

Retiree Advocate

A State Affiliate of the National Alliance for Retired Americans

AUGUST 2009 EDITION

President's Corner

Jean Friday, President of PARA

The time for a Healthcare Bailout is now!

When President Obama first talked about his healthcare plan with a public option competing with private plans to keep health care costs down, it all sounded so workable. Competition could solve many of the problems in the health care system. But where did it go? Behind closed doors. If you followed the Senate Finance Committee as they developed their plan, the door was initially closed on one idea, single payer healthcare, with Senator Max Baucus declaring that there would be no such plan on the table. End of discussion! But when Sen. Baucus' staff conducted town hall meetings in his home state of Montana, they were surprised to learn that some of their own constituents were angry at his stance. So he relented by holding one meeting with some of the leading single payer advocates and then shut the door on them completely.

The committee's initial meetings included the insurance, hospital and pharmaceutical industries, the Chamber of Commerce, Pete Peterson, Judd Gregg and other like-minded opponents of the public plan. Promises were made by the hospital industry and the pharmaceutical industry to produce savings of \$1 trillion to help pay for healthcare reform. But just this week that promise was broken by PHARMA when it dropped their magnanimous contribution to \$80 billion over 10 years. The only mention of the public plan has been a proposal to "trigger" it only if the private plans fail to reduce costs. We've heard those promises in the past, only to see them die a silent death. And now there is talk of co-ops, which are just another form of private industry that adds to the confusion with too many plans to choose from. All of this for the sake of preserving profits, not lives. Must we remind our representatives that they get their healthcare from the government and they seem satisfied?

This is the moment when we must remember the 6 million men and women who are unemployed because of the greed of the banks and Wall Street. We must remember the 50 million people who have no health coverage at all, and the 62% of people who are in bankruptcy because they are underinsured. We must remember those whose 18 months of COBRA coverage are now running out, along with their unemployment benefits, and the many others who have just fallen through the cracks. They don't ask for much; just the opportunity to have good, affordable healthcare for themselves and their families. How many of these people worked and paid the taxes that bailed out the financial institutions? **When is the time for their bailout? The time must be now! If not now, when?**

Please call you Congressman and Senators Casey and Specter, asking them to support the President's public option. **We can't lose this moment.** Good healthcare should be available to all Americans and our future generations. Please call now and let them hear from you.

Lobbying for Healthcare Reform

Joe Raffaele, AFT/PFT Delegate

The central goal for the Alliance's Legislative Conference, held from June 15 through June 18 in Washington D.C., was the passage in Congress of the health care initiative. The Western Pennsylvania delegation met with Congressmen Doyle, Murphy, Altmire, Murtha and staff of Senators Casey and Specter.

In breakout session discussions, leaders pointed out that there are some forty-five million Americans without health care. America has the highest rate of infant mortality among developed nations, health care costs are rising at an alarming rate, and most nations have government universal health care for their citizens.

During the lobby visits, Congressmen agreed that health care should be provided for all Americans, but differences of opinion occurred as to how it was to be done, and how a government program was going to be financed. Some Congressmen wanted the insurance companies to provide basic health care programs at an entry level for all. Others thought that the government had a responsibility to offer health care programs.

As far as insurance companies offering entry level health care programs, Americans know that these plans haven't worked. Health care would not be in the mess it is today because insurance companies have not developed plans with an affordable cost for all Americans. A similar type of program like Medicare could work, but costs have to be kept down with waste, fraud and abuse kept to a minimum.

It is the responsibility of all of us to write our senators and congressmen and urge them to support a fair health care plan that includes all Americans.

Ed Pace, AFT/PFT Delegate

In 2008, retirees across America worked hard for CHANGE. The Alliance for Retired Americans has made "Getting the CHANGE We Fought For" the theme of its 2009 Legislative Conference. Retirees understand that CHANGE is not merely words from men, but deeds from leaders. Now that we have the ear of Washington, we must push, prod, goad and constantly remind Washington: Health Care is what we want!

The sermon of CHANGE manifested itself in several ways during the ARA 2009 Convention. The powerful and enlightened President of the Alliance, George Kourpias, retired. Former President Kourpias passed the task of leadership to a classy, competent and committed Barbara Easterling. President Easterling reiterated that the battle for reasonable retiree health care is paramount. We must prepare to skirmish with our elected officials for our share of the goal of health care for all. To this end, several days of tactics, discussion groups and workshops preceded our march on Congress. On June 17th, delegates boarded busses and went to meet with their elected officials about the "public option" for health care, with mixed results. The conference ended with a call to action that we as Alliance members must answer in order to achieve health care for all.

2009 Legislative Conference a success!

Adam Swope, Alliance Staff

This year, the Alliance for Retired Americans moved our annual legislative conference from September to June, to better participate in the defining issue of our age. The timing could not have been better! Several hundred delegates descended on Washington DC from all over America just as Congress is crafting its monumental health care reform legislation.

Pennsylvania sent a large delegation of almost 50 delegates, representing AFSCME, AFT, CWA, APSCURF, USW, UFCW, UMW, IBT and our community-based members. Delegates heard speeches from important policy-makers such as Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. Delegates were also offered valuable workshops on organizing and improving activism back home.

During the lobby day portion of the conference, delegates met with 8 members of Congress and both Senators' offices to demand that:

- Health Care reform must cover everyone, and should include a public option to compete with private insurers;
- Health Care benefits that have been fought and sacrificed for should not be taxed to pay for reform;
- Health Care reform should include changes to Medicare that close the donut hole in prescription coverage, expand preventative care, end over-payments to privately-run Medicare Advantage plans and offering a buy-in for early retirees from age 55-64; and
- Health Care reform should include a national Long Term Care insurance program.

Call your member of Congress and Senators' offices today to offer your support for these positions. Alliance members can make a difference if we make our voices heard!

NEWS & NOTES

PARA would like to congratulate our two new Executive Officers:

Mike Doyle, a community member from Doylestown, Bucks County, has agreed to serve as PARA's new Treasurer. Mike has a long history of activism for many causes, and will be a welcome addition to the Executive Board. Mike has previously been active with PARA in Southeastern PA as a Zone Coordinator in 2006 and 2008 election cycles.

Wayne Burton, a retired Professor at West Chester University in Chester County, will serve as PARA's new Secretary. Wayne has been active in his retiree organization, APSCURF (Association of Pennsylvania State College & University Retired Faculties), since his retirement in 2000, after a run for State Representative that year. He currently serves as President of APSCURF at West Chester, and Vice President of APSCURF statewide. Wayne was also active as a PARA Zone Coordinator in the 2008 election.

Health Care Reform: Time to Finish the Job

Barbara J. Easterling
President, Alliance for Retired Americans

Thank you to all who attended our recent Alliance Legislative Conference. Nearly 550 retirees came to Washington to lobby their elected officials on health care reform and participate in workshops and trainings to strengthen their grassroots organizing skills.

It was a great conference, and I am encouraged by the progress we are making. Think about it – in less than one year we have elected a pro-retiree, pro-worker President, helped put health care front and center in the national debate, and organized hundreds of lobby visits in our states and at the U.S. Capitol.

But we are a long way from the finish line. Now comes the hard part – converting opportunity into results. It is time to finish the job.

So what can we do? I have four ideas:

- First, continue to lobby your elected officials;
- Second, write a letter to the editor of your local paper, highlighting some of the issues that are important to retirees in the health care debate;
- Third, educate your neighbors on health care and where your elected officials stand; and
- Fourth, encourage everyone you know to become involved with their state and national Alliance to help make health care reform a reality.

I am so impressed by the work Alliance members are doing around health care. You bring such incredible energy, enthusiasm, and passion to your work. We must continue to educate and mobilize our neighbors this summer. Our country will never be a just society until every American has access to quality, affordable health care.

Contributions to the Pennsylvania Alliance for Retired Americans are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Regional Legislative Conferences are coming soon to a town near you, so stay tuned!



**PENNSYLVANIA ALLIANCE FOR
RETIRED AMERICANS**

**319 MARKET ST., 3RD FLOOR
HARRISBURG, PA 17101**

www.pennretiredamericans.org



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