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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.

Message from the President

Leon Burzynski

The past two months have been exciting for the Wisconsin Alliance. Our second biennial convention was very successful. In that vein, please accept my sincere thanks for electing me as your president for a second term. It is an honor to serve you in this great organization.

A difficult aspect of writing this article is prioritizing the topics. During the past two months, we witnessed continued attacks on Wisconsin's retired and senior residents. The most frontal attack came from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) as they announced that the Feds would no longer allow SeniorCare to be considered creditable coverage in place of the Medicare Plan D prescription program.

This was in response to a SeniorCare program that saved Wisconsin seniors \$200 million in drug costs during 2006. This is the response for a program that is easy to understand as opposed to the overly complicated Medicare Plan D with its dozens of possible insurers and unfair tilt toward ensuring those companies keep a deep reach into our pocketbooks.

I attended a meeting arranged by CWAG with representatives of the Department of Health and Human Services in an effort to argue for the preservation of SeniorCare. They brought several levels of their bureaucracy and were quite clear that we were not going to change their minds. They maintained that seniors had an 80 percent satisfaction rate with Plan D. They seemed to forget the problems during implementation when 23 states had to declare a state of emergency so seniors could get their prescriptions filled.

This shows how far removed these folks are from reality. They seem unaware that, during 2006, thousands of people needed the help of Medicare Rights Centers and other advocacy groups to assist with their Part D problems. They seemed unaware of seniors who signed up for plans that claimed their medicines were covered and then discovered there were authorization requirements, quantity limits, and denials of coverage. Unaware of the hardship it caused millions of people in 2006, they defended the "donut hole" as necessary to get the program approved. Sadly, the donut hole will affect even higher numbers in 2007.

While defending the program, the bureaucrats ignored the same polls that found 73 percent of older adults claimed the Plan D benefit was too complicated and 81 percent wanted the prohibition on negotiation of drug prices by Medicare rescinded. The prohibition on negotiating drug prices will probably remain until additional changes are made in Congress and the White House. There were just enough Senators voting the wishes of the drug and insurance industry lobbyists on April 18th to prevent passage of a bill requiring the feds to negotiate drug prices for Plan D.

Where does all the money for prescriptions go? A recent Alliance newsletter stated it clearly. In 2006, the CEO of Wyeth took home \$32.8 million. Other CEO's also did quite well: Abbott Labs, \$26.9 million; Pfizer, \$19.4 million; and Baxter, \$13.5 million. The insurance company CEO's did not fare too poorly either: Prudential, \$25.7 million; Cigna, \$21.0 million; and Aetna, \$19.8 million. The main reason these people do not want Medicare allowed to negotiate drug prices is because they might be forced to live on a million or two less.

SENIOR POVERTY IN AMERICA

Vivien De Back

When I was a child, my grandmother, Nana, would talk about her greatest fear. She said she never wanted to end up at the “Poor Farm”. With my grandfather dead at age 52, and Nana a stay-at-home mother, she worried about running out of money in her old age. There was no Social Security for most of her life. When I thought she was very old, probably late 50’s, she went to work at Woolworth’s Five and Dime store in downtown Milwaukee to start building a Social Security account which was finally available to all Americans. With her small Social Security check later in life, my Nana stayed out of the “Poor Farm” until her death at age 99.

Today, younger people do not realize that Social Security was not always there. There was little opportunity to save for a retirement age that few reached because of the shorter life expectancy. Going to the “Poor Farm” was a real possibility for many retirees.

With Social Security and Retirement benefits being attacked and many jobs lacking retirement benefits, we are again in danger of slipping into a country of very rich and very poor. The warning signs are clear. Today in America, the richest country in the world, we have a growing numbers of Senior already at the “Poor Farm”. Every year, millions of working families don't have enough money to pay for adequate food, housing, health care and other basic necessities of life. Poverty exists in every region, state, city, and community in America. It doesn't discriminate based on race, gender, religion, national origin, or any other factor. For older Americans, the difficulties of poverty are amplified by soaring health care costs and the expected slow-down in employment that typically comes with aging.

According to the federal government, the official measure of poverty is based on a household's

annual money income. In 2002, the poverty line was \$8,628 for one person age 65 or older and \$10,874 for a couple. While on average, 11 percent of the older population lives in poverty, it is important to note, that to our national shame, one of every five children in the United States lives in poverty.

Who of the elderly are among the most poor?

Poverty increases among the elderly, as they get older. In 2000 poverty rates were:

- 9 percent for people ages 65 to 74;
- 11 percent for people ages 75 to 84; and
- 14 percent for people ages 85 and older.

Poverty is greater among women than men:

- 8 percent of men are poor, and
- 13 percent of women are poor.

The non-married are significantly more likely to be poor:

- 5 percent of the married are poor, and
- 17 percent of the non-married are poor.

Poverty hits older minorities harder than older non-Hispanic whites:

- 9 percent of non-Hispanic whites are poor;
- 25 percent of non-Hispanic blacks are poor; and
- 19 percent of Hispanics are poor.

These figures do not tell the whole story. For example, 39 percent of older Hispanic women who live alone are poor.

Government programs aid the poor and prevent poverty.

If it were not for Social Security, these rates would be higher. Social Security keeps 40 percent of older people out of poverty. For those ages 85 or older, six in ten would be in poverty if not for Social Security. Supplementary Security Income (SSI), a means-tested program, was intended to keep low-income elderly people out of poverty, but has fallen short of achieving that goal. In 2004, the average annual SSI benefit was \$6,768 for individuals 65 and older, only 78 percent of the poverty level; for couples it was \$10,152, or 93 percent of the level. Since only 12 percent of older people receiving SSI benefits were couples, most were far below the poverty line.

Proposals to privatize Social Security, raise the Social Security retirement age, or cut Social Security benefits in other ways would halt the progress the older population has made under the basic income protection of the Social Security program. The effect would be to put millions more of the elderly in jeopardy of living in poverty. That is why the Alliance for Retired Americans both nationally and in Wisconsin is fighting so hard to protect Social Security and oppose harmful benefit cuts.

The success of such programs as Social Security, Medicare, the Older Americans Act and senior housing all worked to reduce poverty among older Americans. However, dangerous attempts are being made to reduce or eliminate these benefits. We must, as a nation return to the idea that much can be accomplished when we work together for the good of all, rather than the more recent ideas of everyone going it alone. A socially responsible society looks out for its seniors of every age, in our generation and all the generations behind us. Working together, we can keep our seniors out of the “Poor Farm.”

Calendar Raffle Winners

February 2007

Tom Brantmeier
 Dave Dombrowski
 Alan Stein
 Dave Jurss
 Ruby Mueller
 Dick & Mary
 Presser
 Larry Oyler
 Joseph Gruber
 Kallen DeBack
 Steve Nemeth
 Dave Russell
 Wolfgang Kossack
 Jon Geenen
 John Sbonik
 Chris Sherman
 Dave Thoss
 Phyllis Pope
 Paul Schroeder
 Nancy Poulson
 Roxie Beene
 Bill Freeda
 Bernie Faust
 Betty Karecki
 Dave Christi
 Leonard Witt
 Carol Zoran
 Jean Depotsie
 Nancy Wagner

March 2007

Lucille Schendel
 Randy Hubble
 Dan Sherman
 Linda Tveten
 Rich Hinderholtz
 Jim Bertram
 Jerry Bowe
 Peggy Thrasher
 Leslie (Buzz) Davis
 Pat Johnson
 Katherine Stout
 Randy Sus
 Matthew Tveten
 Joseph Gruber
 Larry Oyler
 Norb Stephan
 Mary Koceja
 Linda Maniaci
 Tony Rehm
 Stephanie Jackson
 Kallen DeBack
 Anthony Rainey
 Tom Mischka
 Louis Lepak
 Rean Ruszhiewicz
 Victor Nemeth
 Sheila Cochran
 Joel Dieffenbach
 Ralph Maly
 James Bloedel

Pulling the Plug on Time Warner

The Communications Workers of America (CWA), AFL-CIO is trying a new approach to dealing with the anti-union cable companies. Instead of workers risking their jobs to organize a union at Time Warner in Milwaukee, CWA is going right after the company with a simple message, "let workers decide for themselves if they want a union--or the union will help Time Warner's customers and employees dump Time Warner."

CWA Local 4603 is heading up this campaign. Their members will reach out to members of unions asking them to pull the plug on Time Warner by switching to TV and internet services provided by union members at AT&T U-verse.

As customers dump Time Warner in favor of AT&T, the union company will need to hire more technicians in Milwaukee and more Customer Service jobs in Appleton and Milwaukee--creating good jobs with good benefits. Not only will the loss of customers start to hurt Time Warner's profits, but their employees can then shed their low-pay, low-benefit, low-respect jobs at Time Warner and take good union jobs at AT&T!

Union members can support the effort to create good union jobs while punishing a viciously anti-union company by switching from Time Warner to AT&T U-verse.

To switch to AT&T U-verse call this union members-only order line: 1-888-667-8489, or for more information on CWA's campaign check out the website at:

www.GetUnionTV.org

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:

WIARA, 6333 West Bluemound Road, Milwaukee, WI 53213

Name-----Phone-----

Address, city, zip-----

Email address-----

_____ \$10 membership

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

2007 Convention Highlights

Billy Feitlinger

The Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans held its second biennial convention on March 5, 2007, at the Concourse Hotel in Madison. Attendees included 160 delegates from throughout the state.

During the business portion of the meeting, the delegates:

- Re-elected Leon Burzynski, President; Buzz Davis, Vice-President; Tom Gadowski, First Vice-President; George McKinney, Secretary; and Dode Lowe, Treasurer.
- Elected five community representatives, including Vivien DeBack, Gerald Martin, Bernie Faust, David Corey, and Tom Frazier.
- Amended the Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation to enable the WIARA to convert to a 501(c)(4) organization. This will allow the WIARA to engage in lobbying and to take positions in political activities.

During lunch, the delegates heard from State Senator, Mark Miller, who spoke about his proposed health care reform plan before the Wisconsin State Legislature. There were three afternoon workshops, including: 1) Organizing on the health care reform campaign as the # 1 Wisconsin priority; 2) Involving you and your members in the electoral process; and 3) Organizing a local Alliance chapter or labor retiree council in your community. As part of our organizing

efforts, the Wisconsin Alliance is a partner in a Wisconsin effort to address health care issue through responsible health care reform.

Please feel free to contact us at 414-771-9511 if you wish additional information about the convention.

Senate Blocks effort to Lower Medicare Costs

On April 18, the U.S. Senate blocked consideration of a bill, S. 3, to remove the prohibition on Medicare negotiating price discounts with the pharmaceutical companies. It would also have forced drug plan providers to reveal currently secret pricing data to government watchdogs. Senators allied with the drug industry launched a filibuster to block the bill, and the April 18 vote of 55-42 fell short of the 60 votes needed under Senate rules to move to a full debate on the bill. Six Republicans joined Senate Democrats in supporting the measure. Earlier in the week, the White House announced it would veto the bill if it passed.

In January, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill mandating Medicare price negotiations. In the wake of the April 18 vote, several Senators have pledged to attach the S. 3 provisions to other legislation this year. "A powerful bloc of Senators gave the pharmaceutical industry a victory at the expense of seniors who struggle to afford their prescriptions. Those Senators even blocked a full and public debate over the sweetheart deal the drug companies won in the 2003 Medicare law," said Alliance executive director **Edward F. Coyle**.

