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NEWSLETTER – March 2010

*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 protect the health and economic security of seniors, reward work, strengthen families and build thriving communities. Launched 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:

Health care seniors can depend on through Medicare

Strengthening pension laws

Affordable and accessible prescription drugs.

Affordable and accessible long term care

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

From the President

Leon Burzynski

A series of recent events indicates why it is important for our generation to maintain our political activism. In fact, I think we need to pick it up a couple notches. I believe the situation in Congress has deteriorated to the point of gridlock of a degree that threatens the nation.

The few remaining senators and representatives willing to work across the aisle are announcing their return to civilian life. The health care process was a good example. In what appeared to be an outright sellout, the proposed legislation was developed in secrecy and through a series of trade-offs that did not pass the smell test.

For those who doubt the seriousness of the situation, take a moment to review what is occurring across the nation. People are not just upset, they are angry.

I attended Senator Russ Feingold's January listening session in Waukesha County and the mood was brutal. Many comments came as a result of the speaker's anger rather than concern. Some made no sense whatever. For instance, the two elderly couples

sitting by me both were upset about the possibility of government running a health care program. This was after a husband told me about his wife's recent surgeries that cost tens of thousands of dollars and were all paid by Medicare.

The anger being generated against Congress and President Obama is real. It demonstrates a deep frustration with the do-nothing Congress that consists of Republicans that are against any proposal and Democrats with no spine or integrity.

The Republicans, the part headed by Rush Limbaugh and Fox television, are committed to maintaining their status as "the party of no." The few centrists that once walked the halls of Congress are no more.

With the newly implemented litmus test for Republicans, most are going to great lengths to prove they are more radically right than any opponents in upcoming primary elections. Even John McCain, the maverick, has turned against major legislation that he recently supported.

I am not exaggerating the situation. G. William Hoagland, a past fiscal policy adviser to Republican Senate leaders recently

stated, "These days I wonder if this country is even governable." While Republicans use the politics of fear and dread to distort any Democrat proposal, Americans are looking for a leader.

In February, we celebrated President's Day in honor of two of the three greatest United States presidents, Washington and Lincoln (FDR was the third). Given the condition of the country, President Obama has the opportunity to join this select group.

We have a do-nothing Congress, Americans are losing their jobs and their homes, and health insurance costs are going through the roof. The federal debt, increased by almost \$4 trillion during the Bush years, is estimated to increase by \$1 trillion a year through 2012. As an aside, President Obama is directly responsible for only 10 percent of that debt, and another 20 percent due to Bush-initiated spending like TARP and the Iraq war.

We in the WIARA must continue the activism that brought us the highest working family and retiree quality of life in history. Thank you for your past efforts to positively impact our political system. Our work is ongoing and your wisdom is still needed.

SENIOR CHARACTERISTICS: A DICOTOMY OF GENEROSITY AND SELFISHNESS

Vivien De Back

In one life span, American had moved from scarcity to abundance, from sacrifice to the freedoms made possible by prosperity ¹

I enjoy reading the results of well-done, scientifically accurate research, not the sound bite non-verifiable kind we get from some U.S. media outlets. I am particularly interested in a greater understanding of human behavior and motivations that drive behavior.

Recently the scientific news has been reporting on psychological research conducted over the past 30 to 40 years. These long term studies provide information to researchers about behavior and why changes occur. At our age we have all observed behavioral changes in those around us. (We tend not to notice our own).

Understanding motivations and actions in ourselves and others is valuable in recognizing how our country's culture has changed. If we understand why the world seems to be changing around us, such knowledge will help, as we work together to make improvements in our society, our families, our community.

Researchers discovered that aging is not necessarily "down" time or a period of decline and loss. Instead, we are told that the old Freudian view that says, "as we age we become uneducatable" is all-wrong. Aging and retirement need not separate us from the world, but rather provide us with the capability of creating new brain connections throughout life. Furthermore, as we age we tend to "use our wisdom, skills, and knowledge to help younger generations." The McArthur Study

of Successful Aging² asked adults aged 70 to 79 how they rate their own usefulness to family and friends. Seven years later those seniors who believed they were useful to family and friends, were not only continuing their involvement in the community, but also were less likely to suffer from chronic illness or mortality. Involvement and usefulness are positive themes of aging.

Part of this "socially responsible" activity on the part of seniors comes from our background, growing up either during the Depression or with parents who experienced the loss that came with that period in our history. Our government helped the people by creating jobs, developing the infrastructure of our nation, and giving us parks, recreational, and historic sites that we enjoy and take our grandchildren to today. In addition, during the Second World War, we participated in the rationing and sacrifice that every family experienced. We did so because our country needed us. We believed a successful country served its people and the people were involved in the decisions of government.

The generosity and sense of serving or helping others, a characteristic of seniors today when dealing with friends and family, is dramatically missing when asking seniors about their belief and involvement in government and governmental structures. We can readily see that in spite of all past sacrifices, seniors today are being given

more than they are giving. David Brooks³ points out "As more money goes to pay off promises made mostly to the old, the young have less control. In other words in the private sphere seniors provide wonderful gifts to their grandchildren...in the public sphere they take it away." Such generosity and self-serving simultaneously existing with us is detrimental to our country.

If this nation is to provide health care to all, it may only be accomplished with some sacrifice from each of us. If our educational systems are to be strengthened, some sacrifice is needed, especially from those who can afford it. If our political system is to survive, we cannot become so polarized as to raise the levels of hate and prejudice toward anyone who has a different opinion. Only we, the older generation, who have been known to "use our wisdom" to help others, can unite as a force for change. We must increase our generosity side and forego the concern for only ourselves, as is being encouraged by those whose goal is to divide us politically and by age groups. Can we do that?

1) *Children of the Great Depression*, Norma Haan, U of Cal, Berkley

2) USC/USCA Center for Successful aging:
www.aging.ucla/successfulaging.html

3) David Brooks, *The New York Times*, 2/3/2010

The State of the Nation by Leon Burzynski

As one observes Congressional behavior over the past several decades, it is apparent that our political system has, in naval terminology, run aground. In a New York Times article, Alan Brinkley, a historian, is cited as observing that we are entering the fourth decade in which Congress, and therefore the government as a whole, has failed to deal with any major issue.

One does not have to search to locate examples of the truth in Brinkley's claim. We are surrounded by examples. Most of our highway systems are collections of pot holes in between a few newly paved areas. The main arterials in many cities are crumbling due to lack on maintenance.

Bridges across the country are in dire need of replacement. At the Zoo Interchange in Milwaukee there are three such bridges that are being replaced on an emergency basis because they are structurally deficient and can no longer be considered safe for heavy truck traffic.

Over the past forty years, our primary and secondary educational systems have undergone a regular swing from one learning fad to another. We went from the multiplication tables to new math. After a few years, we moved to another course of

action. A few years ago I tutored high school seniors that, after three years of high school math, did not know how to solve simple fraction or decimal problems.

Our financial system became a paradise for anyone who could hand a credit card across the counter. It seemed like a new credit card offer came in the mail at least once a week. When one credit card was maxed out, there were three more to take its place. The nation as a whole went to a negative savings rate. The Congressional answer was to remove the regulations.

Our nation's capitol and state capitols became a haven for lobbyists. The companies with the deepest pockets got the best legislation that money could buy. The rest of us got to pay for it. Good union represented jobs in the north were moved to the southern states where people will still work for \$8.00 an hour. Then the CEO's discovered folks who would work for even less.

The work was moved to Mexico and Central America, where there were no pesky environmental or worker safety regulations to follow. When the workers there started talking about joining a union, the jobs moved to the Pacific Rim.

Today the country is standing on the brink of a

financial disaster that has, to this point, been averted. However, many in Washington have their sights aimed at those of us left standing. The Supreme Court, in the unbelievable *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision, ruled that corporations can dump unlimited amounts of money into political campaigns. It is generally concluded that this gives corporate interests a stranglehold on our political system.

What is Needed?

What happened that the country finds itself in this untenable situation? Frank Rich, a syndicated columnist in the New York Times, identified the problem as a lack of leadership. Rich claims there has not been a bona fide leader in the Senate since Lyndon Johnson.

I am in agreement with Rich. Harry Reid, with a filibuster proof majority, could not get even simple legislation passed. The health care fiasco is just the latest in a line of Congressional moves that illustrate a situation beyond comprehension.

My question is, "When is the leadership that cares about us regular people, rather than the moneyed interests, going to arrive in Washington?" We have been waiting a long time.

JOIN THE WISCONSIN ALLIANCE RETIREES CAN AND DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Our Mission is to advance public policy that protects the health and economic security of older Americans.

Our Goal is to educate, energize, and mobilize retirees to make a difference through activism.

JOIN us on the **front line fighting** to preserve **Pensions, Social Security, Medicare**, and issues important to retirees!
Send your membership to: WI Alliance for Retired Americans 6333 W. Bluemound Road Milw., WI 53213

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip code: _____ Phone: _____

\$10 Annual Membership Fee Enclosed Additional Donation: \$10 \$15 \$20 \$25

Support the Repeal of Minimum Mark-Up Law

The Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans is part of a coalition of community, labor, and business organizations urging the Wisconsin Legislature to pass Assembly Bill 482 (AB 482), which would exempt prescription drugs from the minimum mark-up law in Wisconsin. The enactment of AB 482 would save Wisconsin consumers millions of dollars while also saving significant amounts for people insured by private companies, Medicaid, and Medicare.

At a time when the federal government has yet to pass health care reform legislation, the State of Wisconsin can help to lower the costs of prescription drugs by passing AB 482. Currently, even with the federal Part D RX drug program that started in 2006, the price of prescription drugs has increased at least 8 percent a year. People who are struggling to afford their medications need help now.

At the time our newsletter was published, the Assembly Health Committee had passed AB 482. Please contact your state assembly and senate representatives and let them know that you support AB 482.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

The 15th annual Senior Power Luncheon will be held Monday, October 11, 2010, 11:45 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. at the Wyndham Hotel & Conference Center
4747 South Howell Avenue, in Milwaukee

The 4th WIARA Convention will be on Monday March 21, 2011, 9A.M. TO 4 P.M.
Concourse Hotel, 1 West Dayton Street, Madison

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