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414-771-9511
www.wisconsinara.org
NEWSLETTER – March 2009

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

The planning for the WIARA biennial convention has been under way for some time. The easy parts are done. The hotel was booked almost a year ago. The nominating committee developed a slate of candidates to recommend. The notices have been sent.

The difficult part will be in the hands of those who attend and make their voice heard. The important work at the convention will be the decision-making that determines the direction of our organization in the coming years.

What makes this exciting is the fact that, after years and years of being shunted aside, we are finally in a position to have our voices heard in Washington and Madison. It is truly an exciting time!

Since the WIARA Founding Convention in 2005, our focus was dictated by forces beyond our control. The drive to privatize Social Security, followed by the Medicare Part D fiasco, kept us in a reactive mode for the first two years.

After our transition to a 501(c)(4) organization, we were able to get pro-active with our involvement in the Healthy Wisconsin Plan. The WIARA 2008 election effort illustrated the value the Wisconsin Alliance brings to the table in a coalition setting.

I highlighted what I viewed as the main retiree issues in the last edition of the WIARA newsletter. The primary topics included the funding of retirement, Social Security, senior health care, long term care, and the impact of the economy on retirees.

At an arm's length, much of what we accomplished was also aimed toward the quality of life for our children and grandchildren. There is still much to do in that arena.

In that context, the Employee Free Choice Act is the most important work in front of us. Articles inside this newsletter speak to that issue. It is time all workers have the freedom to organize.

There is much we can do at the State level to guarantee a decent quality of life for our kids and grandkids. There are worker protection priorities and policies

that must be addressed by the State legislators.

We have companies declaring bankruptcy and a bank getting what is left, leaving the employees with thousands in unpaid pay and benefits. The UW system faculty and staff do not have collective bargaining rights.

The tax system in Wisconsin is tilted to give business almost a free ride. Studies indicate approximately 60 percent of the largest corporations doing business in the state pay no state income tax. That means you and I pay their way.

The infrastructure throughout the state is crumbling. After a trip on I-94 from Milwaukee to Madison, or in reverse, the first stop has to be a chiropractor to bring your back into alignment. Local streets and highways are reminders of the old days with plank and gravel roads.

When you come to the WIARA convention on March 23rd, please be ready to participate in the planning for the future – our future and the future of our children and grandchildren. We need you! I hope to see you there!

Why Retirees Should Care About the Employee Free Choice Act

George J. Kourpias

Unions built the middle class. By standing together, we fought for and won better wages, health care and pensions, and safety and respect on the job.

But much of what we achieved is crumbling in today's troubled economy. Many of us worry that our children and grandchildren will not live as well as we have. More than ever, American workers need the good wages and benefits that they can best achieve through collective bargaining.

As the former president of the Machinists union – and now as president of the Alliance for Retired Americans – there is no doubt in my mind that the fate of workers and retirees is undeniably linked.

We cannot have a solid, stable retirement unless we have a solid, stable middle class. For example, union workers are three times more likely to have defined-benefit pension plan than non-union workers. And union workers are five times more likely to have health insurance than non-union workers.

To me, it is no coincidence that as it becomes harder for workers to form and join unions, more and more Americans are struggling to take care of their families, see a doctor or get a prescription filled, or retire with any sense of comfort.

According to the National Labor Relations Board, in 2007 nearly 30,000 workers faced illegal employer retaliation for trying to join a union – that is five times as many as in 1967.

How do we change this? Workers and retirees must fight

together to pass the Employee Free Choice Act so we can finally crack down on companies that break the law and try to block a worker's freedom to join a union.

What can retirees do to help?

First, talk to your children and grandchildren. Polls have shown that younger workers may not be as aware of the benefits of collective bargaining. Tell them all about what our generation went through to create jobs that could support a family, and how much it hurts to see it all slipping away.

Next, tell your Representatives and Senators in Washington. Call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 202/224-3121.

Retirees have a lot at stake in this fight. We know what collective bargaining did for us, and we want only the best for our children and grandchildren. If we stand together – retirees, workers, and community leaders – we can pass the Employee Free Choice Act and restore economic security to people of all ages.

George J. Kourpias is the President of the Alliance for Retired Americans. For more information, contact, www.RetiredAmericans.org or 1-888/373-6497.

Editor's Note: President Kourpias sent this message shortly before announcing his retirement.

Kagen Co-Sponsor for Employee Free Choice Act

Wisconsin 8th District

Congressman Steve Kagen has signed on as a co-sponsor of the Employee Free Choice Act. He joins the other Wisconsin representatives who recognize the importance and value of a society where workers have rights in their workplace.

WIARA Members Lobby Members of our Congressional Delegation

Leon Burzynski

By the time you receive our March newsletter, Wisconsin Alliance members will have participated in the National ARA Lobby Week activities. Scheduled during the week of the President's Day recess, February 16-20, WIARA members lobbied several members of the Wisconsin Delegation.

In addition to requesting support for the Employee Free Choice Act, we met with our representatives or their staff to lobby them to strengthen and protect Medicare. We requested they work to eliminate the overpayments to the Medicare Advantage Plan administered by private insurance companies and to have a separate Medicare Part D Plan offered as a part of Medicare.

We also asked that Medicare cover people 55 years and older. Over the next several months, we will continue our efforts to protect and strengthen Medicare for current and future retirees.

Given the new mood in Washington, it is important that our Senators and Representatives hear from us about our view on the changes that are necessary.

At the newsletter went to print, visits were scheduled as follows:

- A DC staff member of Senator Feingold on 2/17/09
- Congressman Kind on 2/18/09
- Congressman Kagen on 2/20/09
- Senator Kohl during April recess

Additional appointments were pending.

President Kourpias Announces Retirement

From President, Leon Burzynski

On February 10, 2009, I received a message from George Kourpias, informing me of his retirement. While saddened at his departure, I am aware that he leaves behind a growing organization that, under his leadership, has become a leading voice for retirees and seniors.

Speaking for the Wisconsin Alliance Officers and Board of Directors, I offer my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to President Kourpias for his work in the ARA and congratulate him on his well-earned retirement.

George's retirement announcement in its entirety.

From President George Kourpias:

For some time now I have been considering retiring as president of the Alliance for Retired Americans and I now believe there is no better time than now after the great victory the labor movement and the Alliance achieved in the last election.

Therefore, I submit my resignation to the executive committee to be effective February 19, 2009.

In accordance with Article VI, Section 1 of the Alliance By-Laws, President Richard Trumka will recommend to the executive committee, that Barbara Easterling be appointed to fill the remainder of my term.

I want to thank you, the executive board, the international presidents and the officers of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win for your support during the last eight years. I also want to thank my union, the IAM for everything they have done for me.

The Alliance could not have achieved the success it has without all of your outstanding support. I leave my post as president knowing that the Alliance is in good shape and will continue to do the great work it does for our members.

Barbara Easterling, who I have known for a great number of years, will do an outstanding job as she has done in all of the other responsibilities she has taken on.

I will still be around to help our retirees. I look forward to seeing you all in the near future.

Fraternally,
George J. Kourpias

Town Hall Meetings on Big Money Influence on Supreme Court Races

The WIARA is serving as a co-sponsor of two town hall discussions on the impact of big money on Supreme Court races. In Wisconsin, we have witnessed first-hand the impact on court elections by big money.

The WIARA is joining with the Coalition for Wisconsin Aging Groups, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, and Common Cause in Wisconsin to sponsor and facilitate discussions on this topic. The discussions are scheduled as follows:

Time – Both Meetings: 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. (followed by lunch)

Date: Mon., March 16, 2009

Place: Brown Cnty. Public Library
515 Pine St., Green Bay, WI

Date: Wed., March 25, 2009

Place: Concourse Hotel, 1 West
Dayton St., Madison, WI

There is no charge, but we must know how many lunches will be needed. Please call 414-771-9511 if you plan to stay for lunch.

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

REMINDER THE DEADLINE TO REGISTER FOR WIARA CONVENTION IS MARCH 9TH

The 3rd Biennial WIARA Convention will be on Monday, March 23, 2009, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at the Concourse Hotel, 1 West Dayton Street, in Downtown Madison. Registration and continental breakfast will start at 8 a.m.

The agenda will include: bylaw changes, election of officers, guest speakers, and educational presentations on the challenges of our economy, health care reform, strengthening Medicare, and the Employee Free Choice Act. We will also be setting legislative and program priorities for the next two years.

The Convention cost is \$35.00 per participant. This includes a continental breakfast, lunch, convention materials and parking at the Concourse Hotel and Conference Center.

We look forward to your participation in our March 23rd Convention as we make decisions on future priorities related to our work for social and economic justice for retirees and working families. Please feel free to contact our office, 414-771-9511, if you have questions or need additional information.

Stimulus Plan Contains Small Benefit for Retirees and Seniors

The \$789 billion economic stimulus package negotiated between the Senate the House of Representatives has a small benefit for retirees. There is one component that directly targets seniors.

It is a one-time payment of \$250 to Social Security beneficiaries, railroad retirees and veterans receiving benefits from the Veterans Affairs department. Those retirees who are in State plans and not eligible for Social Security would also get the \$250 payment.

While we appreciate this small stipend, it will not begin to approach the trillions of dollars retirees lost when the value of their retirement savings plummeted in the Wall Street collapse.

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**DID YOU, OR DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE, WHO HAS
LOST THEIR HEARING DUE TO WORKPLACE
NOISE?**

**WORKER'S COMPENSATION BENEFITS
MAY BE THE ANSWER. WE CAN HELP.**

Sound Advisors* without charge conducts meetings around the state with groups of retirees who need help purchasing hearing aids. Most people who worked in noisy environments do not know that they may be entitled to benefits that can go higher than \$60,000.00 plus hearing aids.**

That's where we come in.

We describe the State's Worker's Compensation program for hearing loss and explain how people can get benefits. We help people fill out the forms and give free hearing tests, if desired.

To get more information contact us at 608-882-6571 or maryjo@johnsonlawoffices.net, www.hearinglosshelp.net.



***Sound Advisors is an informational service of Johnson Law Offices. **Value of claims varies. State law caps awards at over \$60,000 plus hearing aids. If we represent you in filing a claim fees are 20% plus costs contingent upon recovery. Advertisement-As required by Supreme Court Rule 20:7.3(b)**

Note: This is a paid advertisement and not an endorsement by the Wisconsin alliance for Retired Americans (WIARA). The WIARA does not endorse businesses, organizations or their products, unless otherwise stated.

Recent Calendar Raffle Winners

November 2008

David York
Joseph Dosemagen
Mark Westphal
Garnet Stout
Jo Ann Miller
Larry Moldenhauer
Kevin Bowen
Patricia Elizondo
James Carravetta
Lenny Hand
Meg Andrietsch
Linda Maniaci
Jack Kruek
Jim Becker
Jetty Wells
Sam Sprecker
Kenneth Nyhuis
Helen Olig
James Bloedel
Tony Arandt
Mike Drumry
Robert Smith
Linda Miller
Janet Timm
Jane Forseth
Sharleen Ott
Danelle Sommers Murphy
Marcel Dandenean
Mike Murphy, Jr.
Marlene Ott

December 2008

Chester Antoniewicz
Mike Pyne
Mike Gorski
Helen Gadowski
Dave Russell
Courtney Nena
Sue Nelson
Chuck Schroeder
Marsha Radaj
Jim Becker
Alfredo Acosta
Tyler Hubble
Joseph Dosemagen
Kathy Antoniewicz
Edith Karsten
Jane Forseth
Jim Reiland
Charles Hyatt
Robert Vlach
Norman McClintock
Donna Blakeslee
Stephen Janusewski
Mike Brown
Jean Haase
Monica Kelly
Lavern Nowak
Steve Bruch
Jeanne Simmons
Willia Carlson
Alyce Carravetta
Dan Burzynski

January 2009

Joseph Gruber
Gary Miller
Dave Spengler
Robert Schoenborn
Bev Hund
Susan Wenzel
Cheryl Gellings
Gary Evenson
Ruby Mueller
Matt Page
Joyce Reiland
Nancy Wagner
Dick & Mary Presser
Doug Curler
Barbara Uschah
Cindy Clark
Sue Bogdon
Josephine Mieczko
Kati Squier
Colin McKennig
Lev De Back
Forrest Ceel
Douglas Riemer
Ted Mieczko
Anita Johnson
Jef Hall
Cindy Clark
Marvin Bradley
Dick & Mary Presser
Bob Mickenna
Tony Vanderbloemen

February 2009

Unite Young at Heart
Jeanie Patrick
Stephanie Jackson
Jack Kruck
Ruby Mueller
Catherine Cibik
Kamryn De Back
Shirley Gauger
Dale Miller
Butch Witt
Gail Cheatham
Koko Cattran
Matt Page
Daniel Jakubowski
Janis Witt
Carmen Stout
Joe Wilfling
Richard Turzinski
Elizabeth jatczak
Pete Raitn
Davis Bosanko
Hugh Sloan
Stephanie Stein
Janis Nowak
James Bloedel
Maryo Schenkenberg
Kathleen Schneider
Norman McClintock