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NEWSLETTER – July 2008

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

Seeking the Facts

With the state presidential primary elections finally complete, Senators Obama and McCain head toward the finish line in November. As we know, the media coverage now adds state races to the mix and becomes more mind-numbing and tedious.

The amplification of media coverage includes an increase in claims by state and federal candidates, and their political parties, that do not address the serious issues we face as a state and nation. We, as educated voters, must become familiar with the important issues so we ask questions requiring an answer rather than rhetoric. Outlandish claims often seem to be the rule rather than the exception.

Everyone will be asking about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, health care, the economy, immigration, and the Social Security/Medicare funding situation. Many lesser issues, while important to special interest groups, do not rise to the same

level of importance as the economy, the wars, and health care. Here are some questions relating to senior issues that I would like the candidates to answer in a straightforward, simple way. I hope you find them helpful as you formulate your own list of questions and concerns.

Candidates for President and Congress

SeniorCare: Will you support a federal waiver to continue SeniorCare beyond 2009?

Medicare Part D: Will you support improvements in Medicare part D such as (1) negotiating drug prices, (2) eliminating the "donut Hole," and (3) allowing Medicare to offer a Part D Insurance Plan?

Transportation: Will you support federal legislation giving volunteer drivers the same mileage deduction as that received for business use?

Medicare: Will you work to address the Medicare solvency problems without cutting necessary health care services and without further privatization?

Social Security: Will you oppose the privatization of Social

Security? Will you support removing the cap on wages for which payment of Social Security is required?

State Legislative Candidates

FamilyCare: Will you support a statewide expansion of FamilyCare in the next state budget?

SeniorCare: Will you support state funding for SeniorCare in the next budget to continue SeniorCare beyond 2009?

Benefit Specialists: Will you support the funding needed to continue the Benefit Specialist program at a level to meet the needs of the rapidly growing elderly population?

Property Taxes: Will you support an expansion of the Homestead Tax Credit program to provide relief to lower income households? Will you support long-term solutions to reduce our reliance on property taxes for education and public services?

Transportation: Will you support increased funding for elderly and disabled transportations programs?

CITIZENSHIP IS MORE THAN JUST VOTING

Vivien De Back

Did you vote in the last election? Congratulations! Good for you! You chose to be part of the democratic process. But if all you did was vote for candidates on the ballot, you gave up some of your rights and responsibilities as a citizen.

You have a right to help select men and women who run for office. You have a right to support a candidate of your choice by volunteering time, energy and money to assure that your ideas and values are heard and carried to the legislatures. In fact, as citizens we have a responsibility to join in the political process...even though sometimes it gets darn right annoying, boring, frustrating and tiresome.

Consider this. You vote. Does that make you a citizen? A common definition of Citizenship is, *"membership in a community or country that carries with it rights and responsibilities to political participation."*

Another term you might hear is **Active Citizenship**. This implies working towards the betterment of one's community, state, or nation through public service, volunteer work, economic participation, and other similar efforts to improve life for all citizens. An active citizen is involved in selecting candidates for political office, works on campaign committees, and supports candidates and political parties by donations of time, effort or money.

We could argue that we are a nation of citizens based on

voter turnout during the last presidential election. The percentage of registered voters who self-reported casting ballots in 2004 was 89 percent, up from 86 percent in 2000 (U.S, Census Bureau: Facts for Features, 11/1/2007). I should note these are "registered" rather than "eligible" voters. We have a long way to go to raise the percentage of eligible voters who actually vote.

In 2008, an Active Citizen will take part in a Get-Out-The-Vote campaign to register new voters in an effort to ensure more citizens express their opinion in the September primary and November election. But voting, by itself, is not our only duty if we want our country to be nation guided by its citizens.

Many Senior Citizens have spent a lifetime being an example of Active Citizenship. True, we do fewer doors and more phone calls as we age. However, there are many activities we can join in or initiate to continue our involvement in the process.

We can volunteer one hour a week to a local or state candidate to help with mailing or office work. It is especially rewarding to help someone obtain an absentee ballot. Candidates need money. We can hold a fundraiser at our home and encourage the young, and old, to donate to a particular candidate.

Until we have true Campaign Finance Reform, candidates will continue to be financed primarily by contributions from large companies and very rich individuals. You can change who has influence in politics from a few big money donors to a

massive number of small donors. It's a way to reward a candidate who supports progressive values, and demonstrate grassroots support for those willing to fight for our interests.

I am amazed by those who say "I can't give much" or "my vote or dollars don't count". Yet, studies show that five \$20 donations are a better measure of the strength of a candidate than one \$100 donation.

Who gives, and why? In the past, a higher percentage of men than women donated to candidates and political parties. However, a recent study noted a continuation in the rise in women's donations to House and Senate candidates in each election cycle since 1978. Studies also noted women give because of causes, whereas men give primarily for access.

What issues would get you to donate to a particular candidate? Do you favor environment protection, re-visiting Medicare Part D and removing the "donut hole", national health care, support for schools, or protecting Social Security? Find your cause and your candidate. Consider donating time, energy and/or money. No amount is too small. **Become and remain an ACTIVE CITIZEN!**

Wisconsin Voting Notes

To vote in Wisconsin, you need to be registered, which you can do through your municipal clerk's office or at your polling place on Election Day. The primary is on Tuesday, September 9, 2008, and the general election is Tuesday, November 4, 2008.

Calendar Raffle Winners

June 2008

Joe Strohl	Barbara Felde
Jerry Thorson	Chuck Speth
Lori Gonzalez	Jan Nowok
Gary Miller	Joan Dudzik
Yasuko Modjeski	Dorothy Blasezyk
Patrick Weyer	Kathryn Harrod
Matt Page	Francine Hare
Linda Leaf	Joseph Gruber
Pat Johnson	Carol Anderson
Katelynn Modjeski	Nancy Poulson
Eugene Schneider	Richard Neimon
Jean Haase	Dick/Mary Presser
Richard Macidlek	Linda Ann Miller
Taylor De Back	Steve Nemeth
Jean Haase	Josephine Mleczko

Did You File for Your Stimulus Check?

The IRS reports that more than 77,000 Wisconsin residents eligible for the Economic Stimulus Check have not filed the appropriate form. They added that 68 percent of those who have not filed are over 65. All you need to receive a minimum payment of \$300/person or \$600/couple is to file Form 1040A. For more information, see the March WIARA Newsletter or visit the IRS web site at <http://www.irs.gov/>.

Save The Date!

13th Annual Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans Senior Power Luncheon

DATE: Monday, October 13, 2008

TIME: 11:00 a.m. To 1:00 p.m. (Lunch at 11:45 a.m.)

PLACE: Wyndham Hotel and Conference Center,
4747 South Howell, Milwaukee, WI

The honorable United States Senator Russ Feingold is the invited Guest Speaker.

The Power Luncheon is the major annual fundraising event for WIARA. It will honor several people from three categories: Community, Labor and Public Service.

Cost: \$75.00 and \$600.00 to reserve a table for eight. Organizations can reserve an exhibit table for \$150.00. Invitations will be sent out in August.

Place your ad in the Power Luncheon Booklet

For additional Power Lunch information, contact Cher Kuss at WIARA, 414-771-9511.



This group got the Zone Coordinator program off to a great start during the training session on June 11th.

Visit our website at www.wisconsinara.org

JOIN THE WISCONSIN ALLIANCE HELP SUPPORT OUR ACTIVISM FOR SENIORS

The Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans is a senior activist organization. Your membership means you are supporting an organization with volunteers on the front line fighting for improving Medicare Part D under Medicare and to preserve Social Security.

Send your membership to:

WI ARA, 6333 West Bluemound Road, Milwaukee, WI 53213

Name _____ Phone _____

Address, city, zip _____

Email address _____

_____ \$10 membership

Additional Donation _____ \$10 _____ \$20 _____ \$30

An Open Letter to Retirees:

From: George J. Kourpias, President, Alliance for Retired Americans

I'm always reading. I love to keep up on what is going on, and like you, I believe it is our responsibility as citizens to stay informed and make intelligent decisions.

Two articles I recently came across really caught my eye. The first said, "**Medicare Advantage Drives Humana Profit Above Expectations.**" (Associated Press, 4/28/08). Humana's profits are up 12.5 percent this year because of its success with government contracts.

And then I read "**Medicare 'drifting towards disaster': U.S. Official.**" (Reuters, 4/29/08). According to the article, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt said that Medicare faces a dire financial future.

Am I the only one who is confused?

On one hand, we hear Medicare is in trouble. But yet we keep sending more and more tax dollars to insurance companies to run Medicare Advantage programs. Big corporations are now making large profits on what our government used to do as a public service. We subsidize insurance companies – to the tune of \$150 billion over the next ten years – to operate privatized Medicare Advantage plans, at a cost between 12 and 19 percent higher than if Medicare directly served these same people.

Some of us are old enough to remember what people said when Medicare was first proposed. The critics predicted it would be a disaster, the start of socialized medicine. Now, 43 years later, Medicare has been the savior for millions of seniors. But our government sees it as yet another public asset that can be sold off for private gain.

In June, Congress may be debating the future of these federal subsidies to private insurance companies. If this happens, it is more important than ever that we understand the issues and where our elected officials stand.

We all know what Medicare has meant for our generation. Let's make sure it stays strong for all who follow us.



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