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**NEWSLETTER – January 2011**

*Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.*  
*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

About the Alliance: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

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## Message from the President

Leon Burzynski

Like many WIARA members and supporters, I cannot begin to describe the sadness I felt in November as I reflected on the election results. Most notably, our long-time friend and supporter, Russ Feingold, lost his bid to continue serving Wisconsin in the U.S. Senate.

The depressing election results were further amplified by the news coming out of the Fiscal Reform Commission. There were proposals to significantly impact Social Security and Medicare in ways most retirees would not consider positive.

The financial conditions in the State of Wisconsin also brought concerns. Based on history and statements presently being made, the incoming governor and Republican controlled legislators will have cutting programs as their primary goal. At the top of the list will be programs aimed at those most needy in our state, including many seniors.

After this litany of depressing news, you might

wonder what would be the next step. The answer is simple. **GET ACTIVE!** We cannot and should not just sit back and let things take their course. Vivien De Back's article on pages two and three provides several great suggestions on activities for involvement.

Those taking control of Congress have made it clear that the programs most important to seniors and retirees are ripe for the picking. The reports from the Deficit Commission, followed by tax breaks for millionaires, were only the beginning.

For those who think I am exaggerating, I suggest a review of what has occurred during the past two years. We had the Senate Republican Congressional leader proclaiming that everything must be done to make President Obama a one-term president, regardless of the needs of the country. It has only been the past few weeks, during the "lame-duck session," that a few of the more responsible Republican Senators came to their senses and began to represent their constituents, rather than the party.

Efforts are already under way to cut Social Security and Medicare benefits. Social Security would be cut by changing the cost-of-living formula. Paul Ryan proposes changing Medicare to a voucher program and Medicaid to a block-grant payment. A shift to voucher and block-grant payments means there will only be losers.

With the rising health care costs, vouchers will not begin to cover the cost of health care for seniors. The results of block-grants can be readily seen by the recent Arizona example, where dozens of patients awaiting transplants were told Medicaid would no longer cover the cost.

I urge all WIARA members to consider an increase in your awareness of what is being proposed, followed by becoming an activist of the first order. Formulate your opinion based on research from neutral organizations like those listed on page three. Visit your legislators at their home offices and express your opinions. Participation in the political process is not just a right; it is a responsibility!

# FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

## What to Look For and What to Do

Vivien De Back

The election is over, Christmas trappings are being put away and a new group of law makers are ready to govern our country and our state. This is not a time to forsake watch-dogging our government. Much of what has been accomplished in the past few years is about to be unraveled. It will affect you, your retirement, your families, jobs, health care and clean government.

We can take heart in the fact that the National Commission on Fiscal Reform rejected their co-chairs' proposal to drastically cut Social Security benefits and increase the retirement age. In a recent WIARA Press release President Leon Burzynski stated: "We should never try to balance the budget on the backs of current and future retirees, particularly when Social Security has not added one cent to the deficit." The Commission rejected draconian cuts because of swift action by American citizens insisting the needed economic correction must be done through honest debate, measured and fair decisions on taxes, fiscal restraint, and promoting a balance of power and wealth among the rich, middle class, and poor.

The political environment we are entering demands that each of us pay attention to changes, proposals and laws that could negatively impact the lives and livelihood of Wisconsin families. Such vigilance requires knowledge of what we should watch for and how to respond.

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Listen for attempts to attach the fiscal problems in our country and state to "retirees and retirement payments."

- Watch for rhetoric linking continued tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans to an improvement in the economy. This trickle - down theory has been tried and failed.
- Be vigilant on Social Security and Medicare Benefits that are in jeopardy for retirees today and in the future.
- Good jobs and livable neighborhoods strengthen our country. Watch for funding losses related to community support that will undermine economic recovery
- America's health care plan will continue to be implemented over time. This plan will support healthy habits that reduce our reliance on costly health care, especially for chronic illness. There will be many attempts to dismantle this new law.
- Wisconsin faces billions of dollars in deficit in the coming years. This means reduced investment in public services and public structures in cities and villages across the state. Cutting both spending and taxes, as is being proposed, is a recipe for disaster.
- Watch for statements by politicians that divide rather than bring the community together. True leaders do not put ideology ahead of the needs of citizens, nor do they pit one group against another.

### WHAT TO DO

Sometimes it seems overwhelming to pay attention to, listen for, and act upon the complex issues of today. This is why we belong to organizations whose goals coincide with our own. Your membership in the WIARA brings thousands of retirees together to bear upon the issues before us. Other organizations keep us updated on "what to look for."

Examples include your local and state unions, The Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, The Institute for Wisconsin's Future, Citizen Action of Wisconsin, Common Cause, and many others (See web sites on page three).

Our collective work within these organizations is the most effective way to bring pressure on law makers. Join or become more active in these and other socially responsible organizations. They research the issues and answer questions we have about proposed laws, specifically at the State level.

This is not to say that we must abandon our responsibility to act on issues of individual importance to each of us. Make sure your legislators know who you are. Write to them. Call their offices. Join in visits to legislators with the organizations you are part of. Encourage others to join you in your watch-dog efforts over these next very critical two years.

*Cont'd on page three - See "Focus"*

("Focus" cont'd from page two)

We are entering a period of "needed restraint" on government spending. The question is where should that restraint be directed? In the public structures that support our quality of life? On the backs of seniors and young families who are less likely to afford increases in their taxes or loss of benefits? Most citizens are willing to sacrifice as long as those sacrifices are fair and not disproportionately thrust on seniors and the middle class.

Let us not enter the election cycle of 2012 and wonder why we did not do more to protect our workers, our Seniors, our families, and our jobs. Start today. Make yourself known. Join organizations that can give you information and offer advice on how to respond to the critical issues facing legislators. We can accomplish much in the next two years if we stay connected, keep vigilant, and take action when it is needed.

## Sources of Information

### Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans

<http://wisconsinara.org/>

I encourage you to click on "membership" to join or just browse the site for information of importance to you

### CWAG, Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups

<http://www.cwag.org/>

I encourage you to click on "join us" or just browse the site for valuable information.

### Institute for Wisconsin's Future

<http://www.wisconsinsfuture.org/>

This is a research group that help citizens get the needed information they are looking for on issues of importance to our State. You can also donate to the organization on line.

### Citizen Action of Wisconsin

[http://citizenactionwi.org/index.php?option=com\\_frontpage&Itemid=1](http://citizenactionwi.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)

An organization dedicated to making Wisconsin a better place to live and work. Up to date information that you can trust.

### Wisconsin Common Cause

[www.commoncausewisconsin.org](http://www.commoncausewisconsin.org)

A citizens lobby focused on clean, open and responsive government.

***One of the penalties of not participating in politics is that you will be governed by your inferiors.  
(Attributed to Plato)***

## **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

# WI Alliance for Retired Americans 4th Biennial Convention

## Save the Date! ----- March 21, 2011

The Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans **4th Biennial Convention** will convene in Madison, WI, at the **Concourse Hotel**, 1 West Dayton Street, at 9:00 a.m. on **March 21, 2011**.

The agenda includes election of officers and community board members, guest speakers, and setting legislative priorities.

Registration fee will be \$40, and includes parking, lunch, and all materials. Registration information will be mailed in late January 2011. Mark your calendar to attend this informative and engaging event.

The Welcome Address will be delivered by Barbara Easterling, the President

of the Alliance for Retired Americans. A retiree from the Communication Workers of America, Barbara has become a leading voice for seniors and retirees.

Panel presentations will include several WIARA partner organizations discussing legislative priorities that apply to retirees. There will also be a presentation on the use of Facebook and other social media as a way to communicate with members.

The **Silent Auction** will be a new feature during this convention. We look forward to seeing you on Monday, March 21, 2011.

### **Special Convention**

#### **Guest Speaker**

**Zorba Paster, M.D.**

#### **Preventing & Addressing Chronic Illness**

Dr. Paster is a public radio show host, broadcast journalist, author, university professor, and practicing family physician. Dr. Paster has been answering callers' medical questions on health fitness and nutrition on national Public Radio for the past 15 years.

January 2011 Newsletter



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