

Diane Fleming Remarks 1/19/2017

Hello. I am Diane Fleming. I am 75-years-old and I live in the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C. I am a retired member of the International Association of Machinists and am here today on behalf of the Alliance for Retired Americans.

I am pleased to be surrounded by others who are also fighting to protect our hard-earned Medicare benefits.

I worked for United Airlines for 39 years as a reservations agent and in ticket sales. But when the airline went bankrupt, I lost much of my pension.

Luckily my job provided me with retiree health coverage until I turned 65 and went on Medicare. Five years ago, I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Since then, I have had four surgeries and radioactive iodine treatment twice. The cancer has now recurred and I will need another surgery. After being diagnosed with thyroid cancer, I had to have CT scans, sonograms and MRIs to detect the target area of the cancer cells, and needle biopsies. Most of these procedures are quite expensive. I have also had blood work regularly to check my thyroid levels. I don't know what I would do if Medicare didn't cover all these bills.

In addition to the cancer, I suffer from glaucoma and need daily drops to treat it. Medicare helps pay for the eye drop prescription as well as my other prescriptions. I go every four months to check my eye pressure.

While others have private Medicare Advantage plans, I chose traditional Medicare. It has made my cancer a lot more bearable, enabling me to focus on getting better rather than worrying about going bankrupt.

I know I speak for millions when I say, "No cuts to Medicare and no privatization."

With premium support and vouchers, a person with my health conditions would be charged a lot

more than someone in perfect health. I need the guaranteed coverage that Medicare offers, not a coupon toward premiums I can't afford.

Millions of older Americans are able to enjoy their retirement without astronomical medical expenses because of Medicare. In this age of small or nonexistent pensions, minimal retirement savings, and skyrocketing prescription costs, Medicare is literally a lifesaver.

I retired at age 62. But I was lucky – the retiree health coverage I had through my job helped me afford my doctors and my prescriptions until I turned 65 and went on Medicare.

Nowadays, fewer and fewer people have retiree health insurance from their jobs. Most Americans rely on Medicare.

We must make sure that Donald Trump keeps his promise not to cut our Medicare, so that medical expenses don't bankrupt millions of seniors and their families.

Since November, the president-elect's Republican supporters on Capitol Hill have taken steps toward dismantling and cutting our earned Medicare benefits.

President-elect Trump has named House Budget Committee Chairman Tom Price of Georgia to be Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Rep. Price has spent years trying to privatize and cut Medicare. In the past, Rep. Price has promised to cut benefits and change Medicare into a voucher program, effectively ending guaranteed benefits and turning it into coupon-care. As secretary, Price will also have significant control over Medicare, including Part D and policies affecting the price of prescription drugs.

His views are out of touch with the needs and beliefs of American seniors. We cannot stand by and let a program that Americans have paid into for decades, which has provided health care to millions of seniors and saved families from bankruptcy, be destroyed.

Rep. Price and the president-elect will be working closely with House Speaker Paul Ryan. If Speaker Ryan's proposals were to become law, seniors would be deeply hurt. We simply cannot

afford to wait until age 67 to go on Medicare, and the privatization that the Speaker calls for is just another word for benefit cuts.

The members of the Alliance will fight Donald Trump, Tom Price and Paul Ryan every step of the way. We need the guaranteed benefits that Medicare offers, not coupon care that leaves seniors like me hanging out to dry.

Thank you all.