



6333 W. Bluemound Road
Milwaukee, WI 53213
414-771-9511
www.wisconsinara.org
NEWSLETTER – May 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 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, older Americans, and their families. 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

Our third biennial convention in March was an exciting event. Those in attendance heard from several speakers who outlined the work ahead of us. Billy Feitlinger's article inside this issue gives a complete overview of the many convention activities.

I want to sincerely thank the delegates who elected me to continue as president for the next two years. I consider it a privilege and honor to serve the WIARA in our important work.

I also want to welcome the new members of the Board of Directors. Our Board represents a large cross-section of labor and community organizations that care deeply about not only retirees and seniors, but also their children and grandchildren who hope to follow us into their own retirement.

This brings me to the main topic I want to address in this column — The Employee Free Choice Act (H.R. 1409 & S. 560). Convention delegates rated this effort one of the three most important present-day issues.

There are not many people alive today who remember what life for retirees was like before labor unions grew and became an integral part of working America. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 changed the lives of working families.

- Companies Opposing the Employee Free Choice Act**
- AIG
 - Bank of America
 - Burger King
 - Citigroup
 - Costco
 - Home Depot
 - McDonald's
 - Nation Indian Gaming
 - Starbucks
 - U. S. Bank
 - Wal-Mart
 - Wells Fargo
 - Whole Foods

We do not recall the days when there were no health insurance benefits, pension plans, or safety regulations. We have selective amnesia when it comes to remembering the hardships and cruelty suffered by the miners in West Virginia, the steelworkers in Pittsburgh, or the auto workers in

Detroit as they fought to establish unions at their workplace.

We recall *Norm Rae* as a movie in which Sally Field won an Oscar rather than the true story of Crystal Lee Sutton. The difficulties and dangers of union organizing got lost in Hollywood hype.

There are several national companies presently financing TV and newspaper ads opposing passage of the Employee Free Choice Act. It is amazing that many are the same companies that ran to Washington for taxpayer bailouts as they ran their companies into the ground. See the list in the box to the left. Please consider their position as you patronize local businesses.

The WIARA urges members to contact their Senators and representatives and ask them to support passage of H.R. 1409 & S. 560. We owe it to our children and grandchildren.

If it were not for unions, retirees would not have pension benefits or health care coverage. **Remember: Tomorrow's retirees will not have benefits if today's workers cannot bargain.**

CALL OR WRITE NOW!

Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans meets with Senator Kohl

By Vivien De Back

On Wednesday, April 8, 2009, ten representatives from the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans meet with Senator Herb Kohl in his Milwaukee office. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss health care reform. Specifically the group addressed the overpayment to Medicare Advantage Plans, concerns regarding privatization of Medicare and Social Security, removing the donut hole in Medicare Part D, and government negotiation for lower drug costs.

Senator Kohl and his Legislative assistant, Debra Whitman, were very receptive to the WIARA issues and took many notes. Senator Kohl is extremely easy to deal with and he shared a lot of information with the group, including his Priorities for Health Care.

Although the Senator agreed with the points made during the discussion, he believes the present state of the economy may be a limiting factor in doing anything about health care this year. Debra Whitman indicated many letters were coming in that oppose revamping the Health Care System. She thought this was being promoted by falsehoods from talk radio and other statements made about President Obama's programs and plans. The group agreed that seniors need education about health care reform and their questions regarding such reform need to be answered.

Meetings of this kind with legislators and their staff are helpful to the WIARA, its members, and elected officials. In speaking on behalf of the 87,000 retirees who are our members, the WIARA representatives were able to

articulate the concerns of seniors. Legislators, in turn, have an opportunity to explain their stands on issues.

The meeting with Senator Kohl gave the WIARA representatives an understanding of the growing concern that many seniors oppose the changes needed to assure every citizen access to quality health care. The WIARA group agreed it was important that accurate and factual information be distributed to our members and it should be done through meetings, Newsletters, and personal contact.

To that end, this Newsletter will begin answering your questions about the issues of health care reform. We will bring you information you can verify to be accurate. We will keep you updated on legislation related to the changes proposed. You may send questions to lvdeback@yahoo.com or call 414-427-0437 and leave your question on the answering machine. Responses will be given in future Newsletters.

As you think about reform, please consider the WIARA position that Congressional debate on health care should include Medicare reform, specifically Medicare Part D. We propose the donut hole be closed because millions of Americans are paying exorbitant amounts for prescription drugs. Their Medicare Part D benefit stops at \$2,700.00 and the non-payment donut hole lasts until \$6,153.75. During this period, they have to pay the full price of their prescriptions, and YET they must continue to pay their monthly Part D premium. For some, the donut hole is reached as early as March.

It makes sense for Congress to eliminate the donut hole and require Medicare to negotiate for lower price drugs. Today, Medicare is FORBIDDEN

by law to negotiate for lower drug costs.

We believe these changes are fair. What do you think? What questions do you have about Medicare, Social Security, or Medicare Part D? Write or call with your questions. Let us all become well educated on the changes being proposed in this new Congress.

Above all, get the facts...we can help.

Wisconsin Alliance Helps Unemployed with Town Meeting

The Stoughton Chapter of the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans organized a town meeting on Friday, April 17th to help unemployed workers and their families. Presentations were given by nineteen aid organizations on several related topics, including how to get health care, job search resources, and budgeting during tough times.

The representatives of the aid agencies also stayed to answer questions. Buzz Davis of the Wisconsin Alliance said, "Unemployment is a double whammy. We retirees have kids and grandkids unemployed or under employed. Unemployment and all the problems that come with it, can be deadly to individuals, marriages and families. So we organized our communities to help."

The Stoughton Chapter recognizes the pressures of the economic downturn on family life. Their caring attitude symbolizes the concern the WIARA has for the unemployed throughout Wisconsin.

THE BEST MEDICINE USUALLY COSTS LESS

By Tom Frazier, CWAG Executive Director

Recently the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* published a series of articles about the influence of drug companies on the prescribing practices of UW doctors. One article exposed the amount of money that some doctors receive from drug companies, and another article revealed that some drug companies actually fund continuing medical education classes for UW physicians. For example, Pfizer paid \$12.3 million for an on-line UW course to instruct doctors on how to get patients to quit smoking.

As you might expect, the course promotes Pfizer's drug, Chantix, as the most effective treatment, but neglects to talk about serious side effects, including suicide. I applaud the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* for excellent investigative reporting, but we must keep in mind that UW doctors are only the "tip of the iceberg" in terms of the ubiquitous influence of drug companies.

For example, a recent article in *Governing* magazine states "The pharmaceutical industry spends about \$23 billion a year marketing its products to America's doctors." About \$15 billion are drug samples and \$7 billion is spent on "direct to physician" marketing which includes a sales force of 90,000 drug reps called "detailers."

The good news is that more people are starting to

pay attention to such conflicts of interest and Wisconsin legislators are proposing legislation to counter the influence of spending by big drug companies. Senator Herb Kohl has recently introduced legislation at the federal level called "The Physician Payments Sunshine Act" which would require public disclosure of gifts and payments to physicians. CWAG strongly supports this legislation, and we would encourage anyone who is concerned about this issue to express their support to Senator Kohl. He can be contacted by e-mail — senator_kohl@kohl.senate.gov or toll free in Wisconsin at 1.800.247.5645.

At the state level, Representative Chuck Benedict, a physician, is having legislation drafted to require the Department of Health Services "to develop a program to educate persons who have authority to prescribe or dispense drugs, devices or biological products for people regarding comparative efficacy, safety and cost-effectiveness" of those drugs and products. This is known as "academic detailing" and mirrors the practice of detailing by drug companies, but without a sales incentive and using the best research and evidence regarding efficacy and cost effectiveness.

In Pennsylvania, academic detailing has

proven to actually save the state money by providing independent, accurate information to doctors about the most effective drugs for consumers to treat specific diseases or illnesses. It turns out that most of the time, the most effective drug is not the most expensive drug. Senator Kohl has also introduced federal legislation that would provide some funding to states to help develop academic detailing programs.

The influence of drug company money and marketing is one of the big reasons the price of drugs keep going up and up. But the best reason to take action to counter this influence is to obtain the best health care outcomes for patients.

Minimum Markup Law Increases Drug Costs

As if Rx drugs don't cost enough already, Wisconsin's "minimum markup law" is adding to the price. Retail stores, such as Target, that offer \$4 generic prescription drug pricing plans, indicate that Wisconsin's minimum mark-up law is impacting the ability to make such plans fully available to consumers. CWAG favors the repeal of the minimum mark-up law to help lower the cost of generic drugs, gasoline, and other products. If you agree, call your state senator and state representative.

No paperwork to handle.

No fear of losing your health insurance coverage.

That's the convenience and security WPS provides to its members through its Medicare supplement plans. Many people have signed up for plans that sounded too good to be true, such as no monthly cost and benefits that seemed very attractive. Unfortunately all too many found out that these plans were not what they bargained for. Some had their plans cancelled against their wishes, others had their benefits reduced. With WPS, the Medicare supplement plans are guaranteed - you can keep them for as long as you keep paying the premiums - with benefits that are not subject to reductions every January.

With WPS you also get: ④ **Freedom to choose** any doctor or hospital that accepts Medicare.

④ **Flexibility to design your plan** so you have **no deductibles and no co-pays** on Medicare approved charges.

④ **Extra benefits** not found in traditional Medicare, such as routine physicals and routine eye and hearing exams.

④ **The EyeMed vision care program** at no additional cost.*

④ **Security** in knowing that WPS is financially strong, Wisconsin based, and not-for-profit.

④ **The knowledge that WPS offers the #1 selling Medicare supplement plan in the state** - more Wisconsin residents chose WPS for their supplement coverage each of the last four years than any other supplement plan.**

Please call us to learn more or to receive a free, no obligation information packet at:

**1-800-236-1448 8a.m. to 5 p.m.,
Monday-Friday**

If you're not eligible for Medicare yet, ask us about the many options we have to offer early retirees!

* * *

WPS is also available to present its 30-45 minute Medicare Options Seminar at local chapter meetings. The seminar includes the following topics:

- The coverage provided by Medicare
- The "rest of the story" behind Medicare Advantage plans
- How a Medicare supplement plan works to help fill the gap in Medicare coverage

This is an advertisement for insurance. Neither WPS Health Insurance nor its agents are connected with the federal Medicare program.

*Vision discount plan is not part of the insurance policy and is offered at no additional charge. **Based on sales data submitted by insurers to the Wisconsin Office of the Commissioner of Insurance, WPS sold the highest number of new Medicare Supplement policies each year from 2004 to 2007.

23849-021-0903

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.

2009 WIARA BIENNIAL CONVENTION

Billy Feitlinger

On March 23rd,

Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans held its 3rd Convention at the Concourse Hotel in Madison. Over 140 delegates from across the state participated in the election of officers, by-law changes, and determining a number of state and federal legislative priorities. They were welcomed by Ed Coyle, the Executive Director of the national ARA, and Patricia Finder-Stone, from the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups.

Elected to third terms were Leon Burzynski, President; Dode Lowe, Treasurer; and George McKinney, Secretary. Elected to a first term were Bonnie Greasby, Executive Vice-President and Joanne Bruch, First Vice-President.

During the morning session, Mike Pyne, Steel Worker's Union, gave an illuminating presentation on the state of the economy and the challenges for the future.

Guest Speakers during lunch were Lieutenant Governor Barbara Lawton, and Majority Leader of the Wisconsin State Assembly, Mike Sheridan. They spoke

about health care reform, the Governor's budget, and retiree issues and programs that will be discussed during the present legislative session.

During the afternoon sessions, David Newby, President, Wisconsin AFL-CIO, spoke about the Employee Free Choice Act; Robert Kraig, Citizen Action of Wisconsin, presented an overview of health care reform at the state and federal level; and Ed Coyle, Alliance for Retired Americans, addressed Medicare reform and including it the federal debate about health care reform.

President Burzynski reminded attendees that, while the economy is a major cause of discomfort, there are some good signs appearing. He asked members to start acting rather than reacting.

He cited four issues for retirees and seniors to consider: working for passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, protecting Social Security, addressing the sad state of the Medicare/Medicaid program, and seeking universal, national, healthcare coverage for all Americans.

We want to thank the speakers and, in particular, the over 140 delegates who helped the WIARA plan its course of action for the next two years.

What You Need to Know About the \$250 Stimulus Payment

President Obama recently signed into law an economic stimulus plan that includes a one-time \$250 payment for many seniors. Special thanks to Alliance members who contacted their elected officials in support of this bill.

Who is Eligible?

Individuals who currently receive Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, Railroad Retirement or Veterans' benefits.

When Will I Get It?

Payments will be mailed out in late May. Social Security asks that you wait until June 4 to contact them if you did not receive it.

How Do I Get It?

You do not have to do anything. If you currently receive benefits through the mail, look for it that way. If you have direct deposit, it will come that way.

Beware of Scams!

Watch out for anyone saying you need to provide your Social Security number or other personal information in order to get your payment.

Questions?

Contact the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213 or www.socialsecurity.gov

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

WISARA MEMBERS LOBBY MEMBERS OF THE WISCONSIN CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

During President's Week, February 16th - 20th, the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans organized a number of meetings with our Congressional representatives including Congressman Ron Kind, Congressman Steve Kagen, Congressman Paul Ryan, and staff from Senator Russ Feingold's office. At a later date, WIARA members also met with Senator Herb Kohl.

The purpose of these meetings was to discuss our support for the Employee Free Choice Act, and seeking Medicare reform as a part of the federal debate on health care for all. WIARA asked

these members to support having Medicare cover early retirees (55-64 years old), allowing Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices for its beneficiaries, and the opposition to Medicare Advantage subsidies.

Presently, under the Medicare Part D law, the federal government cannot negotiate the lowest possible prices for its over 44 million beneficiaries. The WIARA is opposed to Medicare Advantage because we do not support privatizing Medicare and its subsidizing private insurance companies to the tune of \$150 billion

over the next ten years. It currently costs taxpayers 18 to 23 percent more for Medicare Advantage than for traditional Medicare services.

These are major issues that impact all retirees and seniors. It is important that our representatives hear from us about our position on them.

Over the coming months, we plan to meet with other members of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation. Please let us know by calling our office at 414-771-9511 if you are interested in joining us when we meet with your legislators.

May 2009 Newsletter



**6333 West Bluemound Road
Milwaukee, WI 54213**