees suffer as their pensions, health care and life insurance benefits are stripped away. All too often retirees cannot afford to replace these benefits. We fear for the financial safety of Social Security and Medicare. Even with Medicare, many retirees cannot afford the high costs of prescription drugs and skip medications to pay for food and a roof over their head. Others, under age 65, who have lost their jobs or were forced into early retirement often go without health care insurance because they can't afford it.

Retirees are a major part of a vanishing middle class whose incomes are fast eroding. For many retirees, their losses result in ruined credit, home foreclosures, and personal bankruptcy filings. As you consider the future of Social Security and Medicare benefits and pension legislation, please remember that many retirees have been losing their retirement standard of living for many years!

In this "Retirees' Testimonials" document you can read state-by-state, corporation-by-corporation what is happening to America's retirees. Please take the time to learn from emails sent this year to the NRLN what retirees are facing and take action to improve their retirement security. Help retirees keep what they earned through years of hard work and dedication to make businesses strong.

Marta Bascom, NRLN's Executive Director in Washington D.C. has said, "Members of Congress hear from advocacy lobbyists every day but what they should and do listen to most are personal examples that can be backed up with personal testimony from constituents across this country whose income security and health care are eroding rapidly. Such personal examples are proof that a public policy change should be considered."

For additional information on retiree issues, please contact Marta by phone at 703-863-9611 or by email at: marta@bascomstrategies.com.
Retirees’ Testimonials

ALABAMA

Madison, AL
Kodak Retiree

For seniors, one of our biggest out-of-pocket cost is health insurance. In my case the actual numbers are:
Wife per month...Medicare $101.00 Blue Cross/Shield supplement $103.00 Month Total $204.00. Yearly total is
$2,448.00. My health insurance expenses are the same--$2,448.00. So the total for the two of us is $4,896.00
annually.

Copays will push this out-of-pocket expense over $5,000.00 dollars per year. During the past 3 years we fell
into the donut hole with an additional $4,500.00 per year.

All this impacts fixed incomes that don't go up. Seniors do not mind paying their fair share. However, how
does one define fair share. The high cost of medical premiums are sinking the senior market place. The voting
turnout of seniors in 2014 and 2016 will overwhelm politicians.

New Market, AL
Chrysler Retiree

I understand many members of Congress are proposing legislation that would reduce my Social Security
and Medicare. Social Security and Medicare make a huge difference in older people lives and in my life. I would
like to share with you how important these benefits are to me and my wife.

When I retired in 2000 I calculated Social Security and Medicare in as part of my income. I even took into
account the annual Cost of Living increases that were given every year. This helped me make my decision to
retire. However, I did not count on you, my government, doing what they are doing and letting me down the way
you have.

You have already taken monies from Social Security to pay for budgets you can't balance. Also, you have
already taken away the Cost of Living increases or reduced them to nothing. Now, you want to reduce the Social
Security and Medicare that I and my employer paid for. You, my government, call this an Entitlement. Let me
explain and tell you that Social Security and Medicare is in no way an Entitlement. My personal hard earned
dollars and my employer’s dollars paid for Social Security and Medicare.

Let me go on to explain the condition with which I am to live during my retirement.

- My employer-sponsored health care plan including dental and vision coverage has been reduced to
  where it costs me additional thousands of dollars a year that was not envisioned when I retired. Social
  Security helps me pay for this additional cost. In addition, almost half of my pension and Social Security
  income is going for doctor, hospital bills, and prescription drugs because I have Amyotrophic Lateral
  Sclerosis (ALS). Often referred to as “Lou Gehrig’s Disease,” it is a progressive neurodegenerative
disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. And, there is no cure. And, you want to
reduce Social Security and Medicare. What would do if you were in my shoes?
- I am paying very high prices for a brand-name and specialty prescription drugs related to ALS. This has
  changed my lifestyle in ways you and I could not envision or expected to live in retirement. And, you want
  to reduce Social Security and Medicare.
- My company life insurance that was part of my retirement financial plan and has been taken away from
  me along with other benefits that were counted in my retirement decision. Now, I am, as you would be,
  concerned and fearful about how my spouse and caregiver will ever survive financially after my death.
  And, you want to reduce Social Security and Medicare.

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Cave Creek, AZ
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree
Upon retirement in 1995 my cost for insurance (health, prescriptions drugs, vision and life) were costing $0 through company-sponsored plans. Since then the company has dropped life insurance and put all other coverages on a menu that costs thousands of dollars. In order to make ends meet we have dropped dental, life, and eye care. My pension and income has not increased, with exception of Social Security COLA raises, in eighteen years.
I am worried about how my wife will be able to live even under minimal conditions of survival when my defined benefit pension is terminated upon my death. She will be forced to live on Social Security only, and as I understand the president is proposing lowering the COLA amount.

Clarkdale, AZ
GM-Detroit Diesel Retiree
My husband worked for Detroit Diesel for 33 yrs. When he retired in June of 2000 he was promised Lifetime Benefits which are medical, dental and optical. Then a German Company bought Detroit Diesel. They very quickly went to work to find ways to cheat the retirees out of what they had been promised in writing. They said they couldn't keep paying our benefits and we would have to pay for them. The Union took them to court, I believe the 11th District Court and 3 Republican Judges voted with Big Business. We took them back to court and we had 2 Democrat Judges and 1 Republican Judge and Big Business was told they couldn't do this.
While all this was going on we still had our Lifetime Benefits paid for. As soon as my husband turned 62 his pension was cut to $1,297 a month. They said he could apply for Social Security to get the difference back. We did not because we would lose money filing early. Then the union took Detroit Diesel back to court for the third time and we got 3 Republican Judges appointed by George Bush (both of them) and lost to Big Business again. Now our health care insurance that we pay for is $1,480 a month. That totally wiped out our pension.
What did Big Business (Detroit Diesel) do with the money in our medical fund? Build themselves a very big corporate office building. It wasn't that the money wasn't there, it was THEY wanted the money for them. This is how they take care of you. I can only hope that the new office building is cursed and something happens!

Scottsdale, AZ
American Airlines Retiree
I took early retirement (April 1, 1995 age 56) from American Airlines after working there a couple months shy of 36 years. As a member of management my medical coverage was stopped by AA 4 years ago and the premiums go up every year.
Now I am waiting to see if the $5,000 life insurance policy will be canceled and what will happen to my pension if it is turned over to the PBGC since I took early retirement.
On top of that who knows what will happen to Social Security and Medicare.

Sun City West, AZ
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree
As a part of my retirement planning, I thought I would have a company-sponsored life insurance policy equal to my last year's salary for my family. A few years ago, the company I worked for (US West, then Qwest, now CenturyLink) changed that amount to a mere $10,000. That forced me to go out and purchase a policy to replace the original amount in my retirement plans. Cost is nearly $100 a month which really means a $1,200 yearly cut in my retirement income.
At first, $100 a month wasn't a huge problem, but as time goes on and costs associated with growing older (i.e. medication) coupled with the higher cost of living, it means having to do without other things (a newer car or a fence for the backyard) that I had hoped to have in my retirement.
Add to the picture, the downturn in the economy and the poor performance on Wall Street in the recent past, and you can understand that proceeds from my 401(k) pretty much disappeared and now we rely mostly on Social Security for income. Because of that, I have returned to work full-time at the age of 65. I have no plans to retire now and the only safety net for my family is that life insurance policy when they no longer have my income.
While my situation is not as dire as others, there must be a huge amount of retirees out there who wonder and worry how they can possibly survive until they die.

Tucson, AZ
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink

I retired from Qwest Communication’s (now CenturyLink) in May of 2002 after 25 years of faithful service to the company. I retired from my position as Central Office Technician in my hometown of Tucson Arizona. I am currently 61 years of age. I was offered an early retirement package and left the company at age 50 with a one-time bonus of $28,000 and a yearly pension of $12,200.

I thought I would be able to find other work but to no avail. I was able to collect unemployment benefits for a short while after retiring but that is all the additional help I have received.

I have high blood pressure as well as a fatty liver condition and high cholesterol. I take medication for the high blood pressure and for the cholesterol. I just switched to generics to help lower the costs of the blood pressure medication. Prior to the switch my combined costs for medication was slightly over $1,000 for a 90 day supply. It is now about $950. I have a $1,500 deductible for office visits and for medications that have to be met before my insurance kicks in. Even then I still have to cover 20% of all cost’s associated with office visits and medications until another $1,500 deductible has been met. This does not include the $178 a month I have to pay on top of this for my health insurance coverage. It is expected to increase each year.

For hospital coverage I have a $6,000 deductible before my insurance comes into play. Last year I spent a combined total of approximately $7,500 for doctor and dental visits and my medications. This year I expect that figure to increase and have learned that I have a heart condition that will require me to go on medication at some point in the near future. I have no idea how much that will cost. As you can see by doing the math, I spend most of my income on health related issues. That leaves little for anything else.

Two years ago I had to lower my level of health insurance coverage and accept higher out of pocket deductibles in order to maintain coverage. If the premiums continue to increase and they will, I will be forced to cancel my health care all together. Although I am a veteran I am no longer in their system and have been told that there is a waiting list of about 5 years to get reinstated. I was removed from their system over 30 years ago when it was determined that I was receiving health insurance coverage through my employer Qwest.

Before I left the company my 401(k) had a value of $200,000 but fell to less than $10,000.00 at the time of my retirement. I just cashed it in for living expenses. I also lost 90% of my investments in the stock market due to two severe market crashes. As a result of the above losses and smaller income I have almost exhausted what I have left of my life savings. At my current level of expenses I expect to be without any savings or investments within 5 years or less. If it were not for the fact that I have a life partner to share expenses I don’t know how I would survive. Together we maintain our home but have been considering selling and moving into something smaller in order to lower our living expenses. We should not have to give up our home of 20 plus years.

CALIFORNIA

Carlsbad, CA
Chrysler Retiree

I am retired from Chrysler Corporation. Among other promised retirement benefits that Chrysler eliminated (not living up to their promises) were company provided life insurance and healthcare during my retirement years. These among other retirement benefits that were part of the sales pitch to entice us to accept employment at Chrysler when they recruited myself and others upon graduation from college are gone. So much for their sales pitch and promises to support us in retirement.

Both company provided life insurance and healthcare were part of our retirement plan, which I worked very hard for many years to earn. I no longer have any life insurance as it is too expensive at my age. I do worry if I predecease my spouse, she will not have sufficient money to sustain herself until her death. Much of our income will cease upon my death. The company life insurance was part of our retirement plan to fill the void of the other lost income upon my death. But, now that is also gone. In an effort to make up for the lost life insurance, we are trying to save some each month from the Social Security and other sources to provide for her after my death. But, that is hard as our income is fixed now and costs continue to rise. Hopefully, there will be enough, but time will only tell.
Regarding healthcare, we are spending a huge amount of money each year to make up for the company provided healthcare that we had planned for our retirement, which is no longer there for us. The money we spend for healthcare means we are not able to fully implement our retirement plan. Shame on us for depending upon Chrysler’s promises.

Social Security and Medicare -- Now, President Obama and some members of Congress want to reduce or eliminate these sources of support for retirees. During my and my wife’s working career, we paid the maximum amount every year into Social Security and Medicare. We assumed that those monies would go towards our retirement and be there when we did retire. Yes, it is understood that some (and, maybe all) of the money paid to the U.S. Government during our working careers was used to support those receiving benefits at the time. But, it is now obvious that previous presidents and members of Congress did not fund future Social Security / Medicare properly and did not plan to pay out to those of us now retired; or, those who will be retiring in the short term. Another promise broken.

Now President Obama and some members of congress want to balance the budget on the backs of us retirees who had planned on Social Security / Medicare being there for us during retirement. If those retirement incomes are reduced or eliminated, it will put another large hole in our retirement plans and significant negative adjustments will need to be made. That is not what the U.S. Government promised us for during our retirement years. But, the current President and some members of Congress don't care since they are not faced with retirement at this time -- it is not impacting them. Don't promises mean anything anymore in our culture?

Elk Grove, CA
AT&T Retiree
After losing over $200,000 in retirement IRA (was rolled into IRA from 401K when I retired), we really depend on Social Security. We took the discount to get Social Security at 63 instead of 67 but it helps pays some of the bills. If the chained CPI goes through then we will have a further reduction in our Social Security. Most of our health costs come from prescription drugs. My husband’s Plavix is now over $205 per month (from Costco which was $40 less than using the insurance!). These vital drug costs are totally out of control. He tried the generic and couldn’t tolerate it so he was forced to stop taking this heart medicine due to cost which is very upsetting when you can’t afford the drugs that are supposed to help keep you alive. Plavix use to cost $90 for 3-month supply until it went up this year.

Granite Bay, CA
AT&T Retiree
Both my wife and I worked; I close 45 years, both paying into Social Security, along with our employers. It appears government is referring to our benefits as entitlements, I disagree. Point being we worked and contributed to our Social Security, along with the companies we worked for – it’s not an entitlement.

Regarding my Health Insurance – it was government who a few years ago told corporations once an employee or retiree reaches 65 they no longer are responsible to have to contribute to healthcare coverage – Medicare picks up.

I’m 80 years old, we raised our family, educated our children, taught them right from wrong, including to respect others – Our country’s problems are pretty clear we just don’t want to see and address them.

Paso Robles, CA
Exxon-Mobil Retiree
I retired in 2005 and took a lump sum feeling confident that I could manage my 401(k) savings that was transferred into an IRA and another account that was being managed by Merrill Lynch. It surfaced that Merrill Lynch was using inside information on institutional investments so consequentially I pulled all my money out of the stock market and invested in local hard money lending in our own county.

In 2007 the economy crashed and a number of local hard money lenders tried to cover up the growing number of defaults by fraudulently withholding information from its investors. As a result of my investment timing, my wife and I have lost the majority of our savings to these fraudulent behaviors and now we are relying mostly on our Social Security and Medicare benefits to make it.

As a result of my losses I postponed a heart procedure that most likely resulted in a 15% poorer result to my procedure (atrial ablation). In addition, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and had to undergo radiation
treatments that added to the out-of-pocket expenses. Social Security and Medicare are the social fabric of our society and it is far more valuable than it is recognized. Privatizing it will just feather the Wall Street gangsters at our loss and cutting it will cause a greater hardship for the elderly.

I urge you to understand the profound responsibility you have on our quality of life.

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Poway, CA
Verizon Retiree
AT&T and Pac Bell Both promised that our retirement pension would be adjusted with a percentage of COLA that would relieve the challenge of meeting the demands on our increase each year that would make our pensions relieve the pressures of the increase cost of living.

However, in as much as we have not received the promised increases, we simply suffer from several challenges that we are confronted with. To mention a few…cost of groceries, real estate taxes, utilities, clothing, autos, etc. Thus it gets really difficult out here. My wife and I have only two meals per day instead of the normal three.

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San Diego, CA
General Motors Retiree
I had built up a reliable 401(k) retirement fund, or so I thought. Then the company went bankrupt (General Motors) and all my GM stock went down the toilet. Then GM took my pension out of their pension trust, guaranteed by the federal Pension Guarantee Corp. and put it into an annuity, unprotected against any losses by that private company. So I live on half the income I expected to have and have little if any guaranty that much of the rest of my income will still be there in the future. Don’t let the government decree that our only retirement income must be from a 401(k). Also, we shouldn’t allow retirement trust funds to be passed off from the protection of the government for the convenience of the corporation whose pension plan we paid into all our working lives.

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Santa Barbara, CA
Raytheon Retiree
I retired from Raytheon in 1995. Since the time there has NOT been a cost-of-living increase in the pension benefits. Thus as inflation continues Social Security has become an increasing portion of our retirement income. ANY reductions in either Social Security or Medicare would create dire financial consequences for us. DON’T LET IT HAPPEN!

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San Francisco, CA
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree
My prescription drug plan charges me $136.87 per month for Advair. Due to the cost I only use it when I am experiencing severe breathing problems for one to two months. I then go off it until the next serious incident. My doctor doesn't like it but he understands and gives me a few 7-day sample packs. The website on my plan says “Sorry, there are no covered formulary alternatives available for this drug (Advair).

I find myself using more Albuterol to avoid having to use Advair. But that has even gotten expensive since the CFCs were removed from it in 2009 and the drug companies got a new patent (I guess) so now there is no generic equivalent which has been available for many years. Each name brand Proair or Ventolin inhaler costs $45 at the drugstore or $90 for 3 from mail order. They used to cost $10 each or $20 for 3 from the mail order.

My doctor recently recommended a new product to replace my generic Flonase ($10) to keep my nasal polyps under control to avoid an expensive nasal surgery which I have had 3 times. He recommended Nasonex ($140 per month) and Dymista ($152). When the polyps grow back which they have in the past my only option is an expensive surgery.

There should be coordination between Medical and Drug Plans to do what is best for the patient. Nasal Surgery can be dangerous since the operation is only a few millimeters from the brain. My drug plan is from Express Scripts and my medical plan is from UnitedHealthCare.

Spending thousands of dollars a year for drugs that enable me to breathe was not in my retirement planning. I see these ads that say if you can't afford your drugs XYZ Drug Company can help. Yeah right only if it does not impact executive bonuses and perks. ///

NATIONAL RETIREE LEGISLATIVE NETWORK - 7
COLORADO

Battlement Mesa, CO
General Motors Retiree

As part of my financial planning when I retired was a $125,000 life insurance policy. I had planned for the proceeds from that policy to help pick up the reduction in monthly retirement income, in the event of my death. This would have benefited my spouse's financial future. I was assured that I would have this insurance for the remainder of my life. I have a letter so stating. A few years into my retirement the amount of said policy was reduced to $10,000. Needless to say, at my age, for me to buy a policy, for $115,000, in order to match the original promise, is out of the question. This came on top of my employer provided health insurance elimination. It is true, that $300.00 per month was added to my retirement check, at that time. This amount was quickly eaten-up as the premiums increase dramatically with each passing year.

When I considered early retirement a lot of number crunching was involved. The promises made to me by my employer, General Motors, was a deciding factor in my decision. Reneging on those promises, after I retired, was a dirty trick. Knowing what I know now, I would have worked a few more years in order to acquire additional credits, allowing me to off-set those before mentioned losses.

Canon City, CO
Kodak Retiree

First off, the chained CPI should not be applied to Social Security cost of living increases. The chained CPI set with what seniors even use. The CPI should be for seniors, food cost, medicine cost, health care cost, utility costs, and other insurance costs (car insurance, house insurance, etc.). These are the costs that raise the fastest and are not the main things in the chained CPI. I feel congressional raises should be half of whatever the Social Security CPI is set for. Congressional pay is way askew to what mainstream America makes.

When I retired, my company covered part of my healthcare insurance. The company has since gone bankrupt, and we were lucky to get the COBRA payments as long as the company provides healthcare to its current employees. Even with that our healthcare cost rose from $400 a month to $800 a month, which of course we never expected, so it is a big cost. The dental plan became too expensive to even do. Many of the people that retired after the company went bankrupt had to take an annuity instead of their pension payment, which was one-third of what they were promised.

Medications are skyrocketing and while we are able to still get them, I do not know how long this will be the case. The cost is ridiculous, and why are Canadian medications so much cheaper than in the US? The Pharmaceutical companies can gouge us and do!

Centennial, CO
US WEST/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree

I was encouraged by others to take the Lump Sum, rather the monthly pension payment. Instead of listening to my inner self, I took the Lump Sum, and, ENDED UP BEING DEFRAUDED. So Social Security and Medicare are very important in my life!!!! Social Security is my only income. Needless to say, Life IS Not That Easy. I SHOULD HAVE LISTENED TO MY OWN HEART.

Firestone, CO
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree

I retired from Western Electric Co. (now Alcatel-Lucent) in 1987. My wife and I are now 87 and 85 respectively. When I retired we were promised a Medical Plan that included doctors and hospital coverage. Alcatel-Lucent now administers this plan. They keep chipping away at certain aspects of the plan. Examples:

1. Maximum out of pocket yearly medical care used to be $1,500. It was raised to $1600.
2. The yearly maximum out of pocket for prescription drugs used to be $750. It was raised to $1,250 then to $1,500 and now it is $1,600.
3. Minor surgery in a doctor's office use to covered at 90%. Now it is only covered at 80%.

These are only a few examples of how our Medical Plan has been diluted. These changes amount nothing more than, in effect, a pension decrease. After 25 years of retirement, my pension amount is still the same as it
was in 1987. There have been no cost of living increases, so any reduction in benefits amounts to a pension decrease. This not what we worked 40 years for. These benefits were sacrosanct at retirement. While these small reductions in benefits do not seem to be much, they are significant to a couple who are trying to live on a 1987 pension in the year 2013. Please, no more sniping away at our benefits.

Longmont, CO
Wife of Charles Harris
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree
I was very disappointed when I learned that the $50,000 life insurance policy for the spouse was reduced to $10,000. If my husband Charles B. Harris passes before I do, it would be a hardship on me. I would have to live on Social Security and Medicare. It would be tough to meet all expenses. I am 78 years old.

When he retired that life insurance was a part of his retire package, it doesn't seem right to take it away, he worked 35 years for these benefits. When these things happen it doesn't give a person the desire to work hard and stay with a company.

Loveland, CO
Kodak Retiree
When I retired from Eastman Kodak, and yes I am speaking for myself, my retirement pay looked OK / nice, but what I did not understand or even realized at the time of signing the papers was that this was a retirement with no inflation consideration at all. In other words the money / buying power the dollar had at the time of signing is not there today and with time I seem to have less money.

CONNECTICUT
New Haven, CT
AT&T Retiree
It's the slicing away of benefits as well as the wholesale elimination of benefits that hurts me. This year my meds cost about 10% more and I now pay annual deductibles on my Medicare, my private insurance and my prescriptions. So far I've been able to adjust. It will be harder next time.

FLORIDA
Boca Raton, FL
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree
They say you need a three-legged stool, each leg being a source of financial security. My company benefits leg gets shorter every year; my Social Security benefits leg is not holding its own which along with Medicare and prescription drug costs take a big piece out of my third leg--my savings.

My pension is one of the few things that has not increased in 24 years. And since my company, Alcatel-Lucent, is now foreign owned, I fear my pension may be short lived.

Since we were a 2 income family, I was able to put the maximum amount that would be matched into a 401(k), but even so, although I never made any withdrawals, the present amount is barely enough for us to live on for one year.

The death benefit is gone. The dental plan was eliminated. The company no longer pays my Medicare B premium. The company drug plan is now tied to a Medicare Supplement plan which is useless. And I can get better drug coverage by purchasing a Medicare D plan.

While none of this has yet to create a financial burden for us, I am concerned about the future. My husband is not well and any decrease in Medicare coverage will hurt us financially. Similarly, as drug costs keep increasing, our Medicare D drug plan is covering less and less of our drugs.

I am most irritated by the fact that when I retired I was given a guarantee of three-legged financial stability. Slowly that guarantee has been eroded to a 24-year-old pension that also could be eliminated.
Meanwhile, there always seems to be monies for big salaries for the executives. Similarly Congress wants to cut Social Security and Medicare--again breaking promises to retirees, while not willing to make any sacrifices themselves and shortening another financial stability leg.

My mother was active her whole life (mostly volunteering, frequently representing the government at international conferences and diplomatic visits overseas) and my father retired from the government after 24 years with a pension. They lived modestly and had some savings. And yet for the last three years of her life my mother was dependent on my financial contribution to stay in her own home and get proper medical care. THIS IS NOT FAIR TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE DONE THEIR PART, MADE PLANS FOR THEIR RETIREMENT AND EXPECTED THEIR COMPANY AND THE GOVERNMENT TO KEEP ITS PROMISES.

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Bradenton, FL
General Motors Retiree

I am a General Motors retiree:
1) I lost my medical insurance.
2) I lost my dental coverage.
3) My life insurance was reduced from $30,000 to $10,000.
4) I am worried about Obamcare as I having more physical problems than I ever had and may need a hip replacement or another back surgery.

I am a widow and upside down on my condo. If something happens that I have to go to a nursing home I won't have any income from selling my place. My children all live away from me and have their own problems. I have two sons out of work for several years.

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Fleming Island, FL
Delta Air Lines Retiree

Since retiring from Delta in 2003 and the drop in the economy in 2008/2009 I have had to resort to liquidating IRA funds to service debt. What was expected to turn around in 5 months has taken 5 years. Those assets are now gone. When this was done at reduced value and then paying taxes as well eventually I have run out of funds.

At the moment my family is supporting me but I expect to lose my house in the next year. Despite Medicare and a supplement I still owe over $3,500 in medical bills for multiple treatments and surgery at Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, FL. I found it necessary to be treated there after acquiring a drug resistant infection at another hospital that nearly resulted in death. Further reductions in both Social Security and Medicare will simply destroy what is left of quality of life and in some cases I am sure will result in shorter life spans.

Until I see members of Congress stop exempting themselves from everything they do I see little hope in the long term situation for this country.

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Jensen Beach, FL
Tennessee Eastman Retiree

After almost 33 years, I took early retirement from Tennessee Eastman Co., a subsidiary of Eastman Kodak in 1986. My retirement package was six months' salary plus lifetime benefits of a fixed monthly pension, health, drug, dental and life insurance plus a 35% survivor benefit. Just before Tennessee Eastman was spun off from Kodak and became Eastman Chemical Co. all my records and retirement administration was moved to Kodak in Rochester.

Kodak declared bankruptcy and on Jan. 1, 2013 I lost all benefits except my pension and a reduced 18 month survivor benefit. Even these are not guaranteed. Kodak offered help in replacing benefits. Anon Hewitt Co. for health insurance at a fee of $700 per month which would be over 65% of my pension. Met Life offered to replace my life insurance and then turned me down because I was over 80. I tried other insurance companies and they had the same age requirements. There was no offer for drug and dental insurance.

Retirees who lived in New York State were offered a reduced health insurance rate from MVP insurance, the firm Kodak had used. Since I lived in Florida, MVP wouldn't insure us since we were outside their service area.

We have replaced our health, drug and dental insurance at a cost which is 40% of my monthly pension. Fortunately, we are on Social Security and Medicare, have no mortgage or interest payments and have kept our
debts, food, utilities, insurance, taxes, homeowner fees, to a minimum. Still it would not take much to lower our adjusted gross income, which is below the government’s poverty level, to the dangerous level.

What can a person do, go on welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, try to get a job. Sure!

Largo, FL
John Deere Retiree
This is not a long drawn-out hardship story, just the short facts: If I had no Social Security income nor Medicare insurance, I'd be living on the street. My pension would not even cover my rent, food and basic monthly utilities. I worked for 30 years donating to Social Security and feel I am entitled to it until I die.

Palm Harbor, FL
American Airlines Retiree
Retirement health care and life insurance plans were contractual deferred benefits i.e. money that never was included in my paycheck nor crossed my families dinner table. Now in bankruptcy American Airlines (AAL) may be able to walk away from these obligations that I funded through 43 years of loyal hard work while AAL’s CEO who led AAL into Bankruptcy possibly will receive $20 million walking money.

Today my prescription plan that was a part of my deferred compensation package has since been replaced by Medicare Part D. It started out at $28.00 a month this year it is $81.30 a month. Each succeeding year it appears that I can anticipate another prescription plan cost increase. This is now @ $975.60 annually before purchase of necessary prescriptions. Being diabetic a three-month prescription order is @ $2000.00 x 4 = $8000.00 annually. Fortunately, other than that single life issue I have been healthy and have yet to require the need of hospitalization.

It appears that bankruptcy is corporate America's way of walking away from hard earned employee obligations while continuing in business with an unencumbered balance sheet.

GEORGIA

Atlanta, GA
Retired Delta Air Lines Captain
Following my retirement from Delta Air Lines in 2004, Delta sought protection under Chapter 11 of the bankruptcy laws resulting in a significant reduction in my monthly pension. Delta defaulted on the unqualified portion of my pension, an initial reduction of $1,900 or 38%. Following the Chapter 11 proceedings, Delta then shifted administration of the pilots' defined benefit plan (the remaining 62% of my pension, $3,100/month) to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation. The PBGC then reduced this portion of my pension by 48% leaving me with $1,610 monthly, an overall 68% reduction of the $5,000 per month I was originally awarded.

A group of retired Delta pilots are slogging through an arduous appeal process to the PBGC to correct these excessive reductions to the defined benefit plan. This process is now approximately into the 4th year, and all the while, the retirees involved are having to make up pension shortfalls by drawing down on other retirement sources.

Marietta, GA
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree
I was laid off and given early retirement as a management (at age 63) employee from Alcatel-Lucent August 1, 2008. My husband, Paul, was “encouraged” to take early retirement or be laid off (at age 57) as a union represented employee from Lucent Technologies in April 2001. Neither of us had planned to retire until we were 65+ because we were both healthy. Neither of us were able to get a replacement job at the same rate of pay.

Thankfully, we each qualified for a company pension – but the amount of those pensions only equals 1/3 of our former combined salaries. If either one of us dies, the survivor will suffer extreme financial hardship in order to pay for basic living expenses.

We also had to take our own early Social Security income (at a reduced rate) so that we could live. The combined Social Security income only equals about another 1/3 of our former combined salaries. So our “retirement income” is only about 2/3 of what our working income was. ANY CUTS TO SOCIAL SECURITY IS A
DRASTIC CUT TO OUR BUDGET. Even going without a cost of living increase hurts us because EVERYTHING is regularly going up in cost except our income. I recently had a new medication prescribed (Lantus insulin). The price on the medication was $500 for one month. Two of my other medications run $85 and $59 a month. The total of these medications is also higher than my house payment.

As we go into Obamacare, I am very fearful of what doctor I will be able to see, as many of my current doctors are thinking about NOT taking Medicare patients. I had to change from a very trusted primary care physician when I turned 65 because he did not take Medicare patients. My current primary care doctor does – but for how long is unknown. Two of my other previous doctors did drop Medicare patients because they could not afford to accept the disgustingly low Medicare reimbursement for their services. My primary care physician charges $120 for an office visit; Medicare reimburses him only $25.09.

In a nutshell, our pension and Social Security income is approximately $4,300 a month; our “fixed expenses” for housing, food, gasoline, utilities, transportation expenses, taxes and insurance (all things that keep going up) are $4,000 a month – which leaves us $300 a month for, clothing, miscellaneous items, and doctor co-pays, and “other” expenses. That is NOT much money for a cushion for emergencies.

ANY increases in the cost of living puts a squeeze on our budget – yet Congress seems to think that Social Security is an ENTITLEMENT. You’re darned right it is !!!!! WE EARNED IT – by paying taxes for over 45 YEARS of working to have Social Security when we retired. ANY CUTS TO SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE EFFECTS US DRASTICALLY – and it is stealing from retirees who have paid into the system for 50+ years to have this coverage.

Members of Congress need to take their greedy hands off of Social Security to pay anything other than retirement payments to those of us who paid into the system. They also need to stop taking taxes on our Social Security payments. We already paid taxes on it when we earned the money that went into the Social Security Trust Fund. Taxing us again, is “double taxation”!!!

Congress needs to get the message -- STOP SPENDING MONEY (OUR TAXPAYER MONEY) ON STUPID, UNNECESSARY PORK BARREL PROJECTS – CUT EXPENSES LIKE REAL PEOPLE AND RETIrees HAVE TO DO!!!!! TRY PUTTING TOGETHER A BUDGET THAT COVERS NECESSITIES ONLY!!!

How about cutting Obama’s “travel budget” – he’s in the air more than he is in the White House! Stop paying salaries to Congress and the President until they can produce a REAL BALANCED BUDGET – paying for “NECESSITIES ONLY” while cutting out the extra spending and all the foreign aid to countries who are becoming our enemies. That would give us plenty of cash to pay our bills and reduce our debt.

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IOWA

Dunkerton, IA
John Deere Retiree

All the 33 years I worked for Deere & Co. they told me on my yearly appraisal that all the benefits I had cost them so much and they will continue into my retirement years. They continued to tell me that is why I did not make as much as other similar positions elsewhere. They took away things starting in the 1980s from yearly stipends, vacation time, started making me pay co-pays for office calls and medications for my healthcare. These increased regularly and eventually I started paying a monthly premium for my healthcare insurance.

In 2004, when I retired, I paid $39 per month premium and had a yearly deductible of $100. In 2005 and 2006 the monthly premium jumped to $79 per month and the yearly deductible jumped to $500 per year. Then in 2007 thru 2009 the premium jumped again to $116 per month and yearly deductible sky-rocketed to $4,300 per year! In 2010 the premium jumped again to $127 per month, and deductible stayed at $4,300. In 2011 the monthly premium jumped again to $138 and the yearly deductible jumped AGAIN to $4,500 a year!!! In 2012 the monthly premium jumped again to $159 and deductible stayed at $4,500 a year. And in 2013 the company sends out a letter to “certain” salary retirees saying that nothing would change in 2013.

I gave them 33 years of my life, countless times never charged them for overtime to do the jobs right with the premise they would have our backs like they told us they would over and over and over. Thousands of us believed them to be caring and truthful to us all only to be slapped in the face and told they never said such a thing nor did they imply anything of the sort. How can thousands of retirees all have heard the wrong message? They did not. They bold faced lied to us and hung us out to dry.
I used to be proud to tell people that I worked for the best agriculture company in the world but no more. I wish that I had never walked through the front door and committed my working life to them. They bold faced betrayed each and every one of us salary retirees.

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Spirit Lake, IA
US WEST/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree

I would have to attribute the following to a combination of corporate CenturyLink policy and the requirements of Obamacare. During annual enrollment for 2012 health care with CenturyLink, the health plan option that I had, the premium went up by 75% to keep the same kind of coverage. I had to drop down to a lower level of coverage to keep monthly premiums affordable, in hopes that with good health, the higher co-pays and deductibles would not be experienced. So we dropped to this lower coverage.

For 2013 enrollment, our health plan premium went up 50%. There were now lower price options for us to go to, so we had to absorb a $200 per month increase in premiums. Now for 2 of us, our monthly premium is over $600, for medical and dental.

Related to CenturyLink pension, we just received information that the funding level as of end of 2012 was only 82% or so (defined as total assets divided by total expected pension obligations). This is very concerning.

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ILLINOIS

Coal Valley, IL
John Deere Retiree

My wife and I are living comfortably without any economic hardship. However, the effects of inflation are being felt after 12 years of retirement. I am 72, so I’m on Social Security and Medicare. I am a John Deere salaried retiree, and so far Deere has taken care of my supplemental healthcare insurance needs completely. However, my wife is not on Medicare yet. She’s 64, and still under Deere’s HSA Plan with United Healthcare. Her deductible is something like $2,200 per year.

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INDIANA

Muncie, IN
General Motors Retiree

I retired from GM in 1998 as a salaried employee of 35 years. In December of 2012 I was notified that I had been underpaid since 2002 and I would receive a check for $32,000. I did not believe this and was leery of getting a check and then find out later that it was a scam.

I called Fidelity, who was the agent taking care of my pension and was told it was not that I had been underpaid but that I had been overpaid. A few days later I got a letter saying that my benefits would be reduced by $300 a month and that I would have to pay $32,000 back. In January my account was transferred to Prudential. They took the position that all my benefits until June of 2014 would be used to pay the debt.

My problem was that it was half of my retirement income and I had done nothing wrong or dishonest. I asked "How did you go 10 years and did not know you were paying me too much, don't you have a yearly audit or any checks and balances?"

I talked to 2 attorneys and they said it was a Federal thing and I would have to pay it back even though I had done nothing wrong and they wanted nothing to do with it.

I found an organization called General Motors Retirees Association and made contact. With their help and many phone calls to Prudential I finally got something. Bottom line, my monthly income is now $1,000 out of pocket to pay for something that I think GM should take some responsibility for. This will go on until June 2016. By that time I’ll be dead. I have taken a part time job to stay even. I feel sorry for the folks that can't do that, and I understand there are some thousands, it needs investigating.

I will be glad to help in any way I can, even go to D.C. and testify. I have all the letters and documentation.

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KENTUCKY

Crestwood, KY
Chrysler Retiree

My employer-sponsored health care insurance has been eliminated. So I had to purchase my own coverage to supplement my Medicare. This was not expected as this was part of the retirement package. This amounts to $2,928.00 per year (includes spouse).

Prescription drug program was eliminated so I now have Medicare Part "D" plus enrollment with a provider at $2,517.60 per year (includes spouse).

So that is a total of $5,445.60 per year not anticipated at the time of the retirement in 1987.

However, Chrysler has set a spending account that reimburses me $4,625.00 per year to help offset some of these expenses. So my out of pocket expense is reduced to $820.60 for this year on just these items.

Dental and eye care plans have been cancelled. I no longer have eye insurance coverage but I purchased a dental plan for myself and spouse at $721.68 per year. There are certain items that on occasion I must pay out of pocket.

Term life insurance policy of $50,000 was cancelled so I had to search around for some type of replacement and could not due to what the insurance company called a previous existing condition even though they were insuring me while I was actively employed and even after retirement until Chrysler cancelled the policy. The insurance company said they would cover me again if I would anti up over $3,000.00 per year but for a lesser amount of insurance coverage. Obviously that was a non-starter.

AARP Life Insurance took me on at $5,000 coverage for $636.96 per year. Again this was just another erosion of my retirement package, and a loss of $45,000 in life insurance coverage.

My prescription drug expenses include: Nexium 30-day supply cost is $41.00 or 90-day supply $123.00 and in the doughnut hole $466.15 for 90 day supply. Crestor 90-day supply $141.10 and in the doughnut hole $318.45. Niaspan 90-day supply $123.00 and in the doughnut hole $340.41. I usually enter the doughnut hole by July and will need to have spent $4,750.00 out-of-pocket to get out of the doughnut hole. My spouse also has two expensive medications but she may not reach the doughnut hole this year.

So as can be seen I am behind the eight ball no matter what happens.

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MARYLAND

Abingdon, MD
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree

I am 69 years old. I retired from Lucent Technologies in July 2001 because of the benefits we were offered. That didn't happen and I had to go back to work. In November 2011, I retired again from another company but had to go back to work in April 2012 because with prices going up for gas, food, etc. I was not able to make ends meet.

I receive a pension plus Social Security. I pay almost $400 a month for medical coverage, which only includes medical, prescriptions and dental. I have bad allergies and have to use Pataday and Nasonex year round. Pataday for 1 month just cost me $44 and Nasonex for a 3 month supply cost me $231.16. At this rate, if Social Security benefits are cut I will have to get 2 jobs just to make ends meet.

All I can say is senior citizens need help.

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MICHIGAN

Hartland, MI
Wife of General Motors Retiree

Roger and I have particular circumstances; since he has Alzheimer’s and had to retire early. It would have been nice if we had long term care insurance for the near future, and were able to afford something besides the HMOs and the deductibles and copays or if it didn't cost so much to get someone in to give him his baths, or watch him while I went to the doctor, etc.

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Oscoda, MI
General Motors Retiree
I retired from General Motors in September 1992 and discontinued outside employment in 1999. My pension combined with Social Security is $2,359 monthly. My monthly expenses exceed my monthly income and the additional expenses are added to my available credit cards.
I cannot afford to replace my 2002 Buick LeSabre, my supplemental health insurance has increased from $118 per month to $241 per month and my supplemental life insurance has increased from $261 per month to $433 per month.
It is ludicrous and shameful for Obama to consider reducing Social Security cost of living adjustments. He obviously has no idea how much groceries cost and doesn’t seem to care that gas prices are double the cost of when he came into office.
I currently owe $22,000 for a home equity loan and $10,000 for credit cards which increase monthly. I have actually evolved from an upper middle class category to a level just above the poverty level with no improvement in sight.

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MINNESOTA

Edina, MN
US West Retiree
I retired from US West in January 1986. In 1986 a Popsicle cost $0.05. In 1991, I received a 4% increase to my pension. NOTHING since. I can't afford to buy a Popsicle NOW!

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Plymouth, MN
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink
My income is $2,600.00 per month. My medical & such far exceed it. I do postpone my meds sometimes. I rarely go out to eat & buying new cloths is a joke!!! I am grateful for all the help I get from my family, but feel like such a drag sometimes. I have a nice co-op, but my monthly township fee is over $1000. (It includes a lot though--lawn care, snow removal, free appliance maintenance.

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MISSOURI

Kansas City, MO
TWA & American Airlines Retiree
As a retiree let me say I have never drawn unemployment benefits or drawn food stamps and I have been unemployed on several occasions due to the ups and downs of the airline business. I worked very hard trying to obtain the education necessary to provide me an invaluable skill set that would make me an asset and to be of value to any airline in the industry. I have worked as a janitor, ramp serviceman, a plant maintenance mechanic, a hydraulic mechanic, an aircraft mechanic, an avionics mechanic, a lead mechanic in avionics, a lead mechanic in aircraft, an aircraft inspector, a maintenance coordinator, and a supervisor all as an employee of TWA.
During my employment history I paid into Social Security, Medicare, and have always paid my taxes--city, county, state, and federal but not without feeling that too many people, and especially businesses, in this country avoid paying their fair share of taxes.
TWA fell on hard times and went into bankruptcy and along with it the retirement I had work so hard for, for so long was suddenly in the hands of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) which according to the head of the PBGC as broadcast on National Public Radio during a call in secession informed me that under the structure of the PBGC my retirements had been cut to 27% of what I would have been able to draw at a normal retirement age. That is a hell of a long way down the ladder from a comfortable retirement level.
When American Airlines bought TWA instead of crediting the TWA employees with years of service and years of experience, we as employees were shuttled to the bottom of the list and given special employee numbers that designated us as former TWA employees and classed as second rate employees with only time in service starting in January 2001.
I am very grateful for the limited time I spent working for American Airlines, but have a bitter taste left in my mouth for the way we were treated. After many years of lucrative service to TWA, American Airlines and the unions, my retirement income consists of, PBGC TWA benefit of $779.13 per month, American Airlines pension of $678.51 and a whopping $157.00 from the IAM union pension fund, all after some 35 plus years of devoted service and I consider myself one of the lucky ones.

TWA 091320, that number represents at least some 91,320 employees that have contributed to the strength and economy of this country for many years. It is a part of the fabric of this great country and to turn your back on the backbone of this country would be criminal and a turning point in the history of this country which has traditionally rewarded hard work and has been a guiding light of how people are treated in this country and what to expect for the future of this country.

Too many corporations divest themselves of their fiduciary responsibility to their employees and the years of service those employees invest by giving the years of their lives to a company by declaring bankruptcy and adding that burden to the federal government. Who said companies are too large to fail? That philosophy needs to change and companies need to be held accountable for that bond and liability under that fiduciary obligation.

Raymore, MO
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree
My healthcare is taking up more of my money than food. I am struggling to meet my monthly bills. Costs on utilities have soared to where I can only barely cope. To cut down on my water usage I only bathe in the shower once a week. I fear I will be homeless soon even though I do not have a mortgage but then there are taxes to pay and up keep, etc. I doubt there is anything cheaper no matter what you live in. Apartment, retirement apartment, mobile home all would cost more to live in.

I worry constantly. Get a job, hah! Who would hire a 71-year-old? Even if I had a job the government would take it all back in taxes. With the job market so bad one of my children lives at home and I have to provide support as well. Is there no end to the suffering?

The cost of living is outrageous! Watch the government tax me on my health insurance next! I have to keep dipping into my IRA. It is now very low. Then there is the cost for insurance on my house and car.

St. Charles, MO
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree
My wife and I were advised by our doctor that effective January 1, 2014, his office will no longer treat Medicare patients because of all the regulations and the reduction of their payments from Medicare. This doctor has treated me for the last 32 years and my wife for the last 17 years.

We have begun to cut some our prescriptions in half to reduce costs. In addition, I have been using Advair which requires that I use it twice daily. However, because of the co-pay cost, $44 per month, I spoke to my doctor and he has allowed me to use it once a day on a temporary basis.

We suffered considerable losses in the stock market and do not have the resources to support our current standard of living of a middle income couple if our pensions were reduced.

Currently we are under a Medicare Advantage Insurance plan. Based on all the news we constantly hear and the projections by the Congressional Budget Office, we are fearful that our Medicare Advantage Insurance will increase dramatically.

My wife and I are both 81 in relatively good health and we try to live a healthy lifestyle. We fear that with this administration, we will not receive the excellent care that we have received in the last 60 years.

MONTANA

Helena, MT
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink
I am a retired U.S. West retiree (1995). I had 29 years, 1 month service and was penalized for retiring then. My pension $795.00 a month before taxes. I currently receive Social Security Benefits and I am on Medicare. Without that I would not be able to stay in my current home of 40 years, buy groceries or gas. Out of that salary comes a payment of $121.00 a month for health insurance. Currently I am not on any prescription drugs. All of
us worked many years TRUSTING our employers. They lied. Now we are asking you Congress people to do as we ask, LEAVE SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE ALONE.

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NEVADA

Henderson, NV
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink
I am a widow, and my total income is derived from two items - Social Security and Pension. If it were not for living with my granddaughter and her family, I would have a very difficult time surviving. It would be even more drastic if any of my benefits were cut. I was not in the category wherein I had finances to invest in 401(k) or any other investments. I've been able to get by on my Social Security and pension by living conservatively.

Why is it of all the recommendations for cutting/deleting, etc., there is never a mention of this occurring with the Senate, House, etc., in their income or benefits!!! It would seem to me that those recommendations should be included...across the board! There are many other frivolous types of studies, etc., granted that could be deleted in preference to cutting retirees benefits. Each time these recommendations are suggested, do you even have any idea of the affect it has on these people? There are many at my church that I'm aware of that have a difficult time making ends meet as it is. My last response in all decisions is - You will answer to God for any misconduct in decision making.

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Las Vegas, NV
Delta Air Lines Retiree
Delta Air Lines cancelled my pilot’s pension and medical insurance, but kept it in effect for all other employees. That included those union pilots who were still working. The PBGC now pays 1/5th of my “guaranteed pension”. Many of my colleagues lost 100%.

Now I hear members of Congress talking of Social Security being a hand out. I fully paid my money in and now Congress wants to say it is charity. Where is my money and even if the payments continue as promised they are still way below what I would have had I put the money in the bank.

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NEW JERSEY

Morristown, NJ
Retired Executive Recruiter
I am disabled and still on the disability versions of Social Security and Medicare. However, in 1 year I will be on “regular” Medicare and in two years on regular Social Security. Here’s what they mean to me:
Social Security – I make only a few thousand dollars per years of consulting income, so this is my lifeline as a disabled person. I qualify for slightly over $2,000 per month and that is critical to having a life above the margin.
Medicare A and B – I could be on my wife’s health program for about $9,000 per year. Medicare part B cost me about $1,500 per year and part A was earned by my Medicare contributions over a 35-year period.
Medicare Part D – When this started the administrative costs were a large percent. I now can get a policy with relatively low administrative costs and zero copay for most generic drugs. This saves me several thousand dollars per year, probably about $3,000 versus alternatives.

I am distraught over the possibility that Republican members of Congress want to mess with my Medicare and my Social Security. I earned them with significant payments over a 35-year period.

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NEW MEXICO

Truth Or Consequences, NM
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree
When I retired in 2000 my share of medical insurance was $11.00 per month. Today $560.00 comes out of my pension check for medical insurance. I had to drop my dental insurances because it was costing me more than if I go to the dentist on my own. So between taxes and my insurance I get to keep 36% of my pension.
can't live on that (pension) I need my Social Security check and I'm looking forward to starting Medicare next year. I paid into these programs for over 40 years I want my due.

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NEW YORK

Clayton, NY
Eastman Kodak Retiree

My employer-sponsored health care plan has been reduced and we have very high limit on out-of-pocket costs (catastrophic coverage) and our dental and vision coverage is gone, as well as life insurance. My wife is not Medicare eligible yet and is putting off foot surgery due to high cost. Because we were laid off from Eastman Kodak in our 50s, our pension per month is minimal. Without Social Security, I don't know what we would do. My wife and I are in our mid-60s and still work to make ends meet.

I hope that Social Security benefits will be protected. Our government needs to cut their spending, as well as we have had to.

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Hilton, NY
Kodak Retiree

The company from which I retired (Kodak) declared bankruptcy in 2012 and as of 1/1/13 all retiree health, dental, and life insurance benefits were eliminated. I have no dental insurance (which was actually eliminated for many of us starting 2009) and am paying $400/month premium for a high-deductible single health insurance plan under a lifetime COBRA agreement negotiated by the Committee representing Kodak Retirees. Fortunately my husband, who I was covering on my retiree plan as he had been self-employed his whole career, became eligible for Medicare on 2/1/13 due to turning 65.

I am 63 and will have to continue on COBRA at least until January 2014, when I am hoping to purchase a health plan on the NYS Exchange to be set up under the Affordable Care Act. If not, I will need to continue on COBRA plan through 2014 until I turn 65.

On the high deductible plan, I am responsible for annual out-of-pocket expenses up to $1,250 for non-preventive medical expenses, with $3,600 per year out of pocket maximum. I also have to cover all dental expenses out of pocket.

As a note, to those who might think "why did you retire before being eligible for Medicare?" My division of Kodak was sold in 2007. That technically was my "retirement" from Kodak as I qualified under age & service years at that time. However, in 2010 after 3 years with the new company I was laid off. Finding a full-time job with benefits at age 60 during the biggest recession in 70 years was not a realistic option. My only option was to use the Kodak retiree health plan for myself and spouse. We paid $300/month the first year, then the premiums zoomed to $679/month for the next 2 years, then the plan was eliminated entirely.

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Jamaica, NY
Port Authority of NY & NJ Retiree

In June 2003, my father passed away. He left our family home (which I lived in for 50 years) to my younger brother. My 3 sisters and I lived in the family home. At the time I was working full time for a quasi-government agency. I was preparing to take an early retirement within a couple of years having worked an entire lifetime and also being a caregiver to aging relatives and sickly siblings. My brother sold the family home from underneath his sisters and we at that point were homeless. My younger disabled sister had no place to go so she ended up living in a group home, my other sister lived in a shelter. I bunked in with friends until I found an apartment 3 months later. My apartment status was OK for 3 years until the landlord passed and then I was homeless again.

I retired in 2005 thinking I would maintain some type of employment to supplement my small pension but things did not work out that way. I ended up staying with an acquaintance and working temporary but it still wasn't affording me the opportunity to obtain decent housing. My income wasn't enough. As soon as I was about to turn 62, I applied for early Social Security. In the meantime, I was technically still homeless. I spent 2 months in 1 shelter and 8 months in another until I was able to secure a place in the YWCA for Women. The only reason I qualified for a SRO (single room occupancy) was because I had enough income from Social Security and was working part time for a senior employment program, Easter Seals.
Now, I am in a rent stabilized senior housing residence in Jamaica, NY. If it wasn't for Social Security, I at 64 would be homeless again since my pension check doesn't cover the cost of my rental apartment. Thank goodness I worked long enough to collect a decent Social Security so that at least covers some of my expenses. My health has deteriorated and I have had a stroke which has not left me impaired. I have some health insurance so that I can afford to buy some of my drug prescriptions for my hypertension.

Congressional members have no idea what a struggle it is for most Americans to survive let alone seniors who are the most vulnerable. As for my other 2 sisters (one is 47 and the other is 63) both live in supportive housing units and are collecting Social Security disability benefits. It's been really rough on us over the years.

Rochester, NY
Kodak Retiree

I am one of many Kodak retirees who, when we retired, were promised several benefits: life time medical for retiree and spouse at company expense; same for dental benefits; life insurance for life based upon our final year's salary, and a company paid annuity for the spouse upon the death of the retiree.

Several years ago Kodak started the erosion of those promised benefits by eliminating the life insurance benefits; then they eliminated both the "free - no premium" portion of the medical and dental plans; then eliminated the company benefit for spousal medical and dental plans; and most recently eliminated the spousal annuity plan.

All of the above benefits were considered to be part of our overall salary package from the moment we started our careers. Had they not been in effect our actual salaries would have been much higher. However, we were content since the benefits package plus the salary levels paid were competitive with those paid by other major employers.

Additionally, in 1991 we have not received one penny COLA raise in our retirement pension. Additionally, we are now paying monthly premiums for life insurance, medical insurance and dental insurance; the sum total of which amounts to about a 20% reduction in our retirement income from Kodak.

Additionally, we - along with all Social Security recipients -- went two years without a COLA increase and have seen smaller increases in those years in which a COLA was provided.

The rate of inflation formula drastically underestimates the expenses incurred by seniors by not including medical costs which are, by far, the single most expensive item in our budget. Now Congress is considering changing the formula to reduce it even further. They say that it will operate on the idea that seniors and retirees can "substitute" less costly items when the price of preferred items increase. So the price of beef rises, we substitute pork; when the price of pork rises, we will substitute spam; when the price of spam rises, we will substitute what "dog food"? What, pray tell, do we substitute for today's outlandish medical costs? There is no substitute here -- and the impact of "Obamacare" is going to make this budget item increase even more.

If Congress' ultimate plan is to make us just slowly wither and disappear I think this latest scheme will actually succeed - whereas most of Congress' plans have no chance of doing so.

If we seniors are the cause of the ballooning national debt through Social Security and Medicare and the solution is to make us "pay our fair share" how about levying taxes on the benefits received by almost 50% of the voting population? We pay taxes on 85% of our social benefits even though we paid a much higher tax rate on those same earnings while still in the employed population. Why should not the value of food stamps, day care, telephones, computers, unemployment benefits, and a pyramid of other benefits handed out freely by the government and which are espoused by the same Congress persons considering the changes to Social Security and Medicare, be taxed at some rate? At least those receiving these "handouts" will know that there is a cost attached to them and that they are "no longer getting a free lunch"

NORTH CAROLINA

Burlington, NC
Lucent Retiree

It is a dire need that I must have my Social Security and pension. (I am now retired and 81 years old.) My husband died seven years ago and my two income family dropped down to one - mine only. Quite a shock trying to pay your bills, your health insurance premiums, your taxes, your utilities. My insurance premiums got so high with my employer I had to find an independent company that I could possibly pay the premiums in case of an

NATIONAL RETIREE LEGISLATIVE NETWORK - 19
emergency. There is no way I can find a part-time job. You must fight for me and others in my same category. Our leaders in Washington don't know what it is like to be poor.

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Clayton, NC
Kodak Retiree

I was the Global Director of Employee Benefits for Eastman Kodak for a number of years until I left at age 55 to join Mercer HR Consulting in 1998.

As a result, I know all too well the dire hardships that Kodak’s bankruptcy has placed on many thousands of Kodak retirees. When I left Kodak the average monthly pension benefit was around $1,200 per month. As a consequence, the value of the health, dental and life insurance benefits probably was equal to, if not greater than, the value of the pension benefit.

The executive team enticed thousands and thousands of people to retire under early out programs, some at ages below 50, with the “promise” of those welfare benefits for life. Now as you know all those welfare benefits are gone and with the raiding of the pension plan by the executives, the pensions are at risk as well. I strongly believe that the senior leadership knew full well what was ahead of the company and its commitments – which it would not be able to sustain the obligation when it was encouraging them to retire early.

In fact, Kodak drew down all $600 million in the welfare trusts during the middle 1990s just to try and prop up the stock price, rather then preserve the two Funds for the benefit of those for whom it was intended and would be most needed.

Since President Obama, has chosen winners and losers, a la unionized GM winners (at the expense of “guaranteed” bond holders), versus non-union Kodak losers, these retirees from Kodak are suffering terribly. Their meager pensions are no-where near enough now to cover their welfare needs; forcing desperate daily-needs decisions.

One of the greatest regrets of my life, and one I feel daily, was participating in communications that, in hindsight, clearly mislead all those thousands to make decisions that has jeopardized their very well-being...when “Trust” and “Integrity” were at the heart of the stated values and principles of the company from the time of George Eastman. The vast majority of employees believed and relied on “management” to talk straight to them and to walk that talk...which was not done.

It is true that for all my years there, we positioned the 3-legged stool concept – however, the thousands of retirees that most concern me never had the resources to build the 3rd leg of the stool and now they have toppled.

God willing, I and my wife will “make it” for the few days / years we have left, but there are many who won’t due to the pride and selfish leadership of a once fine and trusted company. Shameful.

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Hampstead, NC
Kodak Retiree

I'm a Kodak retiree. Kodak had honored its retiree plans for a hundred years, so why would we think it would be different for us? But our CEO and Board of the last 25 years or so, did the unthinkable and ran the Company into bankruptcy and many of our governments are doing the same thing.

I felt I had to retire or the job stress was going to kill me. But when I left, jobs were getting scarce and it has just gotten worse; so the best we could find in this jobless recovery are low paying, part time jobs. The consequence to us was our financial plan was pulled out from under us but we tightened our belts and got by. Then Kodak pulled our healthcare benefits and although I had reached Medicare age, all we could afford for my wife was catastrophic coverage with a $20,000 deductible. So we just have to hope she doesn't get sick until she gets to Medicare. And now we need to worry about the future of Medicare and Social Security.

But here's the point I want to make: I think CEOs and Boards, need to be held to a mission of "making a moral profit, now and in the future", and all our governments must "manage a moral, balanced budget now and in the future". Furthermore, companies and governments need to realize, we, the retirees know their success, now and in the future, is in our best interest. They need to start talking and making moral decisions like they know this is more important than their bonus or getting re-elected. It was not right to promise any of us (company or government) workers any benefits they could not sustain. I think most of us retirees are made of a
strong moral character, and we would sacrifice what we can for posterity's sake, but we doubt company and government officials can be trusted do the right thing.

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**Southport, NC**

**Chrysler Retiree**

My concern is that when it comes to Social Security, Medicare, Obamacare and, in my case, my military retirement benefits, I simply do not trust my government. I also think that I am part of a majority of Americans who have concluded that they cannot trust their government. This is a sad thing for America

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**NORTH DAKOTA**

**Fargo, ND**

**US West Retiree**

For more than 50 years, Bell System Companies provided a Death Benefit payment to a surviving spouse or dependent upon the death of a retiree. US West continued this benefit when separated from the Bell System. The death benefit was paid to survivors from the company pension fund and US West included it in Employee Benefit Publications as an element of an employee’s overall compensation plan. That disclosure lead many employees to rely on the Pension Plan Death Benefit feature rather than commercial insurance to provide for a surviving spouse or dependent upon their death.

In 2009, Qwest, successor to US West, discontinued the benefit despite ERISA Law that was supposed to protect retirees’ pension plans. That action was challenged a lawsuit, but ultimately Qwest prevailed and the consequence was many retirees found themselves unable to replace the lost benefit with commercial insurance because of high cost or lack of insurability. There were about 27,000 retirees affected by this action of Qwest.

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**OHIO**

**Laura, OH**

**Alcatel-Lucent Retiree**

When Lucent shut down its manufacturing in 2001 in Columbus, Ohio, many employees were forced to take an early retirement. I was 55 years old.

My son and I decided to go into business for ourselves because I didn't want him to work for a company, only to be forced to retire before he was ready. Our thoughts were having a small business would provide some kind of stability and financial income, knowing that we were not going to get rich but be able to pay our bills on a daily basis.

When the economic downturn hit, we lost our business because people couldn’t get credit so they couldn't buy our products and services.

I took money from my retirement to start the business in addition to getting a SBA loan. We didn't have enough money from the SBA loan to cover our start-up costs. The SBA loan procedure has a long processing time and we didn't have time to reapply before we opened our business. Having your own business is supposedly the American dream. I am still paying off debt and my pension and Social Security income is necessary so I don't have to declare bankruptcy.

I cannot find a decent paying job because most companies do not want to hire older people. They don't tell you that because of age discrimination but it is reality. I have talked with many senior citizens who are facing the same issues that I am.

I went to college, worked hard, and was a single mother who raised a three and five year old by myself. Their father thought having an affair was more important than raising and supporting his family. I am blessed that I have children who have jobs but I feel that I am a burden to them with my current financial situation. They have children who need their support emotionally and financially. I fear that my situation will only get worse if the Congress changes my Social Security, etc. I do not have a spouse who I can lean on in my senior years.

I am gravely concerned about losing any of my social security. I worked seven days a week for many years to pay into Social Security and support my family. It is beyond my control that I cannot find a good paying job, losing any of my Social Security will only become a major burden to me and my children.
Owasso, OK
American Airlines Retiree

I was an aircraft supervisor employed by American Airlines and retired after 35 years of service in 2003. I elected to take early retirement not only to help the company out during their difficult times, but I felt I gave American the best years of my life and the retirement was in my scope and the retirement benefits were very inviting at the time. American Airlines dangled a carrot with health insurance and life insurance for the balance of my life and health insurance for the remainder of my spouse's life, assuming I died first.

When I turned the age of 65, American Airlines advised my wife and I there was no more health insurance nor life insurance that the company would provide. If we wanted health and life insurance, we would have to pick up these expenses ourselves (my wife was not Medicare age). Just to let you know, our monthly health insurance is hitting nearly $700 a month. We can't afford the life insurance premium, nor can we really afford the health insurance.

In other words, the retirement papers I signed at retirement including benefits meant nothing and as far as I am concerned. American Airlines has done what they do best to non-contracted personnel, reneged on a very important retirement benefit promise. All of these insurance benefits were signed American Airline’s documents and part of our retirement file. These are the same documents the union employees sign!!!!!

I cannot express the sad feelings and mistrust this company has put us in when they broke the retirement insurance promises. I could not believe American Airlines was doing this to individuals that gave them our dedicated years of service. American Airlines has shown their true face on how they can issue directives for non-union employees and no recourse for that individual. I can assure you if the tide were turned, American would be the first in line for the legal system to work for them.

Tulsa, OK
American Airlines Retiree

I retired from American Airlines in 1993 after 37 years of service. After my retirement, American continued to provide health insurance for me and my family - and life insurance for me. This had been American's policy since 1956.

However, about three or four years ago, American sent notification that they were discontinuing (not renewing) all of our insurance coverage. This decision applied to all retired management/specialists personnel (all who were not protected by a labor union).

This was particularly difficult for my wife because she is not yet eligible for Medicare and the company provided insurance coverage was all she had. As a result of this abrupt decision by American Airlines, we are having to pay $600 per month for health insurance - and the cost continues to increase each year. In addition, we no longer carry life insurance because the premiums are too expensive.

Weatherford, OK
General Motors Retiree

I’m 78 years old, married and still working. I retired from Allison Division of General Motors in May of 1992. At that time, GM was trying to sell off their industrial divisions and Allison was being caught in that effort. As a result, I accepted the offer to retire.

At that time, my net retirement income from GM was basically the same as it is now, between $1,550.00 to $1,650.00, depending on what deductions are being taken out. During the 25 years I worked for GM, it was my/our understanding, when I retired, I would receive additional benefits which included; supplemental health insurance, life insurance, extended care insurance, dental Insurance and eye care Insurance. And, we did have that coverage until about five years ago, when GM decided to cancel all of it (except for $10,000 dollars of life insurance).

At that time, my wife and I, now in our mid-70’s, had to try to pick up all the insurance coverage that GM dropped on us. We were able to afford the supplemental health insurance from UnitedHealthCare, to supplement Medicare A and B. The supplemental health insurance is about $500.00 per month, plus Medicare Premiums of $198.80 per month. We pay cash for eye care and dental care, when it’s required.
The one thing that we were counting on, that we could not afford to pick up, was extended care insurance. At our age, the age that GM dropped our coverage, the cost of extended care insurance was over $1,000.00 per month per person, basically, forcing us to spend our entire GM retirement to pay and more, for extended care insurance, an insurance we had counted on in the event of a catastrophic illness. So, today, we have no extended care insurance.

Two years ago, my wife had a kidney removed due to cancer. She is fine now. But, she must be checked every three months to catch any cancer that may come back in the bladder or her other kidney. If for any reason she requires extended care at a nursing home or hospital, it will probably take any savings we have to support her, especially if her stay lasts awhile.

Yet, we are more fortunate than most. We live out on the Oklahoma Prairie, where the cost of living isn't as high as other areas of America. If we had known GM would not be paying for extended care insurance, we would have purchased it years ago, when the premium would have been affordable due to our younger age. We weren't given that chance.

We know there are over one hundred thousand other GM salaried retirees in the same boat as we are. We are just lucky that we have saved enough, paid our home off, and I still have good health, so I can continue to work.

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OREGON

Hillsboro, OR
AT&T Service Manager

I am still employed by AT&T. For the first 20 years of my service at AT&T we had a defined benefit pension plan that offered managers with 30 year of service a pension at age 55 roughly equal to 50% of their pre-retirement income. Then came CEO C. Michael Armstrong. In a very deceptive way he moved AT&T managers to a cash balance pension plan. Due to the wear-away provisions of the new plan my current benefit would be about 21% of my current income at age 57 with 33 years of service. Needless to say this has completely changed my retirement planning and required me to work longer.

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Lake Oswego, OR
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree

I was fine as long as I could continue to work after retirement. When that ability ceased I was unable to sustain living on my limited income of just Social Security and a retirement amount that had never taken into consideration the increasing cost of living. As a consequence I lost my house and had to declare bankruptcy. I barely make it now and am in jeopardy of having to go to a veteran’s home.

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Sherwood, OR
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree

Cutting the death benefit (one year’s salary) has reduced what my spouse will receive (in total from life insurance on me by about 30 percent. This is a short fall that neither of us can out live to fill in.

I believe my drug costs (co-pays) have increased on average by about 25 percent. I am prescribed four drugs for heart disease and four for COPD, and two for benign prostate. One drug that has increased from a zero co-pay to over $800 yearly. Some doctor co-pays have increased by one-third.

I am on Medicare. However, my spouse is still subscribed to UnitedHealthCare, and while a "bargain" compared to other insurances, its premiums has increased by nearly $1,000 yearly.

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Pennsylvania

Warminster, PA
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree

The high cost of prescription drugs is real and excruciating as a family retired since 2000, going forward and projected in the current environment, it won't be long before we will be forced into bankruptcy or other means of support.
Warwick, RI
Verizon Retiree

I retired from Verizon (then NYNEX) in 1996. I was 44 years old. I realized very early that my pension was just enough to cover my mortgage and condo fee, gas heat and electric. My cable bill was over $100.00 because no one can have TV without cable these days. I worked a part time job for a while making $6.00 an hour, but I finally landed a job at Cox Communications working there for almost 10 years before my department was eliminated and we were all laid off.

I have been trying to get another full time job since then, but have only been able to become a lunch aide in my city's school system. Since I started my career in the phone company, I never went to college and because I don't have a degree, I get overlooked for people who do.

My pension has not had a COLA increase (or any other increase for that matter) since I retired in 1996. I am now 61 years old and trying to make ends meet. My health benefits have been changed since the new contract and now my co-pay has gone up. I take Nexium and Cymbalta and the cost used to be $25.00 each for a 3-month prescription. Now it's $50.00 each for a 3-month prescription.

I worry about 2015 when the new contract is negotiated because I'm afraid I will have to start paying a co-payment for my health benefits and I still won't be eligible for Medicare until 2017. How will I afford all this?

When I turn 62, I lose $500.00 from my pension. I know I will be able to collect Social Security, but what happens if that goes away? How will I live? I have no bank account. I depleted it because I've been unemployed for almost 3 years. I have no extra income except my little job which is only $62.00 a week, IF I work 5 days. Last week was school vacation so no pay for last week. I don't get paid during the summer and I don't think I make enough to collect any unemployment benefits during that time. It is such a worry for me.

Anderson, SC
Verizon Retiree

Verizon Communications has in the past few years terminated our supplemental life insurance coverage and reduced our basic life insurance coverage. My wife, Alice, who is an insulin dependent diabetic had basic and supplemental coverage. The supplemental coverage was made so expensive as to preclude us continuing to carry the coverage. We had to both go into the insurance marketplace at our age (over 65 and with preexisting conditions) to try to secure coverage.

We had to settle with reduced coverage at a high price. This may in today’s environment be addressed by the new insurance environment. Our plans for a comfortable retirement were negatively impacted by this decision. This may be allowed by the PLAN but it does not make up for the impact on us and other retirees in the same situation or worse.

In addition, our long term care insurance provider a few years back was dropped by Verizon and we had to pick up the tab for this insurance as an individual payee. The payment is NO longer taken out of our pension checks and we had to create a DEBIT to pay for this on a monthly basis. The protection of a larger contract with Verizon was lost and we are now facing the possibility of significant market pricing increases in the future for an insurance that has been in place for decades.

I was recently kicked out of the Verizon Management Pension Plan with 41,000 other retirees and transferred into Prudential Insurance Company annuities (DE-RISKING). What this means is that these retirees lose both federal ERISA pension law protections and the safety net that the federal government’s Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) provides. Corporate pensions are protected by the PBGC, but annuity policies are not, so if an annuity issuer goes bankrupt or suffers an asset shortfall, retirees are up a creek without a paddle.

Are we all forgetting the financial meltdown of 2008, when many too-big-to-fail insurers and financial firms sought out the federal government as their financial safety net? Who in Washington is looking out for America’s retirees? Corporations are being permitted to simply discard the legal rights of America’s retirees and simply
ignore federal ERISA laws meant to protect our pensioners. This is creating a dangerous and potentially devastating trend.

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Seneca, SC
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree
I retired before age 65 because, according to what I’d been promised and via the portfolio which both my wife & I had [I had scrimped and saved for more than 25 years], we could retire comfortably. Lavish and us rarely crossed paths. If in doubt, we went without.

We were promised free company health care benefits until Medicare kicked in. They were free for 2 years and then they went up dramatically every year. That was an increasingly major outlay for six years. Now, medical & drug insurance [even though we’re past 65] are a major budget item for us. My company pension did not have a COLA provision in it so it’s worth about 3% less every year. My primary concern about my pension is that my company’s foolish mistakes might get it into the position where they default on the pensions and, if we’re fortunate, we’ll get a fraction of what they promised.

Additionally, despite the fact that all the monies we were forced to put into Social Security ever since our high school days are now exposed to income taxation as we are finally getting the checks which were promised. Now, Obama is talking about a new rigged COLA index [chained CPI] which would reduce future Social Security COLA despite the real inflation that most people are affected by. (If those same funds would have been put into a conservative annuity, we’d be getting 3 – 5 times per month more than the government is doling out.

We're not a “worst case” scenario example. But we do represent probably millions of recent retirees with similar concerns. Private companies and governments should be forced to live up to their commitments!. There should be a pre-paid bond or re-insurance policy to prevent a failed company or government from defaulting and abandoning those who planned on those promises.

Bankruptcy and other default mechanisms are too easy to use and hide behind for companies and government bodies as a means to stiff those they owe money to. I think we should stop worrying so much about big banks and insurance companies and be more concerned about standing with those who worked long and hard for a future after work only to have the rug pulled out from under them by the stupid, greedy or thoughtless.

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TENNESSEE

Gallatin TN
General Motors Retiree
The loss of benefits affect my wife more than me because I am now covered by Medicare. However, I took reduced payments to pay for her benefits. They were cancelling them and requiring her to go out and work. I want all my money back.

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TEXAS

Granbury TX
General Motors Retiree
I was hired into General Motors in April 1957 and retired in September 1997…over 40 years of service. When first hired in 1957, I was promised certain lifetime benefits and a defined benefit pension upon retiring.

Since retiring in 1997, I have lost employer-sponsored health care for myself and family. It was terminated by the company. I also lost prescription drugs policy. My secondary medical insurance for myself and my wife is $590 per month, plus prescription drugs $95 per month for a total of $685. Medicare comes out of our Social Security in the amount of $210 per month. That totals $895 per month just for medical expense. That is 37% of our Social Security. Security is not an Entitlement, we paid for it. Dental and Vision care was canceled by GM.

We probably do not eat as well or as often as we should. Things happen as we get older. One dental crown is over $1,000. I have had them extracted for $500 instead. I was using Advair for better breathing at $145 per month it is no longer affordable. My wife takes a prescribed vitamin for $245 per month for an Achilles neuropathy. Vitamins are not covered by Medicare or by secondary insurance. This is wrong.

NATIONAL RETIREE LEGISLATIVE NETWORK - 25
In 2004, my first wife, was diagnosed with a squeamish cell carcinoma in the mouth ... she was a non-smoker. Medicare and the secondary insurance paid for the removal of all but one tooth AND one half of her jaw bone. After radiation she was turned to a Dental Oncologist of which there was only 2 in the Dallas / Ft. Worth for some dental engineering. While Medicare and the secondary paid for the removal of the body parts there is NO coverage or code for replacement of jaw bone and teeth. Thus, I had to pay out of pocket $15,000. She had a heart attack and bypass surgery and died from 5 mini strokes on September 29, 2005. She turned 70 on August 2, 2005.

The next disaster was when General Motors / Met life canceled her life insurance as of her 70th birthday. I had paid into that small life policy for 38 years. Therefore I was required to pay for a funeral out of pocket in the amount of about $12,000. That is $27000 out of pocket.

General Motors / Met Life cancelled my life insurance of about $191,000, which I had paid into for 40 years and dropped it to $10,000. When GM published its new policy it stated the company had the right to change, amend or CANCEL that policy. I tried to get some life insurance for myself. Have you ever tried to get life insurance at 73 years old? Impossible.

Kerrville, TX
IBM Retiree

Our situation here would be affected by any cut in our Social Security benefits. Our Social Security benefits constitute roughly half of our total income, and a cut there would have to be offset by cuts in our spending, i.e. less travel, eliminating selected items from our shopping lists, and possibly fewer contributions (donations) to local organizations.

The other half of our income is my retirement check from IBM. We do not know what IBM's plans are for the future with regards to our retirement checks. The cost of our medical and dental benefit plans has gone up annually, especially this last year coupled with smaller and smaller benefits. My IBM sponsored life insurance dropped to a minimum the day I retired. What will IBM do in the future with our retirement checks? Will they turn it over to an insurance company (Prudential) as a few companies have done recently? Who knows?

Purdon, TX
Retired Delta Air Lines Pilot

My pension with Delta Air Lines was cut 82% which caused many hardships like loss of medical coverage and quality of living.

Rockwall, TX
Alcatel-Lucent Retiree

I have been given a prescription for Nexium twice in the last couple of years. My esophagus looked a bit like charcoal the last time I had an endoscopy. I did not fill the prescription because it was almost $100 for a 30-day supply. I now use tums, Prevacid or baking soda and water instead of Nexium and sleep sitting up part of the night.

I am a former employee of AT&T/Lucent Technologies (now Alcatel-Lucent). Years ago I signed up for a long term health care policy with MetLife through AT&T. I believe I was around 42. I am now 65. The beauty of signing up for the MetLife policy so many years ago was that I was led to believe that the premium would never change. That was a farce. My premiums have gone up this year from $130 to $163 per quarter.

My Medicare Part D prescription Drug plan has gone from $34 to $54 per month since I signed up last August with Medco who is now Express Scripts.

After leaving Lucent I worked for a consulting firm until 2009. I was forced into early retirement in 2009 because of a failed back surgery. I was told was that I would be back to new within a couple of weeks....well I am still waiting for the pain to go away.

As a retiree I have no more earning power. A little bit here, a little bit more there never concerned me that much when I was working, but it does now.
**UTAH**

Santaquin, UT  
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree  
I retired (involuntary force reduction) from Qwest in 2007 after 31 years. My pension at that time was $1,800 per month. Healthcare was $40 per month. The following January the healthcare contract was re-negotiated and the cost was $240 per month. In January of 2012 the contract was renegotiated and for same coverage the cost was $585 per month! Really, my pension is $1,800 and then $585 is taken out for healthcare insurance? I get $1,215 to live on? Mortgage = $785; Utilities = $325; Car payment = $210; Total $1,320. No money for groceries, medications, fuel, etc.  
You tell me how we can live on this. What Company will hire a 58-year-old?  

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**VIRGINIA**

Oakton, VA  
Kodak Retiree  
I worked for Eastman Kodak Co. for over 30 years after my graduation in 1966. The company filed for bankruptcy in 2012. My employer-sponsored healthcare insurance has been eliminated and I had to buy my own healthcare insurance for my wife and myself since January 1, 2013. I had to also buy a dental and prescription drug plan. The prescription drug plan doesn’t cover much and there is lot of co-pay and still a lot of out-of-pocket expenses. I am paying very high prices for a brand-name prescription drug and this has changed the life I had expected to live in retirement.  
Kodak has eliminated my life insurance and at age it is too costly to replace it. The company-sponsored life insurance was part of your retirement financial plan and I am fearful about how my spouse will survive financially after my death.  
Members of Congress need to know that they might be guaranteed pension and other benefits, but there are people in their districts who need Social Security and Medicare as they get older. Please support the continuation of Social Security and Medicare and take action to lower the cost of prescription drugs.  

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**WASHINGTON**

Allyn, WA  
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree  
As we get older and inflation becomes a greater reality with the impact it has on the budget, I am very concerned about the loss of my death benefit (one year’s salary). If I pre-decease my husband, he will be faced with living on less than half of what we live on now, and will lose his medical benefit. We fear the loss of my pension and our medical benefits.  
Life becomes more difficult with failing health and disabilities that come with advancing years. To face hardships in the financial arena as well would make life extremely difficult. Congress should not forsake us seniors.  

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Arlington, WA  
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree  
I retired from Qwest in February 2008. At that time our medical premiums were very affordable at $21 a month for the both of us. Then the premiums for our medical started to go up every year. The first increase was to $64. I thought that wasn’t too bad. We could manage it. Then it increased to $446. We are now paying $596. I am concerned about how much higher it will go or if the company will decide to terminate healthcare for retirees.  
My husband retired in 2005 from King County and never planned on working again. I never thought he would, but he has now taken a part time job just to help pay the healthcare insurance premiums. He takes several prescriptions and also has a partial blockage in an artery so health coverage is very important. I have been working part time since 2010 to help pay for our expenses. I am considering taking a full time job (if I can find one) that has benefits so we can drop the CenturyLink healthcare coverage altogether. The
increase in premiums has created a hardship for us. We did retire at a younger age than some people. We are 57. We still have a long time to go before Social Security and Medicare kicks in. We will have to endure these astronomical prices for a lot longer.

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Burien, WA
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree
I am a retired single woman and worked for more than 37 years. I paid into Social Security on my first paycheck at age 14 and continued to do so throughout my long working career. I currently receive a pension check from CenturyLink, but I retired from US WEST. I have never received an increase in my pension on a monthly basis and the Social Security check plus the COLAs help me in providing for myself. Without Social Security I would not be able to make it.

President Obama and members of Congress will have a lifetime pension but continue to think they can take away from the working class. Then they wonder why the working population is in such a mess. They created many of these hardships. Instead of taking care of the American workers who have paid into these systems and programs during their working careers, they choose to take anything they can get their hands on to either tax the people out of their benefits or threaten to take money away from them, through the programs, to take care of the debt.

The companies we worked for and retired from continually take benefits away from us like medical coverage that we were promised to have when we retired. I retired with the knowledge that I would have this type of coverage. Now I have to pay for it and that comes out of my pension check and with the cost of that and the cost of living my pension check does not go as far as it did when I first retired.

Also, so many companies decide to discontinue pensions and take money out of the pension savings to give lump sum amounts to people who are currently retiring is not right either.

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Port Orchard, WA
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree
I am now feeling the effects of the so called health benefit cost increases by CenturyLink. I have been retired from Qwest for nearly seven years and unable to find a decent paying job. My wife and I have been using my lump sum retirement payment and (401K) to survive.

Last year my wife was diagnosed with End Renal Failure so she and I have spent a lot time at the doctors. CenturyLink has increased our healthcare benefits to $528 dollars per month plus my wife has been automatically placed on Medicare with its monthly premium.

I am now 62 years, no one is going to hire a 62 year old. We are using up our nest egg and with the way Social Security is a political football my Social Security check will be eaten away by taxes and reduced by the chained CPI if Congress passes the change in how future COLAs are calculated. We will be out in the street, and that's not an exaggeration. Everything I worked for in 38 years will be gone.

I fear that CenturyLink will try to dump Qwest retiree's health benefits or make it so expensive that we will have to buy a lower quality health plan that is mostly out-of-pocket.

I am beginning lose my positive outlook on my government and our ineffective Congress. We need true leadership and a political will to help Americans like myself and millions of others that are in this position.

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Renton, WA
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree
It is getting more difficult each month for me to make ends meet. My divorced daughter in her late 40s has not had steady work for over 2 years. She has lived with me over a year now as she had nowhere to go after she lost everything, home, car, etc. I'm just thankful I had a home for her. She makes enough to cover her bills, but nothing extra to help me with household expenses. She has no medical or dental insurance or a vested pension for the future.

My youngest granddaughter came to live with me 9 months ago after she lost her baby to SIDS and left an abusive relationship. She was working, but making just above minimum wage, and no benefits. She is now married to a young man stationed at Fort Lewis. In the meantime I have the added expense of utilities for 3 extra people with me. They do buy groceries, as I can't afford to, and I no longer go out to eat, go on trips, etc. My company-sponsored healthcare insurance that I pay each month went up more than 50% from last year.
Prescriptions...I've cut back on taking them every day as they have also gone up in price. The first of this year I refinanced my home to lower my monthly mortgage bill, making it much less than renting. My monthly income is not keeping up with the cost of everything going up. I know there are lots of people worse off than I am, and I am very thankful for what I do have. I used to think I was in the "Middle Class", now I don't think there is such a "Class". You are either wealthy, poor, or on the verge of being poor.

As I look back now, I took early retirement at age 62, and I retired from US West/Quest (now CenturyLink) with 24 years’ service. If I'd worked another year and waited till 65 for Social Security, I'd be making quite a bit more a year than I am now. I had a sick husband and in-laws back then who needed care. But that is all in the past and this is the here and now.

Redmond, WA
Retired Boeing Engineer

My wife, Sheila, and I both worked for Boeing immediately before retiring in 1992. Me for 25 years and her for 13 years. We are very fortunate in that we do not have particular hardships. This is because Sheila was an excellent money manager.

However if congress, in its crazy wisdom, decides to cut Social Security payments or increase the costs associated with Medicare then we will have problems. Our combined health care costs and independent insurance costs represent a fair portion of the money we have available for general living expenses. Cut something, or increase something, and we will have to use more of our savings for general living. That is a distinct worry when on a fixed income (with non-covered dental and prescription costs rising so quickly).

In addition to today's problems with the Social Security system (which is NOT an entitlement, but a prepaid savings plan) is the degree to which prior government entities have used the money for purposes other than for which it was intended and bled down the available cash. Now repaying the borrowed money, replaced with government bonds, is the real trouble.

Renton, WA
Boeing Retiree

When I retired from Boeing I did not choose the Boeing retiree medical plan as the premiums were too expensive. I subscribed to a commercial Medicare supplement plan. Eventually, because of my military service, the government provided a supplemental medical plan called Tricare for Life for which I subscribed.

The combination of Medicare and Tricare was truly a God send. My wife suffered with cancer and had protracted and expensive treatment until her death. I had many medical procedures including spinal fusion, heart valve replacement and two total knee replacements. I don't know how we would have managed without these medical insurance plans.

I am very fortunate to have this support. It did not just happen as I worked until I was 70 years old in order to obtain greater benefits and put 30 years in the military. We also lived a modest life style. Never the less, without Medicare and Social Security our retirement lives would have been much more difficult.

Tacoma, WA
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree

I am affected personally along with other CenturyLink retirees by the takeaways. I rely on my pension for 60% of my income, yet there hasn't been an increase in pensions since 1996. I retired in 1998. Medical costs have increased substantially. What is not paid by my insurance furnished by the company I retired from, or Medicare, has gone up also. I rely on a biological drug which is very costly and I would not be able to afford this myself if the Medicare benefit was taken away.

There is no death benefits now which used to be equal to a year's salary. Also, company-sponsored life insurance went from a year's pay to a flat $10,000. Yet Executives have not suffered and their golden parachutes have become Platinum.

I worked from 1960 to 1998 to be able to live comfortably when I retired, but with every letter I get from my former company, I hesitate before opening and wonder what they've increased or taken away now.
Danbury, WI
US West/Qwest/CenturyLink Retiree

My company life insurance was part of my retirement financial plan and now it has been reduced to a flat $10,000 dollars. My wife and I planned on the life insurance we were promised at my retirement for her to be financially secure after my death if she is still living.

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Based in Washington, D.C., the National Retiree Legislative Network (NRLN) is the only nationwide organization solely dedicated to representing the interests of retirees and future retirees.

Formed in 2002, the NRLN’s endeavors to secure federal legislation to protect retirees’ employer-sponsored pensions and benefits in addition to keeping Social Security and Medicare strong.

The NRLN is a non-partisan, grassroots coalition representing more than 2 million retirees who came to the NRLN from retiree associations, chapters and as individual members who have retired from 168 different U.S. corporations and public entities.

Members live in all 50 states and practically all Congressional districts and are working together to preserve the retirement benefits they earned during their many years of employment.

For more information about the NRLN, visit our website at http://www.nrln.org.