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NEWSLETTER – September 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 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 is fighting for:

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

Health care seniors can depend on through Medicare.

Affordable and accessible prescription drugs.

Strengthening pension laws.

Affordable and accessible long term care

President's Message

Leon Burzynski

We have reached a new low in this country. During my life I have witnessed a lot of what might be called political skullduggery. There have been the crooked politicians, the excessive influence of corporate money through lobbyist groups, and the inflammatory rantings of the right-wing talk radio set.

While each group was individually organized and often coordinated their efforts with others, the Karl Rove system brought them all together to spew their misinformation. The effect was partisan politics at the expense of the democratic principles on which this country was supposedly founded. Bi-partisan compromise disappeared from our political system.

The effort to derail health-care reform illustrates the result. Some political leaders have lowered their standards to a point where there are no standards. Senator Grassley from Iowa continues to falsely claim the proposed legislation will create "death squads" to pull the plug on the elderly. There is no such ele-

ment in the HR-3200 proposal or any other proposed legislation.

Radio and television right-wing commentators have publicly announced their effort to paint President Obama in a negative light and "bring down his presidency." A Fox News commentator connects health care reform proposals to Nazi Germany.

Corporate money is in play. A wealthy Texan is underwriting the effort to fill every town hall meeting with people who are told to create disturbances and "shout down" anyone speaking in favor of reform.

The insurance industry is adding their voice against reform. Richard Champion, the Wisconsin sales manager for Humana, sent an email with several pages of claims about the HR-3200 proposal. I have a complete copy of the bill and checked every listing. Amazingly, every claim was false as it was presented.

Health Care Reform is Good for Seniors

President Obama's proposal will work for seniors. The improvements to Medicare and adding better preventative services will help us to stay healthy.

Here are some ways reform works for us.

It will:

- ❖ **Protect our choice of doctors.**
- ❖ **Make preventative services affordable.**
- ❖ **Lower the cost of prescription drugs.**
- ❖ **Support coverage for early retirees.**
- ❖ **Remove obstacles for changing coverage under the Part D Plan.**
- ❖ **Lowers the cost for seniors in the low-income range.**
- ❖ **Brings savings and extends the solvency of the Medicare Program.**

We finally have a President and Congress recognizing the need for changes to health care. There can be no denying it when fifty million are uninsured. The Alliance strongly supports the proposed changes in HR-3200.

See Vivien De Back's article on page two for information on what you can do to bring about this change. Your voice is critical in this debate!

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO TO PASS HEALTH CARE REFORM STAY ON MESSAGE

Vivien De Back

Following the Health Care debate can be daunting and frustrating. Trying to make sense of the many ideas being debated is almost impossible. That is why we have each other. Moreover, there is good news in all of this.

1. Good public policy comes out of healthy discussion and consideration of multiple points of view. This is democracy in action.
2. The majority of American people agree that Health Care Reform is needed.
3. Citizens who care about fellow citizens do not allow almost 50 million to be without access to Health Care.
4. Our economy cannot survive without redesigning Health Care and how we pay for it.

The good news is that we are where we want to be. However, it is difficult to make dramatic changes in large, complex systems. It is even more challenging when opponents use unsavory tactics to disrupt the needed discussion and dialog. One can lose heart, but that is not acceptable if we really believe that Health Care for all is necessary for our country, our economy, and our people.

Those of us on Medicare remember the secretive process of passing Medicare Part D. There was little or no debate and consumers had no idea what was happening. The bill, at 2,480 pages long (over 1,000 pages longer than HR 3200 Health Care Bill), was passed at 3 AM in the morning with little warning, and was a creation of the Pharmaceutical industry.

This is NOT the American way!
This is NOT Democracy in action!

The debate and discussion you see today over the Health Care bill is frankly.... HEALTHY. It is healthy when people of all walks of life get involved. It is healthy when good ideas are presented. It is healthy when alternatives are offered. It is healthy when civil discourse prevails.

Given the complexity of health care reform recommendations and ideas floating around, you may wonder how to cope with it and enter into the dialog? I found it helpful to select certain component parts of the bill and become an expert on those issues. For example, I want a Health Care bill that includes reform to Medicare Part D, and a bill that offers access to health insurance with no pre-existing conditions clauses, as well as a bill that offers a Public Insurance Option. Now this I can handle. I can read the parts of the bill that discuss these issues.

For example, HR 3200 describes the phase-in of eliminating the donut hole and reducing out-of-pocket drug expenses for seniors. The bill also allows midyear changes in insurers when formulary changes are made. Because of my research, I can explain how Medicare will save money by eliminating overpayments to private plans such as the Advantage programs. This is the way I develop my message.

You can research how each personal issue of importance will improve the health care of the nation, have an impact on redesigning the system and the impact on the economy. If each of us finds the issues we believe most important and become

experts on them, we will, as a group, carry the MESSAGE of Health Care reform to our fellow citizens clearly and based on facts

We can enter into debates on our subject and identify the misinformation being presented. We can discuss the wording in the bill we read, in the research we do, and in quotes from reputable sources to back up our claims. We will stay on the message of change. We will disseminate and discuss the message of health care for all. We will not be deterred by loud voices that do not want to advance the health care agenda.

Seniors are understandably upset because of misinformation about health care proposals. We must get accurate information to them. We must talk to our neighbors and friends and clarify any misunderstandings. Seniors need to understand that the MESSAGE is one of help for them. An example is the change to the Medicare Part D coverage gap. Ask your friends and neighbors to work with you to get the message out in clear language that is meant to inform, not confuse and frighten.

Do you have questions about the health care agenda being debated? The Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans will help. Call or email me with your questions. We will research your issue. 414-427-0437 or lvdeback@yahoo.com

Read the House Health Care bill (HR 3200)
This site has a table contents. You can click on the parts of the bill you want to read.

<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:H.R.3200>:

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY MEDICARE
WHAT IS NEXT FOR RETIREE
HEALTH CARE?**

Leon

July 30th was the 44th anniversary of Medicare. Not only was this a time to reflect on Medicare's success, it has reduced senior poverty by two-thirds, but it also is an opportunity for Wisconsin retirees to become more aware of what is at stake for them and future retirees in the health care debate in Washington.

When President Lyndon Johnson signed Medicare legislation forty-four years ago, the lives of Americans were improved for generations. Before Medicare, growing old meant poverty, disability, and going without health insurance. Before Medicare, only half of all older Americans had health insurance and 35% of seniors lived in poverty. Today, levels of poverty among seniors have dropped by two-thirds and all Americans 65 and older can get health insurance through the Medicare program.

We can only hope that in the year of the Forty-Fourth Anniversary of Medicare, we will celebrate a historic success of passing landmark health care reform legislation, covering all Americans, and continuing to improve Medicare. It is imperative that Medicare reform be a part

of this landmark legislation.

What should retirees in Wisconsin be talking about with their federal representatives? Here are a few specifics:

- Help Early Retirees. Over 5 million Americans age 55-64 do not have health insurance. People in this age group should be able to see a doctor more often, especially for preventive care. This is the wrong time in life to have to cut corners with your health. We should create an affordable way for them to buy into Medicare coverage.
- Overpayments to Medicare Advantage (MA) plans must stop. They cost every Medicare beneficiary an extra \$3 per month in Part B premiums, whether they are in a MA plan or not. Scaling back these overpayments of subsidizing private insurance companies would afford \$190 billion in savings over the next 10 years. This could be used to improve Medicare and

the health care system.

- Close the Doughnut Hole. The so-called "doughnut hole" coverage gap in Medicare Part D means that each year one in four seniors will spend several months paying full price for their prescriptions while still having to pay premiums. This forces retirees to make risky, unacceptable choices about whether they can afford the medicines their doctors deem necessary.

Medicare reform must include containing health care costs. The fiscal challenges should be addressed by improving payment accuracy, encouraging delivery health care system reforms, and other cost-effective mechanisms to reduce the double digit increases in health care costs.

The Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans, a non-profit organization representing over 89,000 Wisconsin retirees is dedicated to the economic and health security of current and future retirees. America needs health and Medicare reform this year. Health care is a right, not a privilege.

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

14TH ANNUAL SENIOR POWER LUNCHEON WISCONSIN ALLIANCE FOR RETIRED AMERICANS

DATE: OCTOBER 12TH, MONDAY
TIME: 11:00AM. TO 1:00PM (LUNCH AT 11:45AM.)
PLACE: Wyndham Milwaukee Airport Hotel and Convention Center, 4747 S. Howell Ave.

Honoring: Governor James Doyle, State Senator John Lehman,
Sheila Cochran, Lev DeBack and Tony Vanderbloemen

Special Recognition: Dr. Linda Farley, a long-time advocate for universal health care

Guest Speaker: Rep. Tom Nelson, Assembly Majority Leader

Sponsors: Office and Professional Employees Union, Vaughn Cascino Law Offices,
Johnson Law Office, and the Forest County Potawatomi Community Foundation

Cost: \$75.00 per person -- Reserve a table of 8 for \$600.00.

Organizations can reserve an exhibit table for \$200.00.

There will be an ad booklet for the Power Luncheon. Ads can be emailed to wicara@att.net
and checks sent to: WIARA, 6333 West Bluemound Road, Milwaukee, WI 53213.

The Power Luncheon is the major annual fundraising event for WIARA. The honorees are selected from three categories: Community, Labor, and Public Service.

If you are interested in participating in the Senior Power Luncheon or need additional information, please contact Judy Burnick, at WIARA, 414-771-9511.

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