

Retiree Advocate

A State Affiliate of the National Alliance for Retired Americans

October 2010 Pre-Election Edition

President's Corner

Jean Friday, President of PARA

Last month, the Pennsylvania Alliance for Retired Americans Executive Board voted to endorse Dan Onorato for Governor. This was the first time that PARA endorsed a candidate running to serve in Harrisburg. Being that we were new to this arena, the PARA Board was thoughtful and careful about our decision. During the summer, PARA sent an in-depth questionnaire to both candidates. The questionnaire was open-ended (no yes/no questions) and covered a wide range of topics such as economic retirement security issues and health care concerns. Unfortunately, even after several calls to his campaign office, Mr. Corbett did not return the questionnaire. We had looked forward to analyzing both candidates' visions for the future of retirees in PA, but had to settle for just one.

Of course, just returning the questionnaire alone was not enough to earn our endorsement. The Board considered Mr. Onorato's answers carefully in order to learn as much about his positions and plans as we could. Through this process, we learned that Mr. Onorato will work to implement Health Care Reform to the maximum benefit of Pennsylvanians, support a fiscally responsible expansion to PACENET until the Medicare Part D "doughnut hole" is closed, support improvement to the quality of Long Term Care (including care received in the home), make sure seniors get the help they need to afford and heat their homes, fully fund public education which keeps our property taxes down, protect seniors from scam artists, and fix the public pension system without abandoning defined benefit pensions by making sure that employees and employers (the state and school districts) pay their fair share.

Naturally, some of Mr. Onorato's answers were less strong on some issues that we would like. We appreciated his honesty, and kept in mind that no candidate is ever going to be perfect! After much consideration, I can recommend with confidence that Alliance for Retired Americans members support Mr. Onorato on November 2nd. Whether or not members choose to follow this recommendation, I hope everyone gets out to vote. Those who choose not to participate in our democracy must still live with the consequences!

A VICTORY FOR QUALITY LONG TERM CARE

Last month, Governor Rendell signed an Executive Order creating a Consumer Workforce Council for our state. The CWC will serve caregivers and consumers who operate in the consumer-directed long term care model. Most of the time, these patients are seniors who hire a friend or family member to provide them with care. The state pays for this through Medicaid. However, the state currently pays minimum wage without any benefits. The CWC will allow these workers to collectively bargain with the state for a living wage and benefits. Seniors who hire these workers will now have a more stable workforce. The CWC can even help seniors find a replacement if their worker needs a day off. By making this a more viable long term care option, countless seniors will be able to stay in their own home, rather than move into a nursing home. In-home care is cheaper for the state, so keeping seniors in their homes will more than make up for the increased labor costs. The Consumer Workforce Council is truly a win-win-win: better care for seniors, better pay for workers and savings for the taxpayers! PARA applauds Governor Rendell for making this wonderful program a reality in PA.

ELECTION INFORMATION

Another Election Day is upon us. Please take a moment to look over this section on Alliance endorsement information. Obviously, your vote is a sacred personal decision. The Alliance does its best to endorse candidates that we believe will best serve the interests of senior citizens. We know that you will take many issues into account when you got to vote, so please think about seniors' issues before making your decision!

US Senate:

The Alliance strongly recommends retired Admiral and two-term Congressman Joe Sestak for Senate. Joe compiled a 97% lifetime pro-retiree voting record with the Alliance over his short time in Congress. Without any reservation, we can say that he will continue to be a champion for Social Security and Medicare in the US Senate. Currently, Joe is leading the fight to fix the Social Security COLA formula that has again calculated NO COLA for 2011. Joe's plan would replace the current formula which takes into account gas prices and other factors that average working Americans spend money on, and put more weight on medical expenses and food – expenses that weigh heavier on a senior's budget.

Joe has taken several positions on seniors' issues that place him squarely at odds with his opponent, former Congressman Pat Toomey.

- Pat Toomey has spoken at length, and published in his book, about his desire to privatize Social Security. He would put a portion of current workers' contribution into accounts that would be traded on the market. Joe Sestak believes that this is a risky scheme for current workers who could stand to lose their retirement security, as well as a problem for current retirees due to money being diverted from the Trust Fund that would otherwise go toward paying benefits.
- Pat Toomey has also expressed support for privatizing Medicare, turning it into a "voucher" program where seniors would be forced to shop among insurance companies for their coverage, who would be free to charge premiums above and beyond the voucher's worth. Joe Sestak voted to strengthen traditional Medicare, closing the "doughnut hole" in prescription coverage, adding preventative services and extending the solvency of the program by 12 years just to name a few. The TV ads saying Sestak cut Medicare are false! He is a champion for Medicare.
- Joe Sestak supports full funding for the LIHEAP program that helps needy seniors afford home heating costs in the winter. Toomey opposes this funding.

Polls show an increasingly tight race between these two gentlemen. Your vote will make a big difference on November 2nd. Please consider your choice carefully!

See reverse side for information on Congressional Races.

The Following Members of Congress are running for re-election, sorted by region. Their lifetime scores with the Alliance for Retired Americans are listed. Each year, the Alliance sends a questionnaire to all candidates running for Congress. Endorsed candidates are underlined:

Philadelphia:

Bob Brady – 99% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating
Chaka Fattah – 100% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

Philadelphia Suburbs and the Lehigh Valley:

Jim Gerlach – 35% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating (The Alliance has endorsed challenger Dr. Manan Trivedi)

Allyson Schwartz – 100% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

Patrick Murphy* – 90% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

Charlie Dent – 30% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating (The Alliance has endorsed challenger John Callahan)

*The key race in Southeast PA pits Congressman Murphy, the first Iraq War veteran elected to Congress, against former Congressman Mike Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick had a lifetime pro-retiree rating of only 20%.

Northeastern PA:

Paul Kanjorski – 100% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

Chirs Carney* – 90% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

*In this large, rural district, Congressman Carney faces a challenge from former US Attorney Tom Marino. Mr. Marino has suggested that future generations should have to give up Social Security, and that the program should not continue!

Central PA:

Glenn Thompson – 10% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

Tim Holden – 97% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

Joe Pitts – 5% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating (The Alliance has endorsed challenger Lois Herr)

Todd Platts – 23% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

Bill Shuster – 11% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

Western PA:

Kathy Dahlkemper* – 100% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

Mike Doyle – 100% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

Tim Murphy – 31% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating (The Alliance has endorsed challenger Dan Connelly)

Jason Altmire – 90% Lifetime Pro-Retiree Rating

*In Rep. Dahlkemper's first bid for re-election, she puts her strong record for seniors against Mike Kelly, who promises, if elected, to re-open the "doughnut hole" in prescription drug coverage, among other negative proposals for Medicare. She is under attack for cutting Medicare, but these attacks are false!

Congressman Mark Critz, who recently won a special election, has not served long enough to get a pro-retiree rating. He has been endorsed by the Alliance due to his strong Social Security stance, and his opponent's promise to cut Medicare services. In the open-seat contest for Joe Sestak's old seat in the Philadelphia Suburbs, the Alliance endorses Iraq War veteran Brvan Lentz.

Guest Column

Bill Oman, Retired Professor, Slippery Rock University

Little kids believe in the tooth fairy. The tooth fairy makes a stressful thing simple. If a tooth falls out, hide it under a pillow and presto! The next morning, money appears.

This election year, many voters are looking for the "truth fairy" to deal with their problems. If you believe in the "truth fairy," you can put your whole head under your pillow and presto! The next morning Wall Street makes jobs for everybody and the globe is cooling off. You will not want Social Security until you are 85 and you won't need Medicare or a pension at all. Once the "truth fairy" throws magic dust in someone's eyes, the facts do not matter any more.

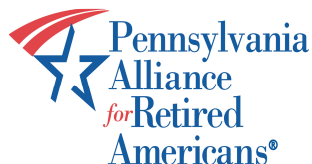
The bad news is that "presto!" does not rearrange the facts. What are some of these facts? The facts are -- and this is the adult part of this message, so get the kids out of the room -- there never was a tooth fairy. The money under the pillow came from earth, not heaven, from Mom and Dad, not the pixies. There is no "truth fairy" either. The sick will not find insurance money under their pillow. If Social Security is privatized, it will quickly turn into Social Insecurity, as two stock market bubbles in less than two decades has convincingly shown.

The "truth fairy" has some grown-ups believing that government only wastes money and free marketers alone can hang on to it. The facts are that Medicare's (the government's) administrative costs are **only half** of private insurance costs, that under the Medicare Advantage plan, private insurers needed to charge Medicare **114%** of their costs. Without a **14% subsidy** -- no free market there -- the wholly private Medicare Advantage program was unsustainable without government support. Other "truth fairies" are saying that Medicare benefits are being cut across the board, when in fact new benefits were added, such as preventive care with no co-pay and closing of the "doughnut hole" in drug coverage.

In Fairyland, the less government does, the better it will be for all of us. The "truth fairies" made people "mad" this year at health care, the stimulus, oil spills and other problems government had to face. In the real world, problems have to be faced as they arise. Sometimes that takes public funds -- like to halt a recession, to build roads, to fight war, disease, crime and pollution. Instead, the "truth fairies" like Pat Toomey and Tom Corbett preach a no-plan plan. In their Fairyland government, *doing nothing turns into doing something*. That's not the Boston Tea Party -- it's the Mad Hatter's.

REMINDER:

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE ON NOVEMBER 2ND!



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED