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**NEWSLETTER – November 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 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

At the present, health care reform is the number one priority in Congress for the first time in years. While you have grown weary of the topic, now is not the time to sit on our hands.

Insurance companies are spending millions to keep reform from happening. The numbers of myths and falsehoods being spread by insurers are aimed at scaring seniors and retirees. They think we, as a major voting block, will be the voice that derails reform for them. We cannot let that happen.

We finally have an opportunity to close the "donut hole" in the Medicare Part D plan, lower the cost of prescription drugs, and help early retirees afford health care coverage.

More importantly, we should also be thinking about our children and grandchildren. The economic disaster is having a terrible impact on them. Not only are they concerned about their

jobs today, they also are looking at a substandard quality of life during retirement.

This is our opportunity to end insurance company abuses. The use of "pre-existing condition clauses" has led insurers to refuse payment for legitimate claims. It also created situations where people who paid their premiums and thought they were insured had their coverage terminated when they became ill.

## Speak Out!

**Call Congress today!  
1-877-323-5246**

**Tell Them Health Care Reform must:**

- **Include a public option**
- **NOT tax our health plans**
- **Guarantee that employers pay their fair share**

Presently, doctors are limited in how they treat you by insurance company bureaucrats who, with no medical training, decide what medicine you take and what treatment you receive. This is not the patient treatment they learned in medical school.

Many of us have personal stories about a health care system that costs too much, covers too little, and excludes too many.

The formation of a public option to compete with private insurance plans will hold down costs. A great example of a public plan is Wisconsin SeniorCare, as it cost far less than the Medicare Part D on a per person basis.

It is critical that the decent health insurance benefits negotiated by union workers not be taxed. Workers gave up wage increases for health insurance program should not be penalized with a tax.

Employers must be held accountable to pay their fair share. If they all pay, the field is level and everyone benefits.

It is time for Congress to stand up for retirees and working families. It is also time for Congress to stand up to insurance companies.

Call Senators Kohl and Feingold and your Congressional representative. Tell them what health care reform means to you. It is a toll-free call.

# Cleaning Up Our Disgraceful Supreme Court and Legislative Elections

Vivien De Back

The current campaign finance system is completely outdated, ineffective, full of loop-holes, and not worth the paper the law is printed on. It has been thirty years since Wisconsin last addressed its public financing system in any meaningful way and significant reform is long overdue.

Do the public think Campaign Finance reform is needed? It depends upon the question you ask. Try it: Ask anyone, "What do you think of our campaign finance laws?" Their eyes will glaze over and they will say, "I don't know." But if you ask "Do you think our elections are free from corruption from excessive money in the system and inappropriate and secret money sources of funding?" The answer is a resounding YES from the large crowds attending "Clean Election" hearings around the state and information sessions about campaign financing reform.

We are coming to the end of the 2009 Wisconsin Legislative Session. It ends November 5<sup>th</sup>. This session will be the last opportunity this year for the Wisconsin Assembly and State Senate to vote on two major campaign finance reform measures, which are waiting to be scheduled and ought to be passed and signed into law soon.

A flurry of meetings and rallies are being held to support the two bills that could dramatically alter the election process in our state. Speakers at the meetings in September and October were passionate, articulate, and well-informed

about both the problems Wisconsin's broken campaign finance system has caused and about what can and should be done to reform it.

Pending is the so-called "Impartial Justice" legislation: [Assembly Bill 65](#) and [Senate Bill 40](#) -- identical measures that would provide full public financing for qualifying candidates for the Wisconsin Supreme Court who voluntarily agree to abide by a spending limit of \$400,000. These measures have already cleared the Assembly and State Senate Committees with jurisdiction over campaign finance reform. I believe no one in this state who paid attention to the last Supreme Court races can intelligently argue that the system is not broken.

The other measure pending is [Senate Bill 43](#), a bipartisan proposal requiring disclosure of the donors and regulation of the money utilized by outside special interest groups that run widely-disseminated campaign communications masquerading as issue advocacy during the period of 60 days or less prior to an election. An identical Assembly version of the legislation is [Assembly Bill 63](#). Common Cause in Wisconsin (CC/WI), the first state reform organization to recognize the critical importance of this reform, proposed a version of this measure back in 1997 -- and has been leading the effort to get it enacted into law ever since. Please contact your representatives in the State Senate and Assembly and urge passage of

Campaign Finance reform bills.

Because the legislative session ends on November 5<sup>th</sup>, you may receive this information after the bills are passed: WE HOPE. But there is still a way for you to take part in this dramatic change in our election laws and bring back Wisconsin's clean image. Call or write to Governor Doyle and tell him you want him to sign the Campaign Finance reform bill(s). Tell him we are tired of elections "for sale" in Wisconsin and want integrity back in the system. If the bills are not passed, call your legislators and tell them you want campaign finance reform placed high on their agenda for 2010.

**The people of Wisconsin deserve clean, fair government.**

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## Editor's Note:

Vivien De Back served as the moderator of a public forum at the Waukesha County Technical College on October 26, 2009. The panel addressed the issue of State Supreme Court election reform and why it is needed.

Panel members included two Justices presently serving on the Wisconsin Supreme Court, Ann Walsh Bradley and N. Patrick Crooks. They were joined by Jay Heck, Exec. Dir. of Common Cause in Wisconsin, and former Lt. Gov. Margaret Farrow.

The discussion centered on the need for transparency and disclosure. All four panelists agreed that reform was urgently needed.

## RETIREE CORNER

Written by Bernie Faust  
for Labor Day 2009  
UAW Local 291 Retiree chair and  
Board member of the WIARA

*The working and the employing  
class having in common.*

*There can be no peace as long as  
hunger is found among millions of  
working people, and the few who  
make up the employing class have  
all the good things of life.*

*Between these two classes, a  
struggle must go on until the  
workers of the world unite as a  
class, take possession of the means  
of production, abolish the wage  
system, and live in harmony with the  
earth.*

Thus read the first two paragraphs  
of the Preamble of the Industrial  
workers of the world.

Labor has always been  
unfairly accused as being too  
powerful. It is my opinion nothing  
could be further from the truth.

Those that oppose unions  
fail to realize the achievements of  
labor. Allow me to share some  
observations.

Unions have ever been in  
the forefront of social change and  
improvement, working hard to  
pass legislation to benefit ALL  
workers, not just union members.  
Let's look at a few:

- The forty hour work week
- Worker Compensation law

- Unemployment Compensation
  - Pensions
  - Vacations
  - And above all Social Security
- Unions today are working hard for such social issues as health care reform, honest elections, and guaranteed pension benefits. Society as we know it today would not exist without the hard and dedicated work of the labor leaders of yesterday and today. So, in the future, when you have the urge to run down a union, pause long enough to remember what organized labor has done for you!

## WIARA FIGHTING FOR HEALTH CARE REFORM NOW

Since President's Week in February, the WIARA has been working with many organizations, our affiliates, the Wisconsin AFL-CIO, and unions to fight for health care reform legislation. WIARA believes any health care reform legislation must include

A strong public health insurance plan option to provide uninsured and underinsured American citizens an option rather than private insurance companies.

- Allowing early retirees, age 55 to 64, to be able to buy into Medicare.
- Protect and strengthen Medicare benefits and services.
- Close or eliminate the Part D donut hole.
- Reduce or eliminate the federal government subsidy to private insurance companies for Medicare Advantage.
- Strategies to reduce the double and tripling the rate of inflation for medical costs
- No taxing of health care insurance benefits.
- Requiring employers to provide health insurance coverage for all employees.

Please contact your Congressman, Senator Russ Feingold and Senator Herb Kohl and inform them of your support for strong health care reform now. While the WIARA has been very active in the fight for healthcare reform, your voice on this critical issue is important.

We will report the results of the most important piece of domestic federal legislation in our January 2010 WIARA newsletters.

### 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

## 14<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL WIARA SENIOR POWER LUNCHEON A HIGH SUCCESS

On Monday, October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans held its 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Senior Power Luncheon at the Wyndham Hotel and Conference Center. The Luncheon is the one major fundraiser held each year by the WIARA. It is also a time to recognize Wisconsin citizens who have worked to improve the lives of retirees and working families throughout the state. The 230 people present set an attendance record for the event.

The 2009 honorees were Sheila Cochran, Lev De Back, Governor Jim Doyle, State Senator John Lehman, and Tony Vanderbloemen. A special award in the memory of Dr. Linda Farley paid tribute to her lifetime of service to the poor, disenfranchised, and uninsured.

Representative Tom Nelson, Majority Leader of the Wisconsin Assembly, and David Newby, President of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO, were guest speakers. A number of Luncheon

participants remarked about the inspirational comments made by our honorees and guest speakers.

The Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans would like to thank all the unions, community organizations, governmental agencies, and businesses who were instrumental in the most successful Senior Power Luncheon. Special recognition should go to our sponsors: OPEIU, Cascino Vaughan Law Offices, Johnson Law Offices, and the Forest County Potawatomi Community Foundation. Thank you to everyone who made the 2009 Senior Power Luncheon such a huge success!

*We should all be thankful  
for those people who rekindle  
the inner spirit.  
Albert Einstein*

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