



From the President...

By Debby Weintraub

As PRO President I have multiple opportunities to interact with people still involved in the daily workings of Peralta. Recently I met with the newly elected Board of Trustees President, Julina Bonilla, and will also meet soon with the new interim Peralta Chancellor, Fran White. Along with PRO Board members Karen Anderson and Bruce Jacobs, I attend the District Benefits Committee, giving me a chance to meet with PFT, SEIU, Local 39 and District representatives. In addition, I am the current Chair of the Citizens Oversight Committee (COC), representing a senior citizen group. The COC is looking at the Parcel Tax and Bond Measures which allows me to participate in discussions with community members, district administrators and employees. All these interactions help keep me informed about current issues in Peralta, but equally as important, they also give me a chance to advocate for retirees and use my institutional knowledge to add a needed perspective to discussions I am involved in within Peralta.



I know that the Benefits Office needs attention, so when I met with Trustee Bonilla, I reiterated the ongoing problems that retirees experience due to the lack of resources for that office (which I outlined in our last PRO newsletter.) During our time together, I also spoke about the importance of the OPEB Bonds being well-managed and ensuring that oversight comes from a variety of areas, not just from Peralta administrators and Trustees. I also believe stakeholders should have a real voting voice in addition to being allowed to attend meetings. I can say, however, from the reports that our non-voting retiree representatives on the Retirement Board give to the PRO Board, the OPEB Bonds are in good shape and doing

exactly what they were designed to do: helping to make our lifetime benefits affordable for the District.

On another topic, the Board of Trustees, in a 7-0 vote, recently decided to terminate former Chancellor Jowell Laguerre's contract before his second contract expired in 2020. Peralta unions and academic senates had been requesting his departure as well. There appears to have been multiple reasons for the sudden dismissal of Dr. Laguerre, including the fact that 36% of the General Fund was being spent at the District Office. Dr. Fran White, a well-known Peralta veteran, has replaced him as acting chancellor. (See a brief piece about Dr. White in this newsletter). I am looking forward to meeting with her very soon and working with her on areas of concern for Peralta retirees. In my initial meeting, I intend to once again focus my remarks on the Benefits Office. I would like to see the District make significant progress in making a viable website that retirees can easily use. I will also express my concerns as current Chair of the Citizens' Oversight Committee in regard to being certain taxpayers' dollars are being spent as the voters intended and as Peralta promised in the Parcel Tax language. I also will urge that Dr. White and the Board quickly advertise and affirm new members

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for the COC as we have been without the appropriate number of committee members for well over a year. If you are interested in serving on a Citizens Oversight Committee for either the Parcel Tax or the Bond Measure, please email Richard Ferreira at rferreira@peralta.edu and ask for his assistance in directing you to the applications for the committees.

Since the District Office has had several significant personnel changes in the last year, the District Benefits Committee has not met in almost a year. PFT took the initiative to set up a meeting with the three District unions, PRO, and a District representative to begin the important work of reviewing the SPD (Summary Description Plan) which outlines in detail retiree and active employees' medical benefits. The SPD is one of the most vital documents every PCCD person should have. For retirees I think it is crucial to have the SPD which was in use when you retired. That document outlines exactly what services you are eligible for, what is covered, and what is NOT covered. The SPD is a negotiated document, and yet the District repeatedly allows CoreSource to change things in the SPD without negotiating with the unions. Since PRO has no negotiating rights, we must work closely with our former unions to ensure that the retiree benefits that we earned and retired with are protected.

The Benefits Committee is also working to be sure that the next medical insurance eligibility audit that

the District will conduct in the fall of 2019 gets to every retiree in a timely fashion so that no retiree (or active employee) has to worry about losing coverage because the District failed to develop a system to accurately contact retirees and current employees about the audit. PRO worked with the PFT several years ago to recommend a simpler more efficient process which the PFT negotiated and hopefully will be in place for the upcoming audit.

Finally, I invite you to come or tell people you know about the workshop Bruce Jacobs conducts on how Medicare and District benefits intersect and work together. It is an excellent workshop. It will be held on April 24 from 5-7 pm at the PFT Office, 500 East Eighth Street, Oakland. It is very valuable for people and/or their spouses who are just about to retire or have retired but are now becoming eligible for Medicare. Please note that this workshop is useful primarily for people with lifetime benefits.

Peralta Retirees Organization
484 Lake Park Ave., #598
Oakland, CA 94610-2730

<http://www.peraltaretirees.org>

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Dr. Fran White Selected as Acting PCCD Chancellor

On February 26, 2019, at its regularly scheduled Board meeting, the PCCD Board of Trustees of Peralta Community College District named Dr. Frances (Fran) L. White as acting chancellor of the District, replacing retiring Chancellor Jowel C. Laguerre.

Dr. White is PCCD's first female chancellor and has deep ties to the District, as well as with each of the colleges. She comes to Peralta with nearly four decades of experience in higher education and has a long history with the California Community Colleges in a variety of roles, including as interim president at both Berkeley City College and College of Alameda in 2016. Earlier in her career, Dr. White was an assistant dean of communication, arts and physical education at Laney College. Prior to that, she was a faculty member at Laney for several years and served as PFT President during that time.

In addition, Dr. White was superintendent/president of the Marin Community College District; president of Skyline College in San Bruno; executive vice chancellor at City College of San Francisco; and interim chancellor of the San Jose/Evergreen Community College District. Dr. White has a doctorate in education administration from the University of

California at Berkeley, as well as a master's degree in counseling psychology and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the California State University, East Bay. She is a community college graduate who earned an associate degree in general education from Merritt College.



Dr. Frances (Fran) White

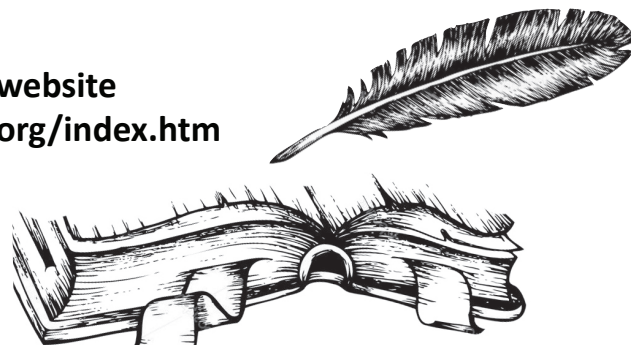
It's easier than ever to renew your membership in PRO.

Check the label on your Newsletter to determine when your membership expires. If the label says 2018 or before, then you need to renew for 2019.

Dues are: \$20 — 1 year | \$55 — 3 years | \$80 — 5 years | \$250 — Lifetime

You can pay your dues for 2019:

- **securely by credit card at the PRO website**
—Just go to: www.peraltaretirees.org/index.htm
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PRO
484 Lake Park Avenue, #598
Oakland, CA 94610-2730



Know Your SPD: Cost of Ambulances Services

By Bruce Jacobs.

This is the fourth in a series of articles that delineate benefits available to Peralta retirees who are enrolled in the Core-Source/Blue Cross option. All benefits are described in a document called the Summary Plan Description (SPD) which is available online at the My CoreSource web site: mycoresource.com. After you sign in, you can access the document by using the "My Links" drop-down menu and choosing Peralta Comm. College Pre (or Post) 7-2004 Retiree Plan Document.

If you have a **medical emergency**, it is often necessary to have an ambulance transport you to a hospital for immediate care. So long as you are using a licensed ambulance service (note that there is no difference between network and non-network providers) you are covered for 100% of the ambulance costs as long as you are being transported from the place where the accident or illness occurred to the *nearest* hospital that can treat your condition. This may include air transport or ground transport depending on the circumstances.



Ambulance service in a **non-emergency situation** is also 100% covered if you need transport to a hospital or between hospitals for required treatment. The need for such transportation must be certified by the attending physician as medically necessary. Such transportation is covered only from the initial hospital to the nearest hospital qualified to render the special treatment.

Emergency services actually provided by an advance life support unit are also covered, even though the unit does not provide transportation.

Please note that in my article on Emergency Room coverage in the last issue of *The Peralta Retiree*, I included the definition of an emergency which appears in the SPD. There is additional wording included in the SEIU SPD which defines an emergency as follows:

"Emergency is the sudden onset of a medical or behavioral condition that causes sufficiently severe symptoms or pain. In the absence of immediate medical attention, the emergency could be expected to result in:

- placing the health of the person in serious jeopardy (or placing others in jeopardy in the case of a behavioral condition)
- serious dysfunction of any organ or body part
- serious disfigurement
- serious impairment to bodily functions."

(Thanks to Diana Lara for providing this additional information which makes clear that behavioral conditions can constitute an emergency.)

Finally, the District has removed the SPD documents from its web site. PRO is therefore providing access to the current retiree SPD's on the PRO web site. They are accessible on the Resources page. There is a link at the top of the Home page (www.peraltaretirees.org) to the Resources page.

The Peralta Retirees Organization (PRO) & The Peralta Federation of Teachers Present Medicare and District Benefits Workshop

When: Wednesday, April 24, 5:00 – 7:00 pm

**Where: Peralta Federation of Teachers Office
555 E. 8th Street, Oakland, CA**

– Light refreshments will be provided –

**RSVP by April 23 to PFT 510-763-8820 or
union@pft1603.org**



Climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, Learn Swahili

By Nikki Ellman

[Periodically we feature a column spotlighting activities of PRO members after retirement. In this issue, new PRO member Nikki Ellman tells about her compelling experiences while climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro. If you would like to share a story of your own, please contact Helene Maxwell: helenemaxwell3@gmail.com –Ed.]

“Pole, pole. Maji, maji.” These words were repeated to me many times by my guides as I slowly made my way up the trail on Mount Kilimanjaro. “Slow, slow. Water, water.” These were the two basic requirements for making it up to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro. It is not a technically difficult climb, but walking many hours uphill as the air grows thinner and thinner takes its toll, so it’s imperative to walk slowly to avoid getting out of breath, and to drink water constantly to avoid severe dehydration and altitude sickness.

In 1970, when I was 16 years old, I had the good fortune to spend a month in East Africa visiting national parks. The trip culminated in a climb up Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, at 19,341 feet the highest mountain in Africa. At the time, I thought of it as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I never imagined that 48 years later, at the age of 64, I would once again climb the mountain, this time making it to the summit. I didn’t learn until this most recent trip that I hadn’t actually made it to the top all those many years ago but only to the false summit 500 feet below the real one.

The opportunity to return to Tanzania after so many years helped precipitate my retirement from the Laney ESOL Department after 30 years of teaching there. In addition to the wonderful and challenging adventure of reaching the top of Kili, this trip involved cycling through rural farmland, viewing wildlife in game parks, and exploring Zanzibar. I expected all of these experiences to be wonderful, but what I didn’t anticipate was how much I would enjoy trying to connect with Tanzanians through my very rudimentary Swahili.

I have always loved languages and feel that I have a facility for them, but I had never before tried to learn a non-Western language. I thought it would be fun to try to pick up some very simple Swahili before I trav-

eled to Tanzania. I was fortunate to be able to connect with an American woman who had lived in Tanzania and had taught Swahili before. I was able to squeeze in only two lessons with her before I left, but she taught me some basic phrases that would be useful for traveling and pointed me to some online resources. I dutifully jotted down everything I thought I would



Nikki Ellman and guides, Isa and Adam, reach Baranco Camp on Mt. Kilimanjaro.

need to know on flash cards and drilled myself on the interminable flight to East Africa.

I was delighted when I tried out my newly learned greeting on our guide when I met him for the first time. “*Nina furaha kukutana na wewe*” (It’s nice to meet you), and he responded with, “*Na mimi pia*” (Me, too). I told him my name in Swahili and asked his name, and thus began a wonderful week of adding words and phrases to my meager Swahili vocabulary as we made our way slowly up the mountain.

Since I was in the business of teaching people how to speak, read, and write English for so many years, it was fascinating for me to find myself in the role of language learner. Granted, my situation was totally different from those of my students. They were immersed in an English-speaking environment and needed to learn the language in order to fulfill their academic or professional goals or simply to be able to communicate with their children, who were absorbing English like sponges as they attended Bay Area

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schools. I, on the other hand, did not need Swahili in order to function in Tanzanian society. I was traveling with a group, and all of our guides spoke excellent English, as did the staff at the lodges where we stayed. Learning Swahili, however, was a way for me to connect with local people and show that I was interested in their culture. It was also a fascinating intellectual exercise (they say that learning a new language is one way to keep your mind nimble as you age) that showed me which aspects of a language are important to learn as a total beginner and how difficult it is to remember and use these enough so that they become internalized. This made me think of my students and how many times and in how many different ways they had to practice a grammar point or a phrase before they were able to actually use it correctly.

And it's amazing how much you can express with just two verbs. The first two verbs beginning ESOL students learn are "to be" and "to have." Once you add some nouns and adjectives, you can start building simple sentences that convey a lot of basic information. You can describe how you feel, who you are, what you do for a job, where you live, or what you have or don't have. These same verbs served me well in Tanzania. Luckily for me, they are often the same word in Swahili, which meant that I could communicate almost everything I wanted to say without having to learn any other verbs: *Jina langu ni Nikki* (My name is Nikki); *Si na watoto* (I don't have any children); *Ni na toka California* (I'm from California); *U na kaka wangapi?* (How many brothers do you have?); *Ni na njaa* (I'm hungry).

My Kilimanjaro guides and other support staff helped me tremendously by quizzing me as we walked along or while we were eating. I had learned a lot of affirmative statements, and they asked me questions so that I could use what I'd learned to answer them (I also had to understand the question), and then I could ask them the same question. This simple repetition reinforced the questions so that I could then ask them on my own without their prompting. Sometimes they asked me about my partner, Greg, and this helped me learn the different subject and object pronouns. This again reminded me of how important it is to practice new language skills over and over in different ways, and

what may seem repetitive to a teacher might be just what the learner needs.

On that same note, I don't know how many times I had to say "*Tutoanana kesho*" (See you tomorrow) before I got it right. One of my oft-repeated erroneous iterations meant "I will marry you tomorrow," which got a lot of laughs.

"*Ni me shiba*" (I am full/satisfied) is a polite way to say that you don't want any more food. This was a very important sentence to learn, because they were constantly pressing us to eat more. Each time our server brought us our food, he exhorted us, "Make sure you eat it all!" Three times a day we were served a meal that would easily feed four people, and we were only two. They felt that because we were expending so much energy climbing the mountain, we had to eat prodigious amounts of food every day. It was true that we needed to consume a lot of calories, but not in the quantities they were serving us. So it was very important for me to learn to politely refuse more food but also to compliment the cook. He performed miracles in his little backpacking tent, cooking on a gas stove and serving up multicourse meals with fresh fruit, vegetables and meat three times a day, cooked with water that had to be hauled up from streams in buckets. Sometimes the cook (*mpishi*) would come into the dining vestibule of our tent and demand to know why we weren't eating more (but with a big smile on his face; we weren't really in trouble!) at which point I would whip out my newly learned past-tense compliment, "*Chakula kilikua kitam sana!*" (The food was very good!)

And then there was the joy of naming, simply being able to point at things and know how to say them in Swahili. When our food was served, I could identify the different components of the meal: *nyama* – meat; *kuku* – chicken; *samaki* – fish; *mboga* – vegetables; *kahawa* – coffee; *chai* – tea; *wali* – rice; *ndizi* – bananas. Similarly, I remember one clear cold night standing outside with our server Yusuf while he taught me the words for what we were looking at: *anga* – sky; *mwezi* – moon; *nyota* – star; *jua* – sun. Just pointing and repeating gave me tremendous

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satisfaction, naming the things around me.

In addition, there were the question words. Beginning ESOL students at Laney College learn how to ask wh-questions in their first semester: who, what, where, when, and why. This allows them to ask information questions that will get them more than just yes or no for an answer. These basic question words were important for me, too. With one simple word, I could point and indicate what kind of information I wanted, and I could also listen for these words in conversation to help me understand what people were talking about or understand that someone was asking me a question. *Nani?* – What? *Wapi?* Where? *Ngapi?* How much? Verbal cues such as these can help one navigate the often incomprehensible barrage of language that one faces when traveling in a foreign country.

Often, as we were hiking, our two guides would carry on conversations in Swahili with each other or with passing porters, and I would listen for words that I had already learned, which helped me have some idea of what they were talking about, or I would hear certain words or phrases repeated over and over. Then I would ask the guides what they meant, and I would try to use them, thus adding to my repertoire. This is how I learned that if I wanted to show how hip I was to the youth culture, instead of saying “*Jambo*” (hello) to the passing porters, I could say “*Mambo*,” and they would answer with “*Poa*,” (cool.) I also took great pleasure in declaring, “*Twende!*” (Let’s go!) after we had taken a break, or announcing, “*Tayari!*” (Ready!) when setting off in the morning. Or “*Hakuna matata!*” (No problem!) Although most people I came in contact with on the trek spoke English, I got a big kick out of using these simple phrases and being understood.

David Sedaris wrote a very funny essay several years back about his experience of attending a language school in Paris when he was first learning French. It was called “Me Talk Pretty One Day.” He recounted the simplistic conversations he had with his classmates in their baby French, and their yearning to be

able to “talk pretty” one day instead of sounding like they were in kindergarten. I’m sure this is what I sounded like to my tolerant Tanzanian interlocutors. *Una furaha?* (Are you happy?) *Nina furaha*. (I’m happy.) One word answers like: *Hapana*. (Yes.) *Ndio*. (No.) *Kidogo*. (A little.) Yet these simple sentences helped establish a bond between me and our guides and porters. These linguistic forays showed that I was interested in their language and culture, that I felt that they had something to teach me, and that I was willing to make a fool out of myself to further these goals.



Nikki Ellman and her partner, Greg Hospelhorn, reach the true summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro.

As instructors, we rarely get a chance to reverse roles and be a student. It is a humbling experience to try to learn a new language that is totally different from your own, or to learn any other new skill when you’re in your seventh decade. But for me, the fact that I was a language teacher for 33 years helped me apply what I had learned from teaching language to learning a new language, and it gave me new insight into the often herculean task our students face when trying to learn English. It has also reinforced my desire to study other languages, especially non-Western ones, now that I have the time.

Nikki Ellman was an ESOL instructor at Laney College from 1988 until 2018. She retired last June and is dedicating her time to travel, exercise, and trying to stave off the degeneration of brain cells by learning new things.

U.S. House Democrats introduce sweeping, controversial ‘Medicare for All’ bill

By Sarah Jones
New York Magazine
March 2, 2019

Medicare for All (M4A) is getting another day in the sun. Nearly four years after Senator Bernie Sanders launched an unlikely presidential campaign and pushed the notion of Medicare for everyone irrevocably into public view, progressive House Democrats unveiled their own comprehensive Medicare for All bill this week. While, of course, it has no immediate chance of passing, the legislation is likely to shape the ongoing debate among Democrats about what reforming the U.S. health-care system should look like in practice.

The Medicare for All Act of 2019 already has 107 co-sponsors, which seems to confirm that a partywide shift on health care is underway. Former Michigan representative John Conyers had introduced a Medicare for All bill every year since 2003, but in 2017, a record number of House Democrats signed on to co-sponsor the legislation. (Conyers later resigned over sexual harassment allegations and was replaced in office by Representative Rashida Tlaib, a democratic socialist who supports Medicare for All.)

The Conyers bill—which was vaguer than this year’s—likely owed its sudden popularity to the

Republican Party’s failed attempts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act with legislation that didn’t protect people with preexisting conditions. In 2018, Representatives Pramila Jayapal, Debbie Dingell, and Keith Ellison launched the Medicare for All Caucus with 70 initial members. When Democrats took back control of the House in the midterms, the party’s newly flush ranks included a number of freshmen who, like Tlaib, supported Medicare for All—and they aren’t all from deep-blue districts. For instance, former Marine Jared

Golden flipped Maine’s rural Second Congressional District from red to blue by running on a platform that included Medicare for All.

Here’s a closer look at what the bill entails, and the role it’s likely to play in the ongoing health care debate.










What’s in the Bill?

The legislation Jayapal introduced this week is more expansive than Sanders’s vision, as Jeff Stein reported for the *Washington*

Post. Jayapal’s bill would move every American onto a single public insurance provider within two years, while Sanders has proposed a four-year transition process. Both would leave only a small role for private insurance.

Under the Jayapal bill, employers would be banned from offering their own private plans to compete

How other countries use private health insurance

| | In the place of public insurance | To supplement public insurance | To complement public insurance |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| Public plan: |  No public plan |  Offers basic coverage |  Offers basic coverage |
| Private plans: |  Provide basic coverage at regulated prices |  Offer not otherwise covered benefits like vision, dental, and prescription drugs |  Offer faster and better options to covered benefits or elective procedures |
| Examples: |  Israel, Netherlands |  Canada, Denmark, France |  England, Australia |

Source: Vox analysis



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with Medicare. There would be no out-of-pocket cost for medical care, though there would be some subsidized charges for prescription drugs. Other features include coverage for long-term home nursing care and abortion care. Existing Medicare and Medicaid enrollees would be transitioned onto the new plan along with everyone else. The Veterans Health Administration and the Indian Health Service would, as Sarah Kliff reported for Vox, continue to operate separately from this new Medicare system.

The Jayapal bill doesn't explain how the U.S. government would pay for Medicare for All. That omission isn't necessarily unusual for policy proposals and as Stein noted, other similar plans have been estimated to cost around \$30 trillion. The U.S., it should be noted, already spends more on health care than any other developed nation, with lower life expectancies and higher infant mortality rates to show for it. Advocates say that by eliminating premiums and co-pays, Medicare for All would boost the economy by leaving more money in a person's bank account. Though Jayapal's version of Medicare for All is more expansive than most single-payer systems in other countries, countries with single-payer systems tend to spend less on health care over all.

Who Supports It?

Jayapal is a left-wing Democrat, and she is the co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. But

the CPC is more ideologically diverse than its name suggests, and the Medicare for All bill, similarly, has a list of co-sponsors who don't fit perfectly into the party's left flank. For instance, Representative Joe Kennedy of Massachusetts, a moderate who had expressed some reservations about 2017's Medicare for All bill, co-sponsored Jayapal's legislation.



Representative Pramila Jayapal, the bill's lead sponsor.

Outside the House, a broad coalition of unions and advocacy groups has endorsed the bill. Some groups—the American Federation of Teachers, SEIU, and MoveOn—might be familiar. The Association of American Flight Attendants, which made headlines recently when its president, Sara Nelson, called for a general strike in response to the government shutdown, has endorsed the bill, too. That's a lot of firepower, and Democrats who want the party's nomination in 2020 will likely face pressure to run on a version of Medicare for All that at least resembles the bill.

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- In memory of:**

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Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____ **Zip:** _____

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Contributor's Address:

City: _____

State: _____ **Zip:** _____

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Send to: PRO, 484 Lake Park Ave., #598, Oakland, CA 94610-2730

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(Medicare for All...Continued from page 9)

Still, Jayapal's bill faces opposition even from some members of her own party. Some have suggested less radical alternatives, like a Medicare "buy-in" for Americans ages 50 to 64, and on February 27, a group of 101 centrist Democrats urged Congress to focus on improving the Affordable Care Act and expanding private health coverage. It's also notable that a number of influential groups have declined to comment on the bill, including the Center for American Progress, AARP, and Protect Our Care.

Is It Socialism?

The GOP will say it is. Some conservative Democrats might, too. (Conservatives deployed the same line of attack against the Affordable Care Act.) Like the ACA, M4A responds to our heavily privatized system's general failure to provide care that everyone can afford. But where the ACA tried to work within the private market, M4A undercuts that market and creates a larger role for government intervention. While democratic socialists like Tlaib and organizations like the Democratic Socialists of America have

embraced Medicare for All, the bill's list of co-sponsors indicates that this an area where the party's democratic socialists and members of its more nebulously defined progressive wing can agree.

For Americans facing rising drug prices, high premiums, and medical debt, these ideological alliances may be welcome news. Polling steadily indicates that Americans broadly support an expanded version of Medicare, and are concerned about health-care costs, though they remain divided on specific solutions. With more backing from voters and politicians, and more concrete policy proposals, it might not be so easy for the GOP to dismiss M4A as evidence of nefarious Bolshevik creep.

Welcome New Member

*PRO welcomes the
following retiree
who has recently joined.*

Nikki Ellman

Peralta Retirees Organization
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Oakland, CA 94610-2730