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NEWSLETTER – January 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:

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 Status of Healthcare Reform

At the time of this writing the U.S. Senate has just passed their version of health care reform and gone home for the Christmas vacation. Given the Senate bill must now be reconciled with the House version, we are still some distance from a final resolution of the healthcare reform issue.

Most of us are aware of the main benefits of the both bills. Vivien's article on page two takes us further into the issue and highlights many proposed changes not covered by the media. I strongly believe reform of the healthcare system is necessary, and why we cannot wait. Here is why.

Insured and Uninsured

The U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services estimates 46.3 million Americans had no health insurance in 2008. That number is still growing. Also, 25 million are underinsured. Their coverage is not adequate to protect them from high medical costs.

Since the recession began, it is estimated 14,000 Americans lost their coverage each day. Small businesses are especially

hard hit. More than half the uninsured are owners, employees, or dependents of small businesses. Fewer small businesses are offering insurance. Many are considering eliminating coverage.

High Health Care Costs

Health insurance costs have doubled since 2000 and family deductibles have increased 30% in a recent two-year period. An estimated 72 million nonelderly adults had difficulty paying medical bills during 2008. Amazingly, 61% of these had insurance.

At \$6,567 per person on 2006, the U.S. spends more per capita on health care than any other developed country in the world. During the past 25 years, the increased per capita spending on healthcare outpaced increases in the Consumer Price Index by significant margins. In 2007 healthcare spending increased 5.1% compared to 2.8% for the Consumer Price Index.

Consequences of Doing Nothing

Tens of thousands of Americans die each year due to not having health insurance. Because of the expense, they do not seek medical treatment until far into their illness.

Approximately 2/3 of the bankruptcy filings are related to debts connected to medical expenses. Many had health insurance but fell victims to exclusions, like pre-existing conditions clauses.

Why WIARA Supports Reform

The majority of WIARA members are union retirees. As union members, we benefitted and are proud of the efforts of those who came before us and won the many benefits we enjoy today. Benefits including:

- The 8 hour day.
- Minimum wage laws.
- Retirement pension plans.
- Health insurance benefits.
- Workman's compensation.
- Unemployment compensation.

Our generation enjoys a wonderful quality of life because of the labor movement. We owe the same to our children and grandchildren.

You can join our efforts by calling you Congressional Representatives and Senators and demanding they support the reform of the American health-care system. It is the least we can do in memory of those who did so much for us.

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT HEALTH CARE LEGISLATION

Vivien De Back

Watching health care bills being debated, drafted, marked up, and re-designed is exhausting. Listening to the news reports about the process is even worse. What is happening? Where is it going? Where are the ideas talked about during the campaign?

You can check the facts by visiting the web site: http://dpc.senate.gov/dpcdoc-sen_health_care_bill.cfm. This is where you find The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, (PPAC). Rather than accepting some news person's interpretation, read what is really in the bill. Many issues in the bill that could actually affect American's health care are not given much news coverage. Some important parts are not discussed at all.

Discussions about changing the system were at the forefront of the health care debate during the 2008 campaign. Some in the news media suggest few changes are being recommended. This is false. There are many interesting and positive changes offered in this bill.

Changes in Health Care and how it will be paid for cannot be achieved unless all of us share in the responsibility. The American public continues to demand that health care be available to all. This means some large corporations who pay nothing for their employees' health care will be required to do their fair share. Individuals who do not have health care will pay according to their means. Paying for health care might be done individually, through an employer or a government program, depending on income and family size. Small businesses may provide coverage through group purchasing or tax refunds.

Some individuals and businesses will pay less because their present premiums are based on supporting or covering those not covered by insurance. For example, it is estimated each insured individual pays an additional \$1,000 per year to cover the uninsured. When everyone has health insurance, the cost of providing health care will be shared. This will be a major change.

Also, this section of the bill reiterates the statement that says, "...any individual, family, or employer who currently has or provides coverage and would like to retain that coverage can do so under a 'grandfather' provision." These are the facts. Check out the bill.

What about the changes in the law that will transform the system of CARE? Many of those changes can be found under Title III, Improving the Quality and Efficiency of Health Care. Those of us enrolled in Medicare or Medicaid will see higher quality care due to greater investments aimed at improving the quality and delivery of care.

The PPAC Act includes Federal support for research to educate patients about results from different approaches to treatment. Improvement is expected immediately in certain quality outcomes. For example, today nearly 20 percent of Medicare patients discharged from the hospital are readmitted within 30 days. Most of those readmissions are avoidable through improved care, education, home visits, and other interventions that improve a patient's quality of life.

Such changes will save the health care system \$7.1 billion over 10 years, as reported by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office. Savings like these in the acute care setting will direct more dollars to be spent in keeping people healthy and preventing chronic diseases like Diabetes and other Health Disease.

Another major change is the establishment of a Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation, which will research, develop, test, and expand new payment and delivery arrangements. A demonstration program for chronically ill Medicare beneficiaries will test payment incentives and health care delivery using physician and nurse practitioner-home based primary care teams. In addition, "Medical homes," a new idea, will be created to encourage providers to follow a patient's health progress,

coordinate specialists, track prescriptions, and avoid duplication of treatments or tests.

The PPAC Act has provisions that will improve health care by strengthening the quality of the patient care system, ensuring patient access to physician care, and developing new patient care models. It will focus on preventing chronic disease and improving public health. Language in the bill prevents the denial of insurance for pre-existing conditions and eliminates life-time limits on health care spending. Furthermore, developing health communities will be a priority and a 21st Century public health system will support this goal.

For seniors, the bill will shrink the donut hole in Medicare Part D by \$500 in 2010 and continue reducing it until the donut hole is eliminated. There will be a savings of thousands of dollars with a required insurance 50 percent discount for brand name drugs for those who do reach the donut hole. The bill will also make generic drugs more affordable, and provide affordable long-term health care through a voluntary program. The bill will assure access to physicians who take Medicare patients by replacing the 21 percent cut in Medicare payment to physicians scheduled to occur next year. This will ensure that doctors continue to serve Medicare patients.

My goal is to demonstrate ways in which the Health Care bill will, in fact, change the system of payment AND CARE. The news media has not fully reported on these important strategies that will significantly change the way care providers, clinics, and hospitals do business.

The Bill is over 2,000 pages long. However, an average page contains 190 words, similar to a long paragraph. Read it for yourself or contact your legislators and ask to be informed about how this legislation will affect your health care. Find out if your representative is truly representing you or a special interest group. WE must start that shared responsibility now.

Recent Calendar Raffle Winners

August 2009	September 2009	October 2009	November 2009
Donald Griffin	Betty Karecki	Ruth Sarnowski	Jerry Zepplin
Gary Mokolajczyk	Steve Obrion	Linda Tveten	Michael Murphy, Sr.
Donna Blakeslee	Connor Vincent	Carla Easterday	Leon Burzynski (2)
Steve Lipski	Ray Myers	Lynn Dieffenbach	Isabel Rossey
Jo Mieczko	Tom Doleschy	Raymond Buchholz	Ruth Sarnowski
Paulie Walker	Marlene Ott	Leon Burzynski (3)	Scott Parr
Stephanie Stein	Judith Gatlin	Jean Depotsie	Daniel Jakubowski
Todd Cormican	Conrad Nenn	Jan Thompson	David Nack
Sam Blakeslee	Patrick Veeseer	Bob Henning	Marlene Ramsey
James Reiland	Jorge Islas	Tom Krall	Tim Vlasis
Victor Nemeth	Scott Cormican	Sue & Rob Mieczko	Lauren De Back
Jerry Thompson	Nancy Wagner	Julie Ertl	Todd Cormican
Elizabeth Janczak	Pat Elizondo	Richard Maciolek	Lauren Asplen
Matt Tveten	John Blakeslee	Linda Riesen	David Sippel
Ivan Collins	Jerry Strait	Kris Hennlich	Elaine Capelli
Jeanette Thomas	Jean Haase (2)	Leslie Davis III	Forrest Ceel
Bob Vicars	Frank Mishich	Mike Chartier	Eve Thelen
Leon Burzynski	Jan Thompson	Tom Doleschy	James Reiland
Charlie Williams	Steve Nemeth	Tom Gadowski (2)	MaryLyn Stuart
Katelyn Modjeski	Richard Chyla	James Hargraves	Leslie Davis III (2)
Mary Rios	Leon Burzynski	Patrick Veeseer	Kamryn De Back
Everett Dassow	Joyce Brantmeier	Jerry Kraft	Bart Green
Joyce Rehm	Merle Brimmer	Mimi Rodriguez	Stephanie Stein
Perry Graves	Mary Rios	John Bloedel	Mary Rios
Donald Poncegrau	Walter Wolters	Anita Johnson	James Hargraves
Elaine McDermott	Jerry Thompson	Reyne Kasten	Robert Parr
James Bemowski	Becky Hungerford	Patti Cresco	LaDale Neal
Bob Hoeft	Pat Johnson	Charlie Williams	Roger Timm
Frank Mauro	Eileen Roth		
Virgil Potvin			
Maria Morales			

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

2009 a Successful Year for the WIARA

In 2009, the Wisconsin Alliance worked in coalition with numerous organizations to advocate on legislative issues related to the Wisconsin State budget, Employee Free Choice Act, health care/Medicare reform, and the affordability of prescription drugs. WIARA felt strongly about the importance of these issues for current and future retirees. Our activities included:

- Members lobbying their Wisconsin state representatives on several issues, including affordable prescription drugs and long term care services.
- Organizing several forums to educate and advocate for the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA).
- Supporting our members who met with several members of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation about our support for the EFCA.
- Organized a letter and phone campaign by WIARA members to our federal representatives to request their support in passing the EFCA.
- Making more than thirty presentations at senior centers and to affiliated organization members on why health care/Medicare reform was vital to Wisconsin retirees.
- Organizing meetings with members of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation to seek their support for significant health care/Medicare reform, including the public health plan option.
- Affiliates of WIARA made phone calls and letters to our Congressional Delegation stressing the importance of health care reform.
- Writing opinion columns, letters to the editor, and participating in press conferences to numerous Wisconsin media outlets on the state budget, the Employee Free Choice Act, and health care reform legislation.

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