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NEWSLETTER – July 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

Having just returned from the ARA Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., I am convinced that retirees and seniors have not given up on the goal of a better future for our kids and grandkids. This is a critical time in Washington as President Obama and Congress attempt to tackle a wide range of issues and challenges.

The Washington trip was special for us from Wisconsin as Senator Kohl, the Chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, scheduled a hearing on Social Security while we were there. The hearing *Social Security: Keeping the Promise in the 21st Century* focused on how to target benefits for those who need them most.

In recognition of the importance of the WIARA, I received a request to testify about the importance of Social Security benefits for our members. My testimony included four examples of individuals for whom Social Security is the lifeline between them and abject poverty. I reminded the Senators that Social Security is a family insurance policy. Two-thirds

of retirees receive more than half their income from the program. It is a steady stream of income that we cannot outlive.

For a solution to the estimated funding challenge in 2037, I also recommended a restoration of the earnings cap to the historical level of 90 percent of all earned income. Indexing the cap to allow for inflation would keep the program solvent for future generations.

Other witnesses at the hearing cited the importance of the benefits to survivors, the disabled and particular subgroups in the population. There were proposals about how funding could be increased to address retirees in the future.

For those who are interested, the entire hearing, approximately one hour, can be viewed on the internet by going to the Aging Committee web site at <http://aging.senate.gov/> Click on "Hearings" in the menu banner. That will take you to the hearing list and a access to a viewable option. If you want to "fast forward," my kids tell me my testimony begins at 23 minutes, 27 seconds.

Upon completion of the five minute testimony segments, Senator Kohl opened the floor to any additional comments. This gave me an opportunity to get information into the record about banks that are freezing retiree bank accounts for creditors in spite of the federal laws that specifically prohibit the seizing of Social Security by creditors.

Senator Mel Martinez, the ranking minority member on the Committee, asked the panel about our thoughts on extending the retirement age. This allowed me to quickly remind all present that, while there are many types of employment that add to our physical impairments as we age. Construction workers and factory workers in heavy industry immediately come to mind. However, secretaries and office workers who suffer repetitive motion injuries would also not look forward to having years added to their working lives.

It was a privilege for me to represent the ARA, WIARA, retirees, and seniors on this important issue. It also illustrated that our efforts at grass roots activism are working in Wisconsin.

HEALTH CARE REFORM LISTEN TO THE DISCUSSION: TAKE PART IN THE DEBATE

Vivien De Back

Because of our age, we seniors have been “around the block” on Health Care Reform. As a result, this discussion will not be about the problems of health care. We are already aware of those. Instead, the focus will be to clarify the terms used and provide information about the specifics of proposals for the overhaul of the American Health Care System.

False Terminology

Socialized Medicine is a false term used to confuse the public. No Republicans or Democrats will ever propose Socialized Medicine as a model for American Health Care. Socialized Medicine is a method of health care delivery in which the government owns, operates, and pays for health care for its citizens. Doctors and nurses work for the government. Hospitals are owned by the government.

When you hear someone use this term, you immediately know it is used to frighten and confuse the electorate. Socialized Medicine is not an option now or in the future in this country. During President Obama’s presentation to the American Medical Association, he was clear about what he proposes: “We’ll fix what is broken and leave in place what works in our Health Care System.”

Specific Terminology

There are additional terms connected to the ongoing discussions on health care reform. They describe various components of a workable, efficient health care system. A reformed health care system may include all or some of the elements listed.

Single Payer is a term that defines a health insurance system and has become part of the debate. In a Single Payer system one entity, such as the government,

pays for health care for citizens. However, it does not provide the care, own the health care facilities, or hire the providers.

In a Single Payer system the government does provide guidelines, recommendations, and requirements. Health care is publicly funded but privately delivered. **Medicare** is a single payer system. According to reports, and statements from President Obama, a Single Payer system is not likely to be part of the result from America’s Health Care Reform.

Disease Prevention

includes screening for cancer, diabetes, health disease and other chronic conditions. It includes recommending certain steps to take, such as vaccination for flu and childhood illnesses. Disease prevention is critical for a comprehensive health care system, as it reduces the incidences of costly diseases. Most of these treatments are presently available to those with health insurance.

Health Promotion and Health Maintenance are services provided by experts to help us become healthier (promotion) or remain at the level of health we have attained (maintenance), even if we suffer from chronic or acute disease. Such services are provided by doctors, nurses, physical therapists, alternative medicine providers, and holistic health providers.

Health promotion and maintenance are components somewhat lacking in our present system. Watch for references to promotion and maintenance in any plans presented for the redesign of our health care system.

Where There is Consensus

During the Health Care debate, the following ideas are being addressed. As an individual, consider each and decide which parts of the health care system are critical to YOUR health care plan.

▶ No one will be refused treatment or enrollment because of pre-existing condition.

▶ Everyone will be covered with a health care plan.

▶ If you like your present plan and doctor, you keep them.

▶ Everyone who can afford it will pay something for health care, but less than they now pay.

▶ Those who cannot pay will be included in a health care plan.

▶ Money will be saved by increasing technology usage, reducing waste, improving efficiencies, and using Primary Care as a first provider to reduce the use of high cost emergency care for routine problems.

▶ There will be a focus on Health Promotion, Health Maintenance, and Disease Prevention.

▶ Health care decisions will be made by individuals in consultation with their health care provider.

After reviewing this list, think about your personal priorities for reforming the health care system and add them to the list. Use them when you discuss the future of health care in our country. Contact your legislators and let them know what you believe **MUST** be included in the revised system.

Write to your local paper and enter the discussion about how the system can be improved. Talk about **what is NEEDED** to modernize and reform the system. Do not let the naysayers and those with personal agendas detract you from this important work.

QUESTIONS? Let us know what you think. Write or call me at lvdeback@yahoo.com or 414-427-0437.

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May 29, 2009

Limited Time Opportunity

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Cascino Vaughan Law Offices have represented workers exposed to asbestos since 1986. We have represented over 1,200 asbestos victims in Wisconsin.

If you or a loved one worked around asbestos and has been diagnosed with mesothelioma, a lung cancer or lung disease, you may qualify for financial compensation. U.S. Bankruptcy judges have set aside over \$30 billion dollars to pay to present and future asbestos claimants. In order to qualify **claimants must have a diagnosis of mesothelioma, lung cancer or lung disease.** The asbestos-related cancer must have been *diagnosed after January 1, 1997* in order to meet the current Bankruptcy Statutes of Limitations. **Time is limited to take advantage of this opportunity.** The opportunity to obtain monies from many of these bankrupt defendants will be coming to a close within the next year. **Please respond to this letter by calling us at (800) 717-2856 as soon as possible but no later than September, 2009.**

If you are over 55 years old and would like to be evaluated by x-ray for lung disease, or if you or a loved one or another brother or sisters believe you have asbestos exposure injuries, please **call us at (800) 717-2856.** You can also **visit dairylandasbestos.com and fill out the "Do you qualify for asbestos compensation?" form or send back the attached form.** We will then send you paperwork to begin the intake process. If we are able to pursue your case, we will represent you on a standard one-third contingent fee basis, which means we will receive a fee **only** if we recover funds for you.

There is no out of pocket cost to you for these services. Cascino Vaughan Law Offices builds its business through union referrals and word of mouth. When you refer us to your friends, family members, and co-workers, it is the ultimate compliment and our greatest reward.

We genuinely appreciate your trust and confidence in us.

Respectfully,



Allen Vaughan, Esq.

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

March 2009	April 2009	May 2009	June 2009
Tom Gadowski	Eileen Roth	Bev Hund	Jerold Kreeland
Don Nielsen	Suzi Lardon	Mike Paul	Joyce Brantmeier
Joyce Reiland	Robert Smith	Gerald Martin	Fred Royal
Debbie Butts	Sam Slota	Mark Westphal	Pat Johnson
Tim Hanson	Joyce Hintz	Joe Koehler	Renee Smith
Mark Westphal	Paulte Walker	Gerald Tevz	Stanley Olsen
Barbara Polasek	Garnet Stout	Jerold Kreeland	Eileen Roth
Chris Sherman	Bill Fendel	Leon Burzynski	Dominic Cambio
Taylor De Back	Edward Doemland	Janis Nowak	Ricardo Gutierrez
Jeannie Patrick	Robert Bennett	Nancy Volk	Robert Smith
Mike Bruening	Taylor De Back	Mary Jo Brink	Reynolds Honold
Richard Maciolek	Daniel Jakubowski	James Bemowski	Jean Haase
Dave Wenzel	Scott Parr	Joyce Hintz	Joyce Reiland
Elaine McDermott	Michael Ryan	Ronald Krutzner	Vivien De Back
Matthew Tveten	Tony Tallarita	Pat Elizondo	Larry Moldenhauer
Mike Pietrzykowski	Bob Henning	Dian Palmer	Dian Palmer
Jean Haase	Joe Wineke	Russell Krings	Christoph Reinke
Rob Wolfe	Mary Serrano	Beth Karecki	Mary Kocija
Helen Gadowski	Mike Hornby	Mike Pietrzykowski	Debbie Butts
Sharon Bradley	Eileen Roth	Gary Miller	Laura Tiedeman
Lisa Van Koningsveld	David Konrad	Mary Schenkenberg	Julie Ryan
John Maydak	Jim Reiland	David Dove	Kati Squier
Vernon Marson	James Leppi	Tom Specranza	Margaret LaBorde
John Bloedel	Lev De Back	Betsy George	Lester Scholz
Scott Hanson	Dick & Mary Presser	Gary Evenson	Victor Brott
Joylyn Rehm	Lisa Van Koningsveld	Josephine Mieczko	Rob Mieczko
Carla Easterday	Craig Hetzel	Fred Mrozinski	Joyce Reiland
Meg Andrietsch	Joe Gruber	Cathie Tikkanen	Jerry LaPoint
Robert Stone	Cindy Clark	Ton Gadowski	Ken Klaczynski
Ashley Martin	Matthew Szemborski	Wiley Vivians	Meg Andrietsch
Nancy Wagner		Lori Gonzalez	

WIARA Members Contact Congress

Since February, members of the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans and its affiliates have been meeting with members of the Wisconsin Congressional delegation.

The purpose of the meetings was to discuss Medicare reform and have it included in the overall health care debate in Washington D.C. We shared the following recommendations on Medicare reform with our federal representatives:

- Change the law that created the Medicare Part D plan to allow Medicare to negotiate volume discounts with drug companies for its over 45 million Medicare beneficiaries.
- Close the 'donut hole' to reduce the amount of out of pocket medication costs paid by retirees.
- End the taxpayer subsidies to the private insurance companies that operate Medicare Advantage plans. Currently, we pay these companies about 20% more than if Medicare served them directly.
- Allow retirees ages of 55 to 64 to buy into Medicare. At the present time, there are over five million retirees who have no health insurance. In 1988, about 65% of retirees had health insurance from their employer. In 2006, it was about 35%.

In addition to meetings with Wisconsin Congressional leaders, the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans made a number of presentations to its affiliates as well as retirees at senior centers. Wisconsin Alliance Board members generated a number of letters to the editors on these important Medicare Reform issues. We are urging Congress to take these issues up during the debate on health care reform during this year.

ARA Legislative Conference

Due to the urgency surrounding the major issues, the ARA moved the date for the Legislative Conference three months forward to June. Nearly 550 retirees traveled to the Capitol to lobby their Senators and Representatives on retiree issues.

Armed with information gained during workshops and training sessions, the lively group of elderly activists became skilled and knowledgeable around the primary issues relating to healthcare. The retirees said they were concerned about the future of their children and grandchildren.

Spurred on by Kathleen Sebelius, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and key progressive and political leaders, conference attendees were energized when they visited over 200 Congressional offices. Their energy and enthusiasm was evident throughout the halls and offices of the Congressional buildings as they outlined the stake retirees have in the health care debate.

They advocated for:

- Improving Medicare Part D
- Opposing the taxing of health benefits
- Ending Medicare Advantage subsidies
- Establishing a public plan option for health insurance

At the conclusion of the four-day event Barbara Easterling, ARA President, urged members to continue their grass roots efforts when returning home.

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

Welcome, Judy Burnick

Judy Burnick has been hired to work in the office of the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans. She will be working Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Judy has many years of work experience as a labor leader. Over the last 28 years, Judy has been the business manager for OPEIU Local 35 and International Staff Representative for OPEIU. You can reach her at our office, 414-771-9511.

Congressional Voting Records

To mark Older Americans Month, the national Alliance for Retired Americans released a report detailing the voting record of every U.S. Senator and Representative on key issues affecting current and future retirees. The Alliance voting record examined ten key Senate and ten key House votes in 2008.

The report listed the roll call votes on issues such as stopping Social Security privatization and fully funding the low-income energy assistance program. Several votes addressed Medicare, including overriding then-President Bush's veto of a Medicare bill that would bring improvements to the program by adjusting the asset tests so more low income beneficiaries would be eligible to receive help. It also added preventive health measures and mental health benefits.

According to the Alliance, the Wisconsin Congressional members who received 100% perfect scores on the ten key House votes included Tammy Baldwin (2nd), Ron Kind (3rd), Gwen Moore (4th), David Obey (7th), and Steve Kagen (8th). In the Senate, Senator Herb Kohl received a 100% score and Senator Russ Feingold received a 90% score.

The full report on 2008 voting records on key retiree issues and programs can be found at www.retiredamericans.org.



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