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NEWSLETTER – May 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

The election season will soon be in full swing. I find it a bit disheartening that the candidates for president from both parties seem to be steering clear of the issues. It should not be difficult to determine the issues.

Certainly, the economy is an issue. Gasoline is selling at \$3.70 a gallon in SE Wisconsin, Harley Davidson announced layoffs of 2,800 employees, and 80,000 jobs were lost in a recent two-month period.

The cost of healthcare and the lack of access to it are also major issues. At last report, there were 46 million people across the nation who do not have health insurance coverage.

President Bush continues to push for reductions in Medicare payments. The result of the president's actions, if Congress does not intervene, will be fewer healthcare providers accepting Medicare patients.

In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the president claims the country is not in a recession. However, a leading

Harvard economist, Martin Feldstein, recently stated that the country may be heading into the worst recession since WW II.

Finally, there must be a way to bring the Iraq war to an end. The Iraqi government must, at some point, take responsibility for their country so the men and women in our military forces can come home to stay.

These are very important issues. Alliance members have an important role to play in the election process. As a group, our voting percentage is the highest of any age group. We also are more informed about the issues, as we have many years of background knowledge from which to draw.

We need to ask political candidates questions that force them to respond to the issues. We cannot allow them to "talk all around" an issue without ever giving an answer.

The WIARA will be developing questions for both federal and State candidates. It is time the campaigns shifted from personal attacks to real issues.

Tom Frazier Wins National Award

Tom Frazier, the Executive Director of the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, and a member of the WIARA Board of Directors, is the recipient of the Jack Ossosky Award from the National Council on Aging.

According to the NCOA web site, "the Jack Ossosky Award is presented to individuals or organizations that have taken a creative, new idea and developed it into a successful program, service, or policy that helps older people to achieve vital aging."

Frazier, a tireless advocate for older Americans, is also vice-president of the NCOA's National Coalition of Consumer Organizations on Aging. He serves on the WIARA Board of Directors as a representative of community organizations.

Congratulations, Tom, for your selection as the recipient of this award.

FIVE WORKING-AGE WISCONSINITES DIE EACH WEEK

CAUSE: LACK OF HEALTH INSURANCE

Vivien De Back

As the number of uninsured Americans continues to rise, studies indicate that the lack of health insurance has dire consequences for individuals, families and communities. It is costly in lives lost, lower quality of life, and expensive for everyone, the insured and uninsured.

In 2002, the Institute of Medicine released a groundbreaking report, *Care Without Coverage: Too Little, Too Late*, which estimated that, nationwide, 18,000 adults between the ages of 25 and 64 died in 2000 because they did not have health insurance. This is happening in the richest country in the world. The United States is a country that boasts of its innovative and highly technical health care system.

In March 2008, Families USA issued a state-level estimation of the number of deaths due to lack of health care access. The information about Wisconsin is daunting. In 2006 there were nearly 2,976,000 people between the ages of 25 and 64 living in Wisconsin. Of those, 10.7 percent were uninsured. The report went on to say: ***Uninsured Wisconsinites are sicker and die sooner than their insured counterparts.*** For more than 10 years, study after study has demonstrated that access to health care matters. It matters financially and in life expectancy and life quality.

The Families USA report tells us: [Why Insurance Matters](#):

- The uninsured are less likely to have a usual source of care outside of the emergency room. (*Costly and no follow up care*)
- The uninsured often go without screenings and preventive care (*Uninsured adults are more likely to be diagnosed with a disease in advanced stage*)
- The uninsured often delay or forgo needed medical care (*Uninsured are cared for in costly venues such as emergency increasing your insurance premiums*)
- The uninsured are sicker and die earlier than those who have insurance. (*This makes uninsured the 3rd leading cause of death after heart disease and cancer*)
- The uninsured pay more for health care (*Uninsured patients are often charged more than 2.5 times what insured patients are charged for hospital services*)

“It’s just wrong for anyone who works hard, pays taxes and plays by the rules to go without decent affordable health care coverage.” (Healthy Wisconsin: Your Choice Your Plan, 2007)

In Wisconsin we have a plan to insure all citizens, save the state and communities

money, and provide property tax relief with the savings.

Healthy Wisconsin was introduced and passed in the Senate during the recent legislative session. Its companion bill died in the Assembly. This bill that assures health care for all, including preventive care and management of chronic care, will be reintroduced in the Wisconsin Legislature in the next session.

We must ask every candidate for the Assembly and Senate in this state to state their position on Healthy Wisconsin. Stopping the passage of this important piece of legislation was unconscionable for members of the Assembly who were unwilling to vote for the health of their constituents and save us all money.

According to the independent Lewin Group, Healthy Wisconsin will save an estimated \$1.3 billion per year, half of which will be used to reduce property taxes. Ask your legislator, and those running for office, to sponsor, co-sponsor and vote for Healthy Wisconsin. Wisconsinites are **DYING** for health care coverage.

(More information: www.familiesusa.org and www.healthywisconsin.net)

Calendar Raffle Winners

March 2008

David Konrad
Eugene Schneider
Rhandi Berth
Joseph Gruber
Mike Murphy, Sr.
Joyce Brantmeier
Carmen Stout
Venita Beene
David Sipple
Joe Strohl
Ljiljana Radojicic
Dolores Kosciuh
Irenen Miller
Richard Chyla
Jeannette Thomas
Linda Tveten
Hugh Sloan
Kamryn De Back
Jay Reinke
Joe Strohl
John Blakeslee
Kay Seamonson
Richard Guitierrez
Carol Friedli
Reynolds Honold
Jerry Tevz
Marsha Radaj
Michael Modjeski
Joe Gruber
Lucille Schendel
Jo Ann Miller

April 2008

Richard Chyla
Carmen Stout
Kay Davis
Myron Halla
Joyce Reiland
Carroll Jakubowski
Gordy Woodrich
Reynolds Honold
Gary Wilde
Jay Kopplin
Dick & Mary Presser
Chris Sherman
James Caravetta
Matthew Tveten
Jeannette Thomas
Tom Speranza
Michael Hornby
Joan Dudzik
Eileen Roth
Jim Reiland
Greg Spring
DC & Retiree Club
Sam Sprecher
Patrick O'Connor
Joan Dudzik
Ben Elizondo
Peggy Thrasher
Tyler Hubble
Dick & Mary Presser
Leonard Witt

Wisconsin Alliance Plans 2008 Fall Election Activities

Billy Feitlinger

The Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans (WIARA) will be involved in the upcoming 2008 state and federal elections. During this election cycle, the Board of Directors has approved participating with Labor 2008, which includes WI AFL-CIO, Wisconsin labor unions and other statewide organizations.

Our Action Plan of election activities will focus on our members, affiliates, and other Wisconsin seniors as we educate and mobilize them to vote. We will ask them to volunteer their time to help elect state and federal candidates who support programs and issues with a positive impact on them and other working families. Our election efforts may include:

- Facilitating educational presentations at senior centers, retirement centers and other senior living arrangements on state/federal issues and programs discussed during the fall election.
- Organizing Health Care Reform Forums, candidates' forums and debates.
- Compiling voter guides to publicize the political candidates' position on issues.
- Informing how absentee ballots can be requested so seniors can vote at home.
- Endorsing political candidates.

The WIARA will communicate election activities and endorsements with its 65 affiliates and thousands of individual members through the bimonthly newsletter, mailing database, website, and via our "quick response" master email list.

If you are interested in getting involved with our election efforts, please contact Billy Feitlinger, Executive Director, at 414-771-9511 or email to bfeitlinger@hotmail.com

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:

I often find myself wondering, “who does our government *really* work for?” I felt this way when I heard that the Bush administration wants to cut \$178 billion from Medicare. This targets the most vulnerable – seniors who need Medicare to afford to see a doctor – in favor of sustaining the record profits enjoyed by big drug and insurance companies. Only in Washington could this be the work of a “compassionate conservative.”

The Bush administration continues to stand by its subsidies to large insurance companies – estimated to be \$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. And on top of this, the White House says it would veto a bill in Congress to end the ban on Medicare negotiating bulk discounts from drug manufacturers.

The pharmaceutical industry’s main trade group spent over \$22 million on Washington lobbyists in 2007, a 25 percent increase over 2006. At the same time, prescription prices rose eight percent, twice the rate of inflation. The newspaper article I read said the increases were aimed at driving drug prices higher before Congress could pass any Medicare reforms.

What all of these stories have in common is how terribly important 2008 is for us. As these issues are debated throughout the year, we must pay close attention. We must know the issues, and know where the candidates stand.

Our generation’s working days may be over, but our fighting spirit remains as strong as ever. We face great challenges as we try to reform health care and retirement security, but I believe this is a fight we can – and must – win.

George J. Kourpias
President
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