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NEWSLETTER – September 2015

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

Happy 80th Birthday to Social Security

Leon Burzynski

I am writing this article on August 14th, which happens to be the 80th birthday of the signing of the Social Security legislation by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. As I wrote in the previous newsletter, Social Security is now the most important program standing between the elderly and poverty.

Social Security is the solution to the retirement crisis facing future retirees who may be unable to retire with a decent quality-of-life, as pension plans continue to become victims of the exponential gap between the wealthy and everybody else.

The real story appears to be more threatening for seniors and retirees. Almost every Republican candidate (except Donald Trump, Ben Carson) running for President in 2016 has a position that will negatively impact the program.

Several (Bush, Cruz, Christie, Paul) want to raise the retirement age, either to 69 for full retirement, or to 64 for early retirement. These reductions are especially deep for those who must retire early for health, family, or economic reasons. They are also particularly harmful to

lower-income workers.

The same group drank the Paul Ryan Kool-Aid and pledge to privatize the program. In spite of the fact that the stock market just scammed retirees out of six trillion dollars in retiree nest eggs in the 2008 crash, Wall Street still wants to get its greedy mitts on the funds in the Social Security Trust Fund.

Christie and Rubio are pushing a method of cutting benefits by means-testing benefits. They want to phase out benefits for "high-income" earners. Their proposal is that anyone who earned more than \$200,000 would receive no benefits, even if they paid into the system all their lives.

Means-testing has been proven to do almost nothing to improve the solvency of Social Security. However, it would undermine the broad public support it now has.

The most dangerous proposal entails the cutting of benefits. We have seen this in prior years when the Chained CPI formula was trotted out for consideration. The Chained CPI is still on the list.

A more insidious proposal by Cruz is to cut benefits so they match inflation increases rather than wages. The net effect would be a cut in benefits for each succeeding

generation of retirees. After 30 years, benefits would be 30 percent lower. According to the Center for American Progress (Weller & Vargas) if this type of formula had "been in effect since Social Security was created in 1935, today's benefits would reflect the living standard when many households did not have indoor plumbing."

The Republican campaigns for the 2016 Presidential election is resembling a clown car. At the time of this writing, there are sixteen candidates, each trying to be a little further right-wing than the others. Unfortunately, they have a wrench in their works by the name of Trump.

In an interesting turn of events, Trump has made statements in support of Social Security and Medicare. Mike Huckabee also stands against benefit cuts.

The WIARA has consistently stood for improving Social Security, not destroying it. There are proposals to expand the program, including the Social Security Expansion Act (Sen. Bernie Sanders) and The Social Security Act 2100 (Rep. John Larson). While these proposals may not advance, everyone whoever paid into the system should be aware of the proposals when they go to vote.

KLEPTOCRACY (Rule by Thieves)

Vivien De Back

The political process in America is corrupted and we, the people, let it happen. It did not start with the 2010 Supreme Court Citizens United decision, although it dramatically changed the rules on campaign spending by corporations and organizations. Essentially, corporations can spend unlimited amounts of money on political activities. This is a continuation of a process of government control (corruption) by one small section of the population, the Billionaires (the 1%).

This country is aware of this "take over" of Democracy. We have become so complacent as to accept a country where violence is the operating strategy to solve problems, allowing state and federal laws to be enacted that encroach on our lives, and watch the gap between rich and poor grow exponentially. Regardless of political persuasion, religious affiliation or social status, Americans are beginning to recognize that our country is in danger of losing our Democracy to widespread corruption in government.

We see it in the use of power by government officials for illegitimate private gain, the misuse of government power to repress political opponents, and enactment of laws that block or deter voting. We know from experience that corrupt governments operating in secrecy do not function "for the people and by the people."

"In a recent decision, the Wisconsin Supreme Court stopped the John Doe investigation of Gov. Scott Walker for Campaign Finance Law violations. The majority opinion was written and supported by Supreme Court Justices Michael Gableman, David Prosser, Patience Roggensack, and Annette Ziegler. Each has received donations from the very campaign organizations Walker is accused of colluding with in the John Doe investigation. The four justices failed to disqualify themselves, clearly a conflict of interest under Federal Law. There is reasonable cause to believe their ability to remain impartial is substantially hindered by their vested financial interest in those being investigated" (Moveon.Org).

How did we get to this level of government corruption? The USA lacks short, publicly-funded campaigns.

Instead, we endure long political campaigns in which candidates must raise enormous amounts of money. Politicians are forced into a system well defined by GOP candidate, Donald Trump during a recent debate. He said he "has given money to many people on this stage," and he does this because when he calls about an issue, "they respond to him" because they owe him. Whether intended or not, Trump aptly described the continued degrading and corruption of our government.

As a self proclaimed "Governor of all the people of Wisconsin" in 2011, Scott Walker traveled to Beloit, to meet with billionaire, Diane Hendricks, his most generous campaign donor. Hendricks asked: "**Any chance we'll ever get to be a completely red state, work on these unions, and become a right-to-work [state]?**" This was an explicitly political question about destroying unions as a strategy to turn Wisconsin into a Republican bastion. Walker didn't blink. "**Yes...we're going to start in a couple weeks with our budget-adjustment bill. The first step is, we're going to deal with collective bargaining for all public-employee unions, because you use divide-and-conquer...**" (Journal Sentinel, Stein/Marley article: May 10, 2012)

When a video of the meeting with Hendricks surfaced prior to the 2012 recall election, Walker knew he was in trouble. His response was to deny everything. This is just one instance illustrating that we are in a state of unrestrained political corruption, known as a Kleptocracy, which literally means "rule by thieves."

Every ten years, states are required to redraw voting districts to reflect the concentration of citizens. Illegally drawing districts is called Gerrymandering, which divides a state to give one political party a majority in many districts and concentrates the voting strength of the other party into as few districts as possible. Partisan gerrymandering has existed since the early 1800's and is getting worse with the modern technologically sophisticated ways to micro-manipulate maps.

Citizens are fighting back against gerrymandering. In Wisconsin, a lawsuit filed by Democrats attacked the process used to redistrict political boundaries.

Calling the current state legislative redistricting "one of the worst gerrymanders in modern American history," the Democrats sued the state, asking the 2011 district map be thrown out for giving unconstitutional advantage to Republicans, diluting the voting power of some voters based on their political beliefs, and burdening their rights of association and free speech. Plaintiffs have been seeking computers used for redistricting to find documents to be turned over to them and learn if other records were improperly withheld. To date, they have been unable to locate the state computers, let alone search them. The lawsuit asks a federal three-judge panel to decide the case so it can be appealed straight to the U.S. Supreme Court before the 2016 elections. The Supreme Court's decision could affect laws in other states with gerrymandering lawsuits pending. If the lawsuit succeeds, the Legislature would be required to redraw boundaries.

There are consequences to illegally drawing voting districts. Wisconsin is one of five states where the party that won more than half of the votes for Congress got fewer than half of the seats, largely because of redistricting. Republicans in Wisconsin received just 49 percent of the votes cast in the state's congressional races, but won five out of eight seats, 62.5%. And that redistricting process was carried out with an unprecedented level of secrecy (Feb 4, 2013, PR WATCH).

There is a nation-wide surge in interest to overturn Citizens United. Get on that bandwagon, sign the petitions that are circulating and contact your Federal legislators. We have a responsibility to stop the corruption of money by educating our fellow citizens about the effect of this law. Groups like Common Cause Wisconsin, Wisconsin Citizen Action, and Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans, as well as the editorial boards of the state's two largest newspapers, have called for replacing the partisan redistricting process with an independent redistricting board. Whether Wisconsin's Republican-led legislature will implement those changes is another question, resulting in Wisconsin ...A KLEPTOCRACY.



3 AWESOME Celebrations

WIARA 10th Anniversary
Medicare 50th Anniversary
Social Security 80th Anniversary

At 1 OUTSTANDING Event

Senior POWER Lunch

Monday, October 12th

Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Exhibits Open

Italian Community Center

10:30 a.m.

631 E. Chicago St.—Milwaukee, WI

Guest Speaker

Congressman Mark Pocan

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Community



Legislative

To attend the Power Luncheon, please complete the attached registration form. You can also **remember** someone past, **honor** an individual or add your name to “*Celebrating Our Earned Benefits*” page in our Power Lunch booklet. Just complete the information requested on the Registration form. Organizations will be mailed information about placing a quarter, half or full page ad. If you are unable to participate, donations are very much appreciated. For questions, please call Judy at 414-771-9511 or email her at office@wi-alliance.org.



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September 2015 Newsletter

Readability.com — Reading Web Articles More Easily

Leon Burzynski

I have a recommendation for you. If you happen to be a follower of news publications and stories on the internet. It is a free software program that makes reading a more pleasurable experience. This is especially true if your eyes, like mine, have aged a bit.

The software is Readability. The Readability.com website calls it "a reading tool that turns a web page into a "customizable reading view."

I have used Readability for a long time and cannot say enough good things about it. I spend a lot of research time on the web as I research topics connected to retiree and senior issues, in addition to the news of the day.

I have the Readability Icon in my Favorites Bar so the first thing I do after opening an article is click on the icon.

This opens the article in a new screen with no advertising, no pop-up ads, just the article text. The article appears in a large, easily readable text on a white background. There are decent size borders on each side of the text.

If I want to make the text larger or smaller, or want to spread the text out a little further on the page, there is a menu on the upper left side of the page where the AA icon allows me to adjust the text and the borders.

On the top of the page there is a note on how long the article is (example: 3 minute read) and the ability to save the article for later reading.

For those who read short stories and books online, the Readability program offers the advantage of

changing the font size to lessen eye strain.

The entire Readability program is free and they have an App for your iPhone or iPad. I see more and more seniors reading on their iPad while waiting for some event to start.

Readability does require having an account, but there is no cost for it. Any personal information submitted for the account is confidential and not shared with any third party.

I highly recommend the Readability program as a way to make online reading less stressful and more enjoyable. Go to: www.readability.com/ and see for yourself!