

How the Corona Virus Affects Social Security

The abrupt and severe contraction in the U.S. economy caused by the coronavirus has far reaching consequences for Social Security. Claims for unemployment exceeded 20 million between March 15, 2020 and April 17, 2020—a level that has not been seen since the Great Depression. The wide scale shut downs and layoffs, as well as provisions of the coronavirus CARES Act fiscal stimulus legislation, significantly reduce the anticipated amount of payroll taxes flowing into Social Security this year, but that won't affect payment of benefits to current retirees.

The CARES Act provides employers with incentives to retain workers on the payroll by providing a payroll tax credit. In addition, employers are allowed to defer the employer portion of payroll taxes for 2020, with those taxes due in two equal installments by December 31, 2021, and 2022.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) recently cited the Joint Committee on Taxation's estimates of the provisions of \$406 billion in reduced Social Security revenues between 2020–2021, increased

continued on page 6



A Coronavirus-Caused Recession Could Eliminate Next Year's COLA

Older Americans have the highest health risk from the coronavirus and now the coronavirus-caused economic recession, along with falling oil prices, put the next Social Security Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) in jeopardy. The rate of growth in consumer price inflation was already slowing prior to the arrival of the coronavirus. The cost of petroleum products plunged in March, down 10.2% from March

continued on page 9

IN THIS ISSUE:

Medicare Premiums Could Spike Due to Coronavirus; p.2

Should My Mom Sign Up for Unemployment or Disability? p.2

How the Coronavirus Affects Your Prescription Drug Supply; p.3

TSCL 2020 Survey of Senior Costs; p.4

Planning for the Future; p.7

Help! My Insulin Costs Skyrocketed. Health Plan Blames Covid-19! p.8

What are Your Fastest Rising Costs?

Mary Johnson, editor

Every year, I take a look at how the Social Security Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) compares with the rise in average retiree costs. Data that I collect for my report on the buying power of Social Security benefits examines the change of prices between January of the previous year to January of the current year. The data I've recently collected indicate the 1.6% COLA that you received for 2020 didn't reflect the economic reality of the average retiree.

Ordinary price changes are no longer measured in the same, straightforward, eighth grade math that you and I use to figure price change. Government economists have changed how they measure inflation many times over the years, using complex formulas and often obscure reasoning. Their explanations are heavy on economic theory and hypothesis, and light on the actual price change experience of people who receive COLAs.

For example, the Social Security COLA is calculated using a consumer price index that measures the inflation experienced by younger working

continued on page 10

Medicare Premiums Could Spike Due to Coronavirus

By Rick Delaney

The coronavirus has hit older Americans particularly hard and sent tens of thousands of Medicare recipients to hospital emergency rooms and intensive care units. That type of care comes with particularly pricey out-of-pocket costs which we expect will drive up Medicare Part B spending for 2020. We are particularly concerned that Part B spending will drive up Part B premiums along with it.

The unexpected and high utilization of Medicare services in fighting the coronavirus is not the only factor affecting Medicare premiums. A “coronavirus-recession” could send Part B premiums through the roof. If the economy does not spring back over the next four months the current rate of deflation is severe enough that it appears likely there may not be any Social Security Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) payable in 2021. Should that occur, a special provision of law called “hold

harmless” would be triggered, and Part B premium costs could soar—perhaps by more than 20%—which is what happened the last time the COLA was zero in 2016 (even without any pandemic costs).

While hold harmless provisions protect the Social Security benefits of most Medicare beneficiaries from reduction due to exploding Part B premium costs in the short term, higher Part B premiums will consume a far greater chunk of Social Security benefits in future years. Extremely low growth in COLAs, combined with spiraling Medicare premiums and out-of-pocket healthcare costs, force older adults to spend greater portions of their Social Security benefits on healthcare. According to the non-partisan Kaiser Family Foundation, Medicare beneficiaries’ average out-of-pocket spending is projected to rise as a share of Social Security income from about 41% today to 50% by 2030, but a



Rick Delaney,
Chairman of the Board, TSCL

crisis this unprecedented could move that forecast forward.

Rapidly-rising Medicare premiums have big implications for Social Security benefits, since the Part B premium is automatically deducted from Social Security benefits. Medicare premiums often consume the entire amount of the annual COLA. After deductions for Medicare Part B and other premiums, beneficiaries can wind up without any increase in net Social Security benefits, and sometimes even lower benefits than the prior year, leaving nothing with which to cope with other rapidly rising costs, such as prescriptions, housing repairs, or auto insurance.

TSCL strongly endorses Social Security and Medicare legislation that would address these problems, by modestly boosting Social Security benefits and COLAs, and reducing out-of-pocket Medicare costs—particularly for prescription drugs. Social Security can be strengthened, and benefits modestly boosted, if the Social Security payroll tax were applied to a higher portion of earnings. What do you think about proposal to lower Medicare costs? Please take TSCL’s Survey of Senior costs <https://seniorsleague.org/2020-senior-cost-survey>. ■

SOCIAL SECURITY & MEDICARE QUESTIONS

Should My Mom Sign Up for Unemployment or Disability?

Q: My mom has Parkinson’s disease, but was still working until the coronavirus forced her company to shut down indefinitely. She has applied for partial unemployment, but can she file for disability benefits? She signed up for Medicare when she turned 65. Would signing up for disability affect her retirement plan?

continued on page 9

How the Coronavirus Affects Your Prescription Drug Supply

Shannon Benton, Executive Director



Shannon Benton,
Executive Director

As the U.S. anxiously awaits the development of a vaccine for the coronavirus, worry about potential shortages of common prescription drugs is growing. The vast majority of the active ingredients in many drugs dispensed in the U.S. are made overseas, including many from China.

China is already known as the major manufacturer of athletic shoes, toys and electronics, but it also produces much of our nation's penicillin, antibiotics, and pain medicines, as well as protective medical masks and medical devices. While the U.S. is a global leader in drug discovery, manufacturing has moved offshore. Chinese companies have supplied as much as 90% of U.S. antibiotics, ibuprofen, and hydrocortisone in recent years.

Supply disruptions, like those we are experiencing now for medical facemasks, the vast majority of which are manufactured in China, could leave us dangerously short of critical medications. According to a story by Sydney Lupkin appearing in the *New York Times*, as of February 26, 2020, the Food and Drug Administration was monitoring 20 products and ingredients from China that soon could become short in supply.

President Trump has urged U.S. companies to move their factories out of China, but with mixed results. Keeping costs down has been a factor, and many companies have simply gone to other low employment cost countries like India and Mexico, rather than coming back to the U.S. In addition, products from those other countries may still contain components from China.

Some critics of the reliance on China suggest that the U.S. needs to provide subsidies to manufacturers to enable U.S. based companies to become more competitive with China, and potentially ensure a more stable supply of drugs. But the cost of doing so and expanding manufacturing in the U.S. would not be cheap, quick, or easy. That

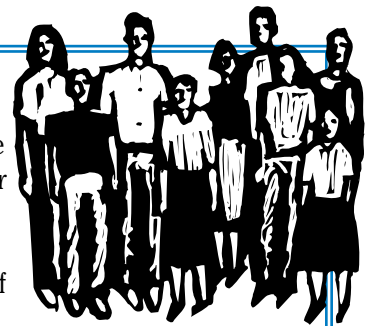
would make the problem of keeping drug prices in line even more difficult than it is today.

Should U.S. taxpayers provide subsidies to big pharmaceutical companies to ensure a more stable supply of drugs? Can that be an option in comprehensive legislation to bring down the cost of drugs, by allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices and capping out of pocket costs? Tell us what you think. Take our Healthcare Cost Survey here: <https://seniorsleague.org/2020-senior-cost-survey>. ■

Source: "Coronavirus Spurs U.S. Efforts to End China's Chokehold on Drugs," Ana Swanson, *The New York Times*, March 11, 2020.

Your Opinion Counts!

We can strengthen Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid programs without the need for deep cuts and higher out-of-pocket costs. The Senior Citizens League needs your opinions and ideas to share with Members of Congress on the issues. Make sure they hear your concerns. Take a survey, sign a petition, read about the latest legislative action in Congress, or send us an email. Visit The Senior Citizens League's website at www.SeniorsLeague.org.



The Social Security & Medicare Advisor © 2020 is published by The Senior Citizens League (TSCL). TSCL is an organization of active seniors concerned about the protection of their earned Social Security, Medicare, military, and other retirement benefits. TSCL's supporters participate in a number of grassroots lobbying and public education campaigns to help ensure governmental bodies live up to their commitments. Current active contributors to The Senior Citizens League are entitled to receive *The Social Security & Medicare Advisor* for no additional charge. Readers wishing to contact TSCL should address correspondence to The Senior Citizens League, 1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 600, Alexandria, VA 22314. TSCL website: www.SeniorsLeague.org. Editor: Mary Johnson.



TSCL 2020 Survey of Senior Costs

You can help inform the public and members of Congress about issues affecting older Americans. Your response to this survey helps The Senior Citizens League (TSCL) bring you better services to meet your needs and priorities. Your responses help us craft TSCL's legislative agenda and to represent your interests on Capitol Hill. Your answers are vitally important to us and will be kept anonymous. Thank you!

Please fill out this survey on pages 4–6.

If you want to save money on postage, TSCL's 2020 Senior Costs Survey may also be taken online at seniorsleague.org/2020-senior-cost-survey

*The Senior Citizens League
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 600
Alexandria, VA 22314*

PART 1. How has the coronavirus crisis affected your household finances?

1. Have you gone without essentials (including food, toilet paper, disinfecting cleaning products, face masks) due to shortages, rationing or high price?
 Yes No
2. Did you postpone filling one or more prescriptions due to price spikes caused by coronavirus shortages or supply chain disruptions?
 Yes No
3. Did you postpone filling one or more prescriptions due to quarantine or emergency orders to stay home (lock down)?
 Yes No
4. Has your retirement savings dropped significantly in value, forcing you to cut back your spending?
 Not applicable Yes No Not able to cut back any further
5. Did you become ill with COVID-19, and now have related out-of-pocket healthcare costs?
 Yes No Not sure, at this time
6. Did you lose a job or get laid off due to the coronavirus?
 Not applicable Yes No
7. Did you recently start, or are you planning to start, Social Security earlier than previously planned due to recent loss of work because of the coronavirus?
 Not applicable Yes No Not yet
8. If your income is less than \$75,000 (individual)/ \$150,000 (married and you file jointly) have you received a coronavirus stimulus check for \$1,200/ \$2,400?
 Yes No

continued on page 5

Part 2: How are you affected by the following costs?

9. Did you pay income taxes on a portion of your Social Security taxes for the 2019 tax year? (The filing period that typically would have ended on April 15, 2020.)
- Yes No Not sure
10. Have you ever had any surprise medical bills, bills that you thought would be covered by your insurance, but were not?
- Yes, within the past 12 months Yes, within the past 3 years
 No, I've never had any surprise bills Not sure
11. If you have dental insurance, how much did you spend on dental insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs over the past 12 months (June 2019–June 2020)? Please include dental expenses that your insurance did not cover.
- \$0—I don't have dental insurance Less than \$250
 \$251–\$800 \$801–\$2,000 More than \$2,000
12. If you do not have dental insurance, have you ever postponed dental procedures due to the cost?
- Yes No
13. If you have dental insurance, how satisfied are you with your dental insurance?
- Very satisfied OK, better than nothing
 I still have large uncovered costs Don't know. I haven't been able to use it very much yet

Part 3: How do you feel about the following?

14. Do you feel our healthcare system is adequately funded to meet public health emergencies like the coronavirus? Please check only one:
- We need to invest more in our national healthcare system, so that we can respond rapidly and effectively to the next healthcare crisis and better protect public health.
 Our public funding for healthcare is about right. We could not have anticipated the scope of the coronavirus pandemic.
 We need to prioritize private insurance in order to reduce reliance on federal spending and the need to raise taxes.
15. Of the following choices which do you feel is the HIGHEST priority for Congress over the next 12 months? Please check only one.
- Protect public health by strengthening our healthcare system and lowering healthcare costs.
 Get the economy moving again and people back on the job.
 Reduce the federal deficit
 Not sure
16. Chinese pharmaceutical companies supply more than 90% of U.S. antibiotics, ibuprofen and hydrocortisone. Critics say, that in the event of a war, downturn in Chinese economy, or a pandemic, this can lead to shortages in the supply of important medicines. Which of the following statements most closely reflects your view of how we should approach the issue? Please check only one:
- Enact an emergency U.S. government program to rebuild pharmaceutical manufacturing in this country, with taxpayer funded subsidies to drug companies.
 Enact a program of government backed loans and tax incentives for drug companies to locate and manufacture antibiotics or other targeted pharmaceuticals in the U.S.
 Rely on existing federal emergency powers to allow the government to purchase and stockpile essential medicines and equipment to distribute to the states in time of crisis and disaster.
 None of above.
 Not sure

continued on page 6

Part 4: Please indicate your support for the following proposals to lower Medicare costs:

17. Restrict increases in the price of prescription drugs to no more than the increase in inflation.
 Support Oppose Not sure
18. Allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices by tying U.S. prices to prices paid in other industrialized countries, like Great Britain, Canada, and Japan where prices are lower.
 Support Oppose Not sure
19. Cap out-of-pocket spending for prescription drugs at no more than \$250 per month, (\$3,000 per year.)
 Support Oppose Not sure
20. Prohibit “surprise medical bills,” and to settle billing disputes, require out-of-network doctors, hospitals or other providers to accept fees no greater than 20 percent more than Medicare-approved fees as settlement.
 Support Oppose Not sure
21. Prohibit “surprise medical bills.” Require billing disputes between doctors, hospitals, or other providers and Medicare Advantage insurers to go through private arbitration.
 Support Oppose Not sure
22. Are you a military retiree?
 Yes No

How the Corona Virus Affects Social Security; continued from page 1

revenues from repayments of \$339 billion between 2022–2023, and about \$3 billion in higher outlays. The CBO assumes that some companies will go out of business and would be unable to repay deferred taxes—about \$67 billion—in Social Security revenues. The CBO warned that uncertainties in its estimate of the CARES Act are high, and that actual outcomes could vary significantly.

The Social Security Trustees estimated last year that Social Security payroll taxes in 2020 would be about \$973.8 billion under average economic conditions. Thus the estimated \$406 billion cost of the payroll tax provision in the CARES Act appears to be as much as 42% of all anticipated

Social Security revenues for 2020.

Also putting pressure on the program, TSCL anticipates that more people close to retirement age will file claims for benefits. While employment was at record levels in January, many older adults were postponing benefits to allow their Social Security payouts and retirement accounts to grow. Now, faced with paid sick leave and unemployment benefits ending, older workers are unlikely to be able to afford to wait to file for benefits if they have lost their jobs. In addition, workers lucky enough to have 401(k)s and IRAs have experienced significant losses in the value of those retirement accounts and will be depending on Social Security all the more. Big changes in equity prices reduce the

distributions from those accounts.

The CARES Act will not impact payment of Social Security benefits because funding from the projected Social Security payroll taxes will be credited to the Trust Fund. Increased borrowing and increased debt costs may put added pressure on Social Security for changes to improve solvency in the future, though.

Safeguarding the health of all Americans and protecting Social Security and Medicare is of primary importance now. The Senior Citizens League is working for legislation that would help strengthen Social Security. How has the coronavirus affected you? Take TSCL's Survey of Senior Costs <https://seniorsleague.org/2020-senior-cost-survey/>. ■

CONGRESSIONAL CORNER

Planning for the Future

By Representative Brad Wenstrup (OH-2)

As of 2019, one quarter of American adults had no retirement savings at all. Only 36 percent of non-retired American adults think that “their retirement saving is on track,” according to the Federal Reserve’s annual report.

There is no question about it: our nation can do a better job of equipping and encouraging our senior citizens to be prepared for this next season of their lives and provide more opportunities for Americans to plan long-range. Part of this can be done at a policy level, by passing practical reforms that address the obstacles to saving that some Americans experience. We must also address this on a personal level, by ensuring more Americans are equipped with the knowledge and resources they need to effectively save for and secure their futures.

In Washington, my priority is helping improve the lives of the American people, and that includes addressing our nation’s retirement system to ensure it serves our seniors more effectively. One way Congress recently did this was by passing the Setting Every Community Up for Retirement Enhancement (SECURE) Act of 2019. This bill, which passed with my support, will streamline and update our nation’s retirement system in several ways, including removing the age limitation on IRA contributions, increasing access to retirement plans by allowing small businesses to join together to offer plans, and allowing penalty-free distributions from a retirement

account for the birth or adoption of a child.

This legislation isn’t perfect, but it is a step forward, and I am glad the SECURE Act was passed into law at the end of 2019. While approximately half of American households still don’t have an option for work-based retirement plans, as a nation we must continue to work to advance access to retirement savings vehicles and decrease barriers to entry for small employers who want to offer savings plans to their employees.

As a country, we also need to encourage generations of all ages to be informed about their options for retirement saving and to take personal responsibility for their own financial planning, including understanding the extent of their senior benefits such as Medicare or Social Security or taking advantage of the fact that many employers will match what American workers choose to contribute to their retirement, which means twice the savings.

Currently, for many Americans, their personal savings fall well short of what they will need to continue to fund their standards of living after retiring from the workforce full-time—and I worry that each generation is saving less. If financial planning feels overwhelming, there are many existing resources you can access to help ensure you are effectively utilizing your options. The Department of Labor has created a guide called the *Top 10 Ways to Prepare for Retirement* to help with



Representative Brad Wenstrup (OH-2)

practical tips for building retirement savings. USA.gov provides an outline of your options for saving as well as a list of questions to ask yourself to ensure you’re planning sufficiently for your future. You can also use a retirement calculator to find out the best age to claim your Social Security benefits. If you are experiencing a problem with your pension, profit sharing, or retirement savings plans, USA.gov points to the Pension Rights Center as a potential source of free legal assistance or advice. Knowledge is power, and it’s important that Americans of all ages are informed of their options so that they can plan appropriately for their futures.

Ultimately, seniors aren’t just a class of individuals who are a certain age—they are our mothers and fathers, grandparents, teachers, pastors, and public servants. They are each of us, either today or tomorrow. As a nation, it is incumbent upon us to prioritize safeguarding the futures of our senior citizens and addressing some of the obstacles to saving that exist both in our system and in our society. It is not just “their” future, it is our future. We’re in this together. Let’s secure our futures. ■

The opinions expressed in “Congressional Corner” reflect the views of the writer and are not necessarily those of TSCL.

ASK THE ADVISOR

Help! My Insulin Costs Skyrocketed. Health Plan Blames Covid-19!

Q: My prescription for Lantus and blood pressure medicine has skyrocketed recently. When I called Humana, they said they are dealing with Covid-19, and costs have increased. The new price is at a level that makes it impossible for me to afford the medicine I need. I don't know what to do now. Any help is appreciated.

—Robert N., FL

A: The situation that we all are in is precarious, and that includes the worldwide supply chain for prescription drugs. (More on that in a minute.) You need immediate help and here's a check list of what I suggest you try:

- 1. Contact your doctor's office and alert them to this dilemma.** Ask if they have emergency samples of Lantus and your blood pressure medicine that they can provide, or if they can give you the contact number of programs that can help you.
- 2. Ask your doctor if you have alternate insulin options to control your blood glucose levels.** Novolin may be one of them, and it may be less expensive, but it acts differently than Lantus. Ask your doctor if there are any dietitians working with the clinic who can help you reduce your reliance on Lantus and thus the quantity you need to use. Perhaps you can take a combination of Novolin and Lantus.
- 3. Call your local State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) and ask for free counseling from a**

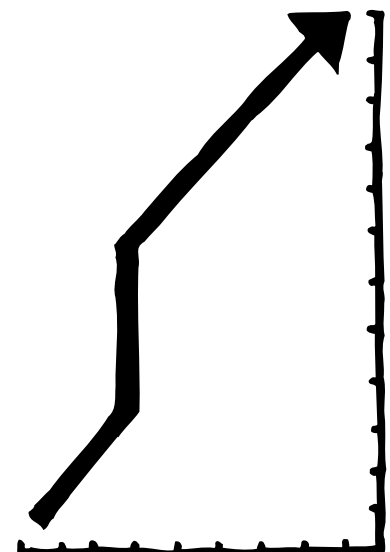
Medicare counselor. You can find local contact info here: <https://www.shiptacenter.org>. Many of these programs operate through local agencies on aging or senior services departments. Counselors can help you over the phone from home.

- 4. Depending on your income, you may qualify for Medicare Extra Help, which can cover most or all of your prescription drug premium and out-of-pocket costs.** Your SHIP counselor may also know of special programs in your state.
- 5. Double check the price quote that you received by checking the difference in price between several retail walk-in pharmacies and Humana's mail-in.** Sometimes the price can be very different between the two. I learned that my drug plan's mail-in pharmacy would charge me \$243 for three albuterol inhalers. The small local walk-in pharmacy was still charging just \$141.99 for three. Often, mail order can be less expensive than walk-in retail. Check for each separate drug. You can use the Medicare drug plan finder to help you look up your plan and learn the cost of your co-pay or co-insurance.
- 6. Send an email to your Members of Congress.** This is an election year, and the last thing they want to hear is that health insurers are blaming COVID-19 for the steep price increases. You can get email addresses on TSLC's website

here: http://wfc2.wiredforchange.com/o/8854/p/dia/action4/common/public/?action_KEY=10560. Or, you can look up your Representative and send emails at: www.house.gov and Senators at: www.senate.gov.

Analysts are warning about potential drug shortages, but there is a system for checking whether there really is a shortage, using reported shortage tools on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website. You can look up current drug shortages at: https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/drugshortages/dsp_SearchResults.cfm.

Nations all over the world are experiencing unprecedented disruptions to the drug supply chain, and that affects the U.S. drug supply. You may be interested in this article which explains the problem: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/24/us-drug-shortage-fears-grow-as-india-locks-down-due-to-the-coronavirus.html>. ■



A Coronavirus-Caused Recession Could Eliminate Next Year's COLA; continued from page 1

one year ago, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. A drop that sharp in the cost of petroleum products has an outsize effect in pulling down the Social Security COLA, because oil products are given greater importance in the consumer price index (CPI) that's used to calculate the annual inflation adjustment—the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W).

Because so much of the public has been under emergency orders to stay at home or in quarantine, there's much less demand for certain types of goods (such as apparel, entertainment and travel), and that could lead some companies to drastically reduce prices. The result of falling prices

means that the COLA for 2021 could be extremely low and if prices of gasoline and other items don't recover over the next four months, that could even wipe out the entire annual adjustment.

Over the past decade, inflation has been so low that the annual COLA adjustment has averaged just 1.4 percent, less than half the average 3% rate of inflation from 1999 to 2009. There was no COLA payable at all in 2010, 2011 and 2016, and the COLA was just 0.3% in 2017.

On the other hand, TSCL is closely watching widespread shortages of essential consumer items, pharmaceuticals and medical gear. Unprecedented demand and need for healthcare services is expected to lead to spiking costs on certain items in short supply, particularly for healthcare. That type of situation

would sharply cut into the buying power of Social Security benefits, because healthcare costs are not adequately reflected or weighted for importance in the CPI-W.

The situation is going to require everyone to pull together. A recent survey by The Senior Citizens League found that 20 percent of survey participants reported spending more than \$1,000 per month on healthcare costs, yet the average Social Security benefit in 2020 is just \$1,500. The Senior Citizens League is working for legislation that would help safeguard Social Security benefits and would guarantee beneficiaries a COLA of no less than 3 percent for 2021. How are rising costs affecting you? Take TSCL's new Survey of Senior Costs <https://seniorsleague.org/2020-senior-cost-survey/>. ■

Should My Mom Sign Up for Unemployment or Disability? continued from page 2

A: Your mom is facing some really complicated choices. Social Security lists Parkinson's disease in its listings of disabilities, which would mean she would qualify for disability benefits more quickly if she meets all other criteria. However, if she is 66 or older, she would be at her full retirement age, and the Social Security Administration would find her eligible for a retirement benefit rather than disability benefits. Disabled adults are automatically shifted to retirement benefits once they reach their full retirement age.

Filing and getting approved for disability benefits is a long and sometimes costly process that can take about 6 months or even longer. There's a six-month waiting period before benefits even start.

Filing for retirement benefits would be easier for your mom to qualify and to get started quickly. People can receive either a Social Security retirement benefit or disability benefit, but not both at the same time. Your mom could get an estimate of what her retirement benefit would be by setting up an account at www.SocialSecurity.gov.

It's also important to note that, since your mom has applied for unemployment benefits, to qualify she will need to be "actively seeking work" and to return to the work force if she is offered a job. On the other hand, to receive disability benefits, your mom's Parkinson's disease would have to be so severe that she's totally unable to perform any meaningful work.

What your mom should also do right away is to apply for programs that can help to lower her Medicare costs. Medicare has Savings Programs that pay the Medicare Part B premium (\$144.60 per month in 2020) and, if her income is low enough, will also cover the Part B deductible and out-of-pocket costs. She should also apply for Medicare Extra Help, which can help pay most or all of her Part D plan's premium, deductibles, and reduce the cost of prescriptions.

Your mom can get free one-on-one counseling from a State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) counselor. While the programs go by different names, many operate through local area agencies on aging. Get contact info at <https://www.shiptacenter.org>. ■

*What are Your Fastest Rising Costs?
continued from page 1*

adults. It does not reflect ANY increases in Medicare premiums. Yet two-thirds of Social Security beneficiaries are retired or disabled and covered by Medicare, one of their fastest growing costs. Younger people spend their money differently than retirees and generally don't have to spend as much on healthcare, which grows several times faster than overall inflation.

For this and a number of other reasons, the COLA shortchanges retirees. If you feel like you've been robbed of your rightful COLA, that's why. COLAs would grow more quickly if actually based on the inflation experience of older consumers. This is also why we need to contact Members of Congress to ensure they fully understand the need for making Social Security COLAs more reflective of the real price

inflation experienced by people over the age of 62.

Here's a list of the ten fastest growing costs from January 2019 to January 2020. from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. However, that was then, and this is now. The price

of gasoline has plummeted by 10.2% from a year ago, as of data through March 2020. How does this compare with your experience? Please take TSC's Survey of Senior Costs <https://seniorsleague.org/2020-senior-cost-survey>. ■

Fastest Growing Retiree Costs from Jan 2019 to Jan 2020

Category	Rate of increase
1. Health insurance	20.5%
2. Gasoline	12.8%*
3. Land line telephone service	8.2%
4. Lettuce	7.6%
5. Fresh milk	6.0%
6. Beef roast (uncooked)	5.4%
7. Medical care	5.1%
7. Repair of household items	5.1%
8. Veterinarian services	4.7%
9. Hospital inpatient services	4.2%
10. Rent	3.8%

Source: Consumer Price Index—January 2020, Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 13, 2020.

**The price of gasoline has fallen by 10.2% through March 2020.*