

## Alliance Clips and Retiree News November 15, 2011

### **Alliance Mentions**

Super Committee considers raising Medicare age

Jim Anderson

November 14, 2011

Illinois congressmen spoke out about raising the retirement age from 65 to 67 at a Joint Deficit Reduction Committee hearing. "Almost every day I hear from someone who's trying to just hold on until they reach 65, that important date when they're gonna qualify for Medicare, so they can afford the health care that they need. They're postponing that care until they reach the age of 65," says U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Evanston). The Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans estimates the cost shift to Illinois individuals, businesses and the state at \$524 million in 2014, if the Medicare age were raised to 67 by then.

Iowa GOP voters: Don't cut Social Security

IowaPolitics.com

Hannah Hess

November 11, 2011

By nearly a 3 to 1 one margin, a survey of GOP caucusgoers, including those aligned with the tea party, shows they would prefer withdrawing troops from Iraq or Afghanistan as an alternative to route to cutting the nation's \$14-trillion deficit. The AARP commissioned GS Strategy Group of Boise, Idaho, to survey 400 likely Iowa Republican caucusgoers. Results show 64.5 percent oppose cutting Social Security benefits to lower the deficit, with a margin of error of 4.9 percent. Don Rowen, Iowa president of the Alliance for Retired Americans, a national advocacy group representing 30,000 retirees, says the disconnect explains diminished voter enthusiasm among Iowans 65 and older, as recently reported by the Des Moines Register. "Candidates for president have clearly said that they don't support Social Security in its present form," Rowen said, "so, you don't have to be overly bright to figure out that those people certainly don't have seniors in their best interests."

<http://www.timesrepublican.com/page/content.detail/id/544342/Iowa-GOP-voters---Don-t-cut-Soci---.html>

### **Alliance People**

Dear Alliance News Clips: On behalf of NARA I congratulate our union sisters and brothers and Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans in rejecting overwhelmingly the restricting of collective bargaining rights in Ohio. Job well done, we are very proud of you.

Scott Watts  
President

Let's not make life harder on our veterans

By LEON BURZYNSKI Thursday, Nov. 10, 2011

This year as we celebrate Veterans Day, it's with a heavy heart over the economic hardships that so many veterans and Americans face.

I enlisted in the U. S. Navy because I loved my country, wanted to serve it and wanted to keep America strong. Like today's young veterans, I hoped to have a bright future when I came home.

Fortunately, I did. I secured training and a job as an electrician, raised a family, and was able to earn health care benefits for my family and a pension for my retirement. Back in those days, the middle class was fairly robust. In those days, American corporations operated manufacturing plants here at home, and heads of companies were compensated at a fair rate for their expertise. There were reasonable opportunities to work hard and earn a decent living in return. Things are different today.

Today, 20 percent of veterans between ages 18 and 24 are unemployed. For those who are able to find work, their futures are less definite. When I served in the U.S. Naval Submarine Service, our threats were external. Now, it seems our quality of life is threatened by internal forces.

For example, this month, a "supercommittee" in Washington tasked with reducing the federal deficit will conclude its negotiations. It will submit recommendations that Congress must vote on by the end of the year. There is talk this supercommittee will advocate lowering Social Security cost of living adjustments (COLAs) and raising the Medicare eligibility age. So many people in Wisconsin, and across the country are already hanging on by a thread—this would be a difficult change for them. But more than that, it would be a hardship for future generations. The way things are going, our young people will need programs such as Social Security and Medicare more, not less.

It also shows our priorities as a nation. Not only do corporations and the top 1 percent seem to be the only ones profiting from the wars the rest of the nation are sent to fight, they also seem to be among the only ones profiting from the wealth 99 percent of us help to create, while being immune to shared sacrifice.

The corporations that outsourced our jobs, laid off workers, and avoided paying taxes, while at the same time exponentially increasing their salaries and bonuses, continue to get a pass. Veterans didn't fight so only the top 1 percent could afford to live and retire in dignity.

Americans do not work their entire lives building their communities, contributing hard-earned tax dollars so only wealthy executives are represented and have a decent quality of life.

The unrelenting attack on Social Security is a perfect example and analogy for the attack on the middle class. Social Security did not cause the budget deficit—the program is funded by the payroll taxes we paid all our working lives. By law, the program cannot contribute to the federal deficit. But politicians are creating a false narrative and using the program as a scapegoat to avoid addressing the real issues, such as how corporate greed has run our country into the ground. These same politicians do not want to admit the tax breaks and loopholes for the rich and big corporations are truly jeopardizing our nation's economic health.

Some of us fought for our country in the armed forces, and many of us contributed to building this country in other ways.

Veterans Day 2011 will mark a day of remembrance for all who served. I hope we can show our honor and appreciation for those who fought for and helped build this country by preserving the basic programs that ensure Americans a decent quality of life.

*Leon Burzynski of Pewaukee is president of the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans, 6333 W. Bluemound Road, Milwaukee, WI 53213; phone (414) 771-9511. WIARA represents more than 103,000 Wisconsin retirees and is dedicated to the health and economic security for current and future retirees. [www.wisconsinara.org](http://www.wisconsinara.org)*

Guest column: Remedy confusion of ACA's impact on Medicare, preventive care  
Nov. 12, 2011

Written by Leon Burzynski

Several months ago, our organization, Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans, teamed up with Know Your Care Wisconsin to help educate Wisconsin seniors about how the Affordable Care Act impacts them. You may have heard the ACA called by its other names — "Obamacare" or health insurance reform.

One thing is clear from our travels across Wisconsin: Amidst all the debate about reform, there is great confusion about what is actually in the law even though it was signed into law almost two years ago.

This is particularly the case when it comes to how the ACA affects Medicare. Before explaining the new benefits for Medicare enrollees, I want to refute one of the biggest myths I hear. Some politicians claim the ACA cuts Medicare benefits. This is not true. The ACA does not cut any benefits for Medicare enrollees. The so-called "cuts" are actually the result of getting rid of waste and fraud. By cracking down on waste and focusing on preventive health care that diagnoses diseases earlier, when they are less expensive to treat, the ACA has actually extended the solvency of Medicare.

Unfortunately, statistics show Americans use preventive services at half the rate they should. The ACA is changing this by making many preventive services available to Medicare enrollees free of charge. For instance, you may now get your annual checkup with no co-pay or charge against your deductible.

The same applies to many other preventive screenings and shots. Flu, pneumonia and hepatitis B shots are included in these free services. So are bone mass measurements and diabetes, cholesterol and other cardiovascular screenings. In addition, many cancer screenings are included in these preventive services — including Pap smears, mammograms and tests for prostate and colorectal cancer.

However, that is not where it ends. Seniors who hit the prescription drug "donut hole" coverage gap were eligible for a \$250 rebate in 2010 and are eligible for a 50 percent discount this year on brand-name prescription drugs.

Over half of Medicare enrollees made less than \$22,000 in 2010, and enrollees in general spend a disproportionate share of their income on health expenses. This means the ACA drug discounts and free preventive services are benefiting Medicare enrollees even more as a percentage of their income.

Some politicians want to repeal the ACA, including its drug discounts and free preventive services. They support turning Medicare's guaranteed benefits into a voucher program which will double out-of-pocket costs over the next decade — all while keeping tax breaks for big oil companies. These politicians are wrong for the vast number of people in our country, especially seniors.

Of course, the provisions of the Affordable Care Act don't only affect seniors. I encourage everyone to find out more about the law here: [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov).

*Leon Burzynski is president of the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans, a nonprofit organization representing 103,000 state retirees.*

<http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/article/20111113/GPG0706/111130612/Guest-column-Remedy-confusion-ACA-s-impact-Medicare-preventive-care?odyssey=mod%7Cnewswell%7Ctext%7CGPG-Opinion>

## **Medicare**

Medicare savings could be mirage

Politico

Matt DoBias

November 14, 2011

One plan for Medicare savings is to boost the eligibility age from 65 to 67. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that this could save \$124.8 billion between 2014 and 2021. Some argue that the savings really are not that black and white. Research conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation suggests that much of the savings would be eaten up by the consequences, such as people aged 65 to 67 no longer having insurance, and having to buy from the private sector. This would cause premiums to go up for young people as well as old, because older and sicker people will be joining the risk pool. The cost would be shifted to seniors, employers, and the states. So, while lawmakers may tout raising the retirement age as a good idea, think of who those savings are being shifted to.

<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1111/68339.html>

Deficit cutters target upper-income Medicare beneficiaries

Kaiser Health News

Mary Agnes Carey and Marilyn Werber Serafini

November 14, 2011

As the Super Committee gets closer to its deadline, their focus on Medicare becomes clearer. A measure that has quite a bit of support is raising premiums for wealthy seniors. A public opinion poll shows that people support wealthy seniors paying more. Senior advocate groups are weary; they feel that it is just one tiny step from raising costs for wealthy Americans to raising costs for middle class Americans. "When you're talking about seniors, the definition of wealthy seems to be a whole lot lower than when you're talking about younger people," said Maria Freese, director of government relations and policy at the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare. "Just because they're retired, it doesn't mean their expenses are much lower." There continues to be debate over this measure.

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/11/14/2502211/deficit-cutters-target-upper-income.html>

## **Politics**

On supercommittee, growing doubts about reaching a debt deal

The Washington Post

Lori Montgomery and Rosalind S. Helderan

November 13, 2011

With less than ten days to reach a decision the Super Committee seems to be making little progress. Rep. Jeb Hensarling of Texas, the Super Committee's GOP co-chairman, hinted that he was hoping for success, but not ruling out failure. What seems most likely is the Super Committee will come out with recommendations, only for them to die on the House floor. If the recommendations do die, then the automatic cuts will activate, cutting \$1.2 trillion from defense and discretionary spending. Some congressmen have hinted that even that measure will be stopped from going into effect. If some kind of deficit reduction action is not taken the United States risks another credit downgrade.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/on-supercommittee-growing-doubts-about-reaching-a-debt-deal/2011/11/13/gIQABgG9IN\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/on-supercommittee-growing-doubts-about-reaching-a-debt-deal/2011/11/13/gIQABgG9IN_story.html)

Deficit Panel Seeks to Defer Details on Raising Taxes

The New York Times

Robert Pear

November 13, 2011

One major part of the deficit reduction plan the Super Committee is working on is tax reform. Republicans have finally conceded to talk about it, but the two parties are still very far from agreeing. At a public hearing on Nov. 1, Erskine B. Bowles, a co-chairman of Mr. Obama's fiscal commission, told the panel, "I don't think you can possibly rewrite the tax law between now and Nov. 23." What Mr. Bowles did say was "We do recommend that you delegate it to the tax-writing committees and set up a framework" for them. This means that the Super Committee can push tax reform even further down the road by pushing it to congressional budget writing committees. So what does that mean for the November 23 proposal?

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/14/us/politics/panel-seeks-way-to-reach-a-deal-on-tax-increase.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/14/us/politics/panel-seeks-way-to-reach-a-deal-on-tax-increase.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all)