

Retiree Review

A publication of the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans

Celebrate with Oregon ARA

Oregon ARA members and friends will celebrate the holiday season at their annual Holiday Luncheon on Thursday, December 28 at 11:30 a.m. Location will be Steamers Restaurant, 8303 NE Sandy Blvd. (just East of 82nd on Sandy Blvd.).

Steve March, self-proclaimed soon to be former State Legislator, will be our speaker. As a strong supporter of education

(Portland State University Professor), legislator, attorney and Charter Member of the Oregon ARA, March is aware of the many issues facing retirees and how important it is for the “soon-to-be-retirees” to become aware of these issues in order to prepare for the future.

Join us for this no-host lunch (order off the menu). We look forward to seeing everyone.

Thursday, December 28
11:30 am
Steamers Restaurant
8830 NE Sandy Blvd.

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Fixing Medicare Part D in the next Congress

By U.S. Senator Ron Wyden

Even as Congress created the Medicare Part D prescription drug program for seniors in late 2003, I pledged to continue working to improve the law, which had obvious flaws. Since then I have heard consistently from folks at town halls and meetings across Oregon who are concerned about the restriction that keeps Medicare from bargaining to hold down the costs of the medicines older people purchase.

In fact, a recent poll indicated 92 percent of Americans want this restriction lifted, and for obvious reasons. The fact is millions of older people simply cannot pay their skyrocketing prescription drug bills and they want to know why the government isn't doing more to contain these costs.

Medicare Part D, as it currently exists, is like a guy going to Costco and buying toilet paper one roll at a time. He's not being a smart shopper, and neither is the government. Medicare is not taking practical steps, like everyone in Oregon or anywhere else would, to use bargaining power to hold down the cost of essential prescription drugs for older people.

This is because the Medicare bill that created Part D also included a formal prohibition on the government using negotiations to bring down the costs of medications for seniors. And while U.S. taxpayers are like that Costco shopper — getting stuck with a higher bill be-

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Medicare in the new Congress

By Congressman Earl Blumenauer

The recent shift in Congress promises some exciting opportunities for issues that have been neglected or made worse by the Republican majority. The incoming Speaker-Elect, Nancy Pelosi, and Democrats are committed to not only act on the important issues that the voters supported in the election, but to do so in the first 100 hours of the 110th Congress. One area needing reforms, and soon, is the Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Program.

The first step is to allow Medicare to negotiate prices for prescription drugs for seniors like we do for veterans. Unlike the Veterans Administration, Medicare is currently prohibited from negotiating lower drug prices which would reduce prices by 25% or more. Under this reform, Medicare beneficiaries in Oregon could see total savings ranging from \$800 million to \$1.5 billion over the next decade.

Arguably the most frustrating and troublesome aspect of the Part D drug program is the “doughnut hole”, the gap in coverage that occurs once a beneficiary has reached their initial limit of total drug expenses. Only after beneficiaries have spent thousands of dollars of their own money will they get out of the hole, all the while continuing to pay their monthly premiums though they receive no coverage. In Oregon, an estimated 103,000 Medicare recipients will hit the gap this

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Oregon ARA marches on...

By Verna Porter, President, Oregon Alliance for Americans



The big 2006 election is behind us and we have much to feel optimistic about. We, as an organization,

have been given credit for having a very positive effect on the senior vote in this state.

Other organizations cited our October Special Edition Newsletter as a very effective tool for explaining the ballot measures, which can seem so convoluted and confusing when someone tries to figure out what is really being proposed.

We have also been vocal about the issues around Medicare Part "D", Social Security, health care and retirement security. Members

of the new Democrat majority in both houses on the state and national level assure us that progress will be made toward improvement of the status of many Americans because of the work they will now be able to do on these issues.

However, we need to be aware that this is not the time to rest on our laurels. Bill Sizemore and others like him have already started preparing their undermining agenda for the next election. We need to continue, as an organization, and as individuals, to be aware of what is happening and to be sure our voice continues to be heard and is clearly understood.

Our age group is the largest voting segment of the population. There is strength in numbers and I believe we have a moral obligation to demonstrate that strength.

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year. If the price negotiations reform is successfully passed there will be savings to eliminate or significantly reduce this gap in coverage.

Finally, if you neglected to sign up for Part D before May 15, 2006, the cost of your premium will likely go up at least 1% per month for every month that you waited to join. These increased premiums have to be paid for the lifetime of enrollment. Democrats are working to eliminate these penalties.

I voted against the Medicare prescription drug bill in 2003. Today I continue to hear problems and confusion associated with the bill. I feel very positive about the changes proposed by my Democratic colleagues and I look forward to working them the 110th Congress to make sure prescription drug prices are fair and affordable.

The Alliance for Retired Americans
Retiree Review is published by the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans, 4125 NE 72nd, Portland, OR 97218-3616
President: Verna Porter, (503) 284-8591, vvjporter@aol.com
First Vice President: Paul Krissell, 503-763-9419, pkrissell@alumni.upenn.edu
Second Vice President: vacant
Treasurer: Ron Rogers, (503) 503-864-2896, rogersaacse@aol.com
Secretary: Val Jack, (503) 543-0246, valerij@comcast.net
Trustee: John Klein (503) 639-5433
Trustee: Ron Rogers (503) 864-2896; rogersaacse@aol.com
Trustee: vacant
Northwest ARA Organizer: Steve Dzielak, (206) 718-0770, sdzielak@retiredamericans.org
Newsletter Editor: Val Jack, (503) 543-0246, valerij@comcast.net
Contributors to this issue: Verna Porter, Dave Grant, Steve Dzielak.

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Oregon ARA loses a friend

Oregon ARA member Al Scarcelli died in October of complications from diabetes; most people never quite knew the details of Al's health. Al was tough.

He worked as a journeymen mechanic for Freightliner Corp. for 37 years, but that wasn't all. He was a loyal and active member of the International Machinist and Aerospaceworkers (IAM) Local Lodge 1005, where he held many positions: an officer; a District #24 delegate to the IAM; a delegate to the Oregon Machinists' Council; a delegate to the Northwest Oregon Labor Council; and a long time shop steward at Freightliner, involved in several union contract negotiations with the employer.

Al attended and participated in educational programs, conventions, and political events here and "back East" as an IAM member and retiree; as a member of the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans, and as an Oregonian and an American. He brought back what he learned to us all.

Al was a strong voice for the working people and a true trade Unionist through and through. He thought about the things he cared about, and made you know that very clearly when he spoke. It was good to have Al on your side, but you got something to think about if he wasn't.

Calendar of Events

Oregon ARA Meeting Schedule:

- * December 14, 10 am, Board Meeting, NOLC
- * December 28, 11 am, Holiday Luncheon, Steamers, 8303 NE Sandy Blvd
- * January 11, 10 am. Board Meeting, NOLC
- * January 25, 10 am, Membership Meeting, Westmoreland Union Manor, 6404 SE 23rd Ave., Portland, OR

Big changes — or at least bigger opportunities: Oregon goes blue!

By “soon to be former” State Representative, Steve March

Oregon voters decided that it was time to give the Democrats a chance to move Oregon forward. November’s election returned to Democrats control of both houses of the Legislature for the first time since 1989. In the Senate the Democrats gained the majority in 2003, while the House of Representatives turned-over from Republicans in control at 33 to 27 to the Democrats in the House in control by 31 to 29.

Voters also returned Governor Ted Kulongoski to the Governorship while retaining former House Democratic leader Dan Gardner as Commissioner of Labor and Industries and former Democratic State Senator Susan Castillo as Superintendent of Education. This means all state-wide elected administrative officials and both houses of the legislature are in control of the Democrats.

What this means has been the subject of some debate. In the House it means the Speaker will be Rep. Jeff Merkley, Mid-Multnomah County. Merkley will be starting his fifth term in the legislature; he served as the House Democratic Leader in the last session. After having served in the minority for four terms, which seemingly became more rancorous each session, soon to be Speaker Merkley has pledged to bring civility back to the House. Rep. Diane Rosenbaum, Portland, was named Speaker Pro Tem and Rep. Dave Hunt, Clackamas County, was named House Majority Leader. Each brings a wealth of experience and dedication to their respective positions.

The Senate has remained Democratic and Sen. Peter Courtney will be elected President again. The Democrats have announced that Kate Brown will be returning as the Senate Majority Leader. Except for a couple of non-returning members and a couple of members going independent, there is expected to be less change in the Senate.

The real change of course is the House. This may not mean a lot of broad-sweeping policy changes, due primarily to the close numbers, but will mean many broadly supported pieces of legislation will finally make it to the floor for debate and vote. The previous House leadership preferred to keep many bills bottled up in committee. Under Merkley’s leadership expect more bills to reach the floor. They may not all pass, but legislators on both sides of the issues will finally be able to debate the issues and both they and the public will benefit.

Another area of change will be the Ways & Means process. By statute it is supposed to be a joint House and Senate process, but it was broken up last session into separate House and Senate special budget committees.

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cause we are not using our bargaining power — it is older folks who really suffer when they can not afford their medications.

Fortunately, we have already been able to make some headway on this issue in the U.S. Senate. U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe (R–Maine) and I, after years of bipartisan effort, earlier this year got the support of 54 Senators — a majority of the U.S. Senate — to lift this restriction and take stronger action to hold down the cost of medicine. Senator Snowe and I have also proposed legislation, the Medicare Prescription Drug Lifeline Act, to ensure that seniors do not fall into the “donut hole” of Medicare prescription drug coverage by alerting seniors when they approach coverage limits and allowing them to switch plans to avoid the gap.

And to address the complexity of the new Medicare drug benefit, I am working with U.S. Senator Max Baucus (D–Montana) and other Senators to pass legislation (the Medicare Prescription Drug Simplification Act of 2006) to simplify the prescription benefit, offer easier comparisons of competing drug plans, and prohibit plans from changing drug coverage in the middle of the benefit year. The good news for our simplification efforts is that Senator Baucus will serve as Chairman of the Finance Committee in the next Congress.

In addition to strong support from Senator Baucus, U.S. Senator Harry Reid (D–Nevada), who will serve as Senate Majority Leader, made it clear Medicare reform would be a top priority for the U.S. Senate to take up when we begin our work early next year. With this strong support in the next session of Congress, I hope to see a much-improved Medicare Part D benefit for Oregon seniors soon.

This session expect the Joint Committee on Ways and Means to remain joined. The House Democrats have name Rep. Mary Nolan, Portland, as the House Co-Chair of Ways & Means. Nolan, a business owner and former director of Portland’s Environmental Services, brings with her a zeal for math and business acumen. Senator Kurt Schrader, who was the Senate Co-Chair is likely to return in that capacity. Look for the budget process to stay together and a push to get the budget done on time by July 1, 2007. Helping that is around \$1.3 billion more in available funds, although competition for and demands on even that amount of money will be staggering.

This Holiday Season I’m dreaming of a civil legislative process with many more good ideas getting a fair hearing and enough funding for every great need. Oh, I’m also hoping all of you have a great new session.



Oregon ARA Membership Application/Financial Contribution

- YES! I as an individual, I want to join the Oregon Alliance and help protect Social Security and Medicare for generations to come. Enclosed is \$10 for a one-year individual/couple membership. (Payable annually) New Renewal
- I am already a member (through my union or individual membership) and would like to become a Financial Contributor to the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans by enclosing \$ _____ to help fund organization activities.

Please print:

Name: _____ Spouse: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email address: _____

Union Name & Number (if applicable): _____

Make your check or money order payable to **Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans** and mail with this form to: **Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans, 4125 NE 72nd, Portland, OR 97218-3616**

Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans Membership

By now many Medicare recipients have been enrolled in Medicare Part D (prescription drug coverage) for nearly a year. To some individuals this enrollment wasn't a problem (ie. if you're covered under a PERS medical insurance program, you were automatically enrolled; individuals who are covered by both Medicare and Medicaid—referred to as dual-eligible—were automatically enrolled).

For others, it has been a much more confusing issue. And, the open enrollment period is here again. If you are in this group and have had difficulties determining the best program for you, help is available from Senior Health Insurance

Benefits Assistance (SHIBA).

Additional areas SHIBA can assist individuals include: answers to Medicare coverage questions; answers to questions regarding co-pays; transportation assistance; in-home support; legal help; abuse; housing and/or meals; any other problems related to aging and disabilities.

Call SHIBA 503-988-3646 (24-hour help line); 503-988-3683 (TTY).

State-wide the toll-free number in Salem is 800-722-4134.

Or, check out the website:
<http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/ads/index.shtml>

Save these numbers. You never know when you may need to seek assistance for yourself, a friend or a relative.



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Portland, OR 97218-3616

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