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Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.
Martin Luther King, Jr.

About the Alliance:

The Alliance is a unique state/national organization working to create an America that protects the health and economic security of seniors, rewards work, strengthens families and builds thriving communities. Launched nationally in 2001 and in Wisconsin in 2005, it is a coalition of AFL-CIO affiliated unions, retiree groups, and community-based organizations dedicated to economic and social justice.

The Alliance is a voice for retirees and older Americans. Our goal is to educate, energize and mobilize seniors to make a difference through activism. The Alliance fights for:

A strong Social Security system that provides guaranteed benefits & protects families for life.

Health care seniors can depend on through Medicare.

Affordable and accessible prescription drugs.

Strengthening pension laws.

Affordable and accessible long term care

Message from the President

Leon Burzynski

A Wonderful Feeling, We Are Not Done

The election is over, we celebrated, and the inauguration is being planned. There are those who think the job is done. That would be a terrible mistake.

First, go to page two and read Vivien De Back's message about what can be done right now. The Obama-Biden transition team wants our input. This is an amazing opportunity to share your opinion about the direction our government goes during the next four years.

The past eight years of the Bush administration have presented us with a wide variety of subjects for discussion. In case you are unsure of which issue you want to offer advice on, I have a few topics for consideration.

Retirement Funding

For those retirees who have to rely on the stock market instead of defined benefit pensions, the story is quite depressing. Two trillion retiree dollars have been lost by those invested in the market. Also, there are those who

saw their pension benefits disappear through company bankruptcy filings. Changes are needed. The idea of a 401(k) replacing pension benefits has proven to be unrealistic as these retirement savings instruments react to the whims of the stock market. The time has come to re-evaluate how retirement years are funded.

Social Security

In spite of the market failure, there are still those in Congress who want to privatize Social Security by handing the money to Wall Street. That idea was unwise when introduced and still is.

Senior Health Care

The drug and insurance companies have reported massive profits at our expense with the advent of the Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage Plans. The Advantage Plans receive funding in excess of the cost of standard Medicare. The drug companies get a huge benefit as the Part D law specifically prevents Medicare from negotiating the price of drugs purchased under the program.

Economy

We have witnessed the strongest economy in the world

brought to its knees by the greed of Wall Street, the investment community, and crooked bankers. The mortgage crisis has led to millions of families losing their homes. This is the result of the "deregulation craze" that started with the Reagan administration.

Unemployment continues to increase as American employers cut back. Food stamp use is at an all-time high. As auto industry workers suffered, Southern senators and Hank Paulson tried to bust the UAW.

Health Care

Health care continues to be a high-priority issue. Presently, there are 47 million Americans without health insurance. That number is certain to increase in 2009 as the recession advances.

In Closing

The key will be the continued involvement of all of us. It is crucial that we remain engaged with our Senators and Representatives as legislation is introduced and considered. We cannot sit back and hope good things happen. President-Elect Obama has a lot of years of bad government to reverse and he needs our input.

WE WORKED SO HARD TO ELECT A PRESIDENT WITH A NEW VIEW OF THE WORLD NOW WHAT?

Vivien De Back

"Today we begin in earnest the work of making sure that the world we leave our children is just a little bit better than the world we inhabit today"

President-elect Barack Obama

This statement from President-Elect Obama sounds so good, so refreshing, and so comforting. However, every day brings more bad news. Jobs being lost, foreclosure on home loans, savings dwindling, and I find myself, even in my most optimistic moments, getting a bit queasy about my country. I continually remind myself that the way to respond to the unknown is to TAKE ACTION. Fortunately, that is exactly what the Obama Team is asking of us.

We are being offered the chance to participate in the discussion about how to change America. President-elect Obama and Vice-President-elect Biden have developed innovative approaches to challenge the status quo in Washington and to bring about the kind of change America wants and needs. We must think of this as the beginning of the solutions, not the end of our problems. Thus, it requires us to become informed, stay up to date, give feedback, and tell our stories.

If you have not yet visited the Obama-Biden Team internet sites, I encourage you to do so. You can get information and keep up-dated on the Team's work.

Go to:

<http://change.gov./newsroom>

to learn all about the Obama-Biden plan. More importantly, you can click on "Join the Discussion" and give feedback to the Team. You are challenged to "tell us your ideas and be part of the change America is looking for." Focus your comments on what can be done in your community now and in the near future. Avoid "blaming" as it does not fit in the new America.

AN AMERICAN MOMENT

YOUR STORIES AND YOUR IDEAS CAN
HELP CHANGE THE FUTURE OF THE
COUNTRY. WHEN WE COME TOGETHER
AROUND A COMMON PURPOSE, GREAT
THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.

TELL US YOUR STORY

<http://change.gov./newsroom>

There are other important links at the Obama web site. At *American Moment*, you can tell your story, and express your concerns and hopes for policies you want to see carried out in the next four years. When telling your story, be concise and give suggestions that would improve the situation on which you comment. Above all, as I tell my grandchildren, don't whine. Your stories are read. I know because I received a response.

During the next year, the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans will be working with our legislators to initiate and enact the necessary legislation to bring positive changes impacting retirees, seniors, and their families. One of our agenda items has been, and will continue to be, access to health care for all.

There is a link to the Obama-Biden health care agenda at the above mentioned web site. You

can submit your ideas of how to make the system work better for you and your family. For example my suggestion was:

Require Medicare to negotiate with drug companies to obtain the lowest price for prescription drugs. The present law (Medicare Part D) forbids Medicare from negotiating lower prices. This change in the law would cost the government nothing and save American Seniors millions of dollars even

keeping many of them from falling into the "donut hole".

Clearly the next few years will be difficult for many of us. However, we can re-claim the America we once knew by participating in the plan development and execution of the changes that are needed.

Join the Team. Take action. Give you ideas. Remain Hopeful.

WIARA Successful 2008 Election Activities

- Trained fourteen retirees as part of our Retired Zone Coordinators Project to implement our 2008 election proposal. The national ARA assisted in training and providing partial payment of project expenses.
- Sent state and federal questionnaires to twenty-five candidates in our priority races and endorsed over thirty state and federal candidates.
- Organized eleven Candidate Forums in priority races with over 1100 people in attendance.
- Shared questionnaire responses relating to Social Security, Medicare and Part D, pension, health care reform, the right to organize, and other retiree and working family issues in forums statewide.
- Held sixteen educational presentations on election issues and programs at senior centers and other venues where seniors meet.
- Distributed 1000 pieces of materials on above issues and 1000 voter guides developed in coordination with the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups.
- Facilitated twenty-eight presentations to WIARA affiliates discussing election issues and programs, highlighting differences between McCain and Obama on key retiree and working family's issues and programs. Many affiliates

shared materials with their members who were unable to attend presentations.

- Participated in a number of Truth Squad events including America Votes, Labor 2008, and National Health Care Coalition.
- Participated in Labor Fest, Labor 2008, and endorsed WIARA candidates' activities.
- Organized three Celebration events for the 73rd Birthday of Social Security in August. Over 200 people participated in these events in Green Bay, Milwaukee, and Madison.
- Participated in several press conferences with topics that included health care reform, our opposition to Senator McCain's support for privatizing Social Security, and personal retiree stories on Medicare Part D and Social Security.
- Sent press releases and letters to the editor on WIARA issues related to Obama and McCain positions on retirement security and included the positions of our endorsed state and federal candidates.
- Forwarded two newsletters to 2300 WIARA members about the WIARA positions in the fall elections.

Wisconsin was considered an important battleground state for the Presidential election, the 8th Congressional District, and several state races. A Democrat has not won re-election in the 8th CD in over forty years. We are proud of our role in the successful re-election of Congressman Steve Kagen

The WIARA Board of Directors approved a mail program to targeted union retiree households in Wisconsin. Currently, the WIARA has over 89,000 retiree members in Wisconsin. The mail program targeted approximately 28,000 union retirees in priority state and federal races. The WIARA mail program sent out over 100,000 pieces of campaign materials targeting these households.

Early Wisconsin polls indicated Senator John McCain leading Senator Barack Obama by double digit percentages for plus 55 households. By Election Day, most Wisconsin polls showed Obama tied or slightly ahead of McCain with these same households. This illustrates Obama's success with plus 55 households in Wisconsin. Nationally, almost 70% of union retiree households voted for Senator Obama.

The WIARA Board of Directors realizes the economic crisis and how presidential candidates handled the crisis set the tone for the voters' overwhelmingly support of President-Elect, Barack Obama. We are very proud of our efforts to communicate directly with over 28,000 Wisconsin union retiree households about the significant differences between Obama and McCain concerning important issues impacting retirees and working families.

In addition to the national ARA, we want to offer our sincere thanks to the following that assisted us in funding our mail program:

IBEW, AFT, AFSCME, Operating Engineers Local 139, UAW, Laborers District Council, United Steel Workers, and the Fox Valley Labor Council.

Thank you to everyone who made this wonderful effort a success.

WIARA 3RD BIENNIAL CONVENTION

The Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans will hold its 3rd Biennial Convention on **Monday, March 23rd, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Concourse Hotel and Conference Center, 1 West Dayton Street, Madison, Wisconsin**

The Convention agenda will include: election of officers, by-law changes, guest speakers and a number of workshops/trainings on setting legislative and program priorities, lobbying, organizing a WIARA chapter in your community and organizing on retiree issues/programs. The Convention cost for a participant is \$35.00. This includes a continental breakfast, lunch, convention materials and parking at the Concourse.

If you would like additional information please contact us at 414-771-9511.

Employee Free Choice Act

Leon Burzynski

The WIARA joined forces with the State AFL-CIO Labor 2008 program in the successful phase one of taking back America. This was the easy part. Like the headline in the Milwaukee Labor Press, *We Won – Now What?*

The “Now What” is the Employee Free Choice Act. The Employee Free Choice Act is, in my opinion, the most important labor legislation since the Wagner Act (National Labor Relations Act) of 1935. It will bring equity and fairness to those who are trying to bring union representation into their workplace for the first time in decades.

The Employee Free Choice Act will:

- Allow workers to form unions through a ‘Majority Sign-up’ process.
- Add teeth to the laws meant to protect workers and insure their rights.
- Strengthen penalties against unscrupulous employers who illegally fire or retaliate against workers.
- Restore balance to workers’ efforts to form unions, get better health care, job security, and retirement benefits.

I urge you to contact your Congressional Representatives and request their support of the Employee Free Choice Act. It will be one of the greatest gifts you can give to workers throughout Wisconsin and the nation.

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