

Retiree Review

A publication of the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans

Oregon ARA to elect officers at Convention

Officers will be elected at the Fourth Annual Convention of the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans Convention (See page 3) on Friday, March 17.

Current officers whose term of office are expiring include: President, Verna Porter; First Vice President, Paul Krissel; Secretary, Val Jack; Treasurer, and Ron Rogers. Two currently vacant positions,

Second Vice President, and Trustee will also be elected.


Two year terms of office will begin at the next scheduled Board meeting (April 12) fol-

lowing the Convention.

Individuals wishing to run for any of these positions should send a letter of interest to Election Committee, Oregon ARA, 4125 NE 72nd, Portland, OR 97218-3616.

For additional information and Convention Registration, see the Call to Convention included with this newsletter and

4th Annual Oregon ARA Convention
 Saturday, March 17
 9:00 a.m.
Longshore Hall
 2435 NW Front
 Portland, Oregon



Check out the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans Website: www.orara.org.

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Lemonade from a White House lemon

By Steve Kofahl

If the 2005 White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA) was a lemon – and in many respects it was – the Alliance for Retired Americans is determined to turn the groundbreaking work of its 1200 delegates into a recipe for healthful lemonade.

On December 7, 2006, the Alliance issued a report entitled “The 2005 White House Conference on Aging: Neglecting a Generation.” The full report and an executive summary were researched and written by ARA Policy Director Dianna Porter.

The Alliance followed up on December 11, marking the first anniversary of the Conference with a press release entitled, “New Report Looks at \$7 Million Bush Administration Whitewash on Seniors’ Conference.” We strongly encourage you to read, share and utilize these excellent, hard-hitting documents, which have been posted to the Alliance (www.retiredamericans.org) and AFL-CIO websites.

An early opportunity to discuss the report came December 13 at the Oregon WHCoA Follow-up Summit, hosted by ARA member Dr. Jim Davis (Sen. Wyden’s delegate to the WHCoA) at Marylhurst University. Participating in the all-day meeting were 65 activists, including Verna Porter and others from Oregon’s Conference delegation, representatives from two Congressional offices, and Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain.

Having been Washington House Member Rep. Jay Inslee’s delegate to the WHCoA, I was on the agenda to discuss our experiences, with emphasis on the Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recommendations produced by the Conference delegates exactly one year earlier. These recommendations appear on pages 15-17 of the ARA report.

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Part D bumbles along like a Three Stooges movie

By Will Parry

If it didn’t involve life-or-death issues for the people on Medicare, it’d be more hilarious than a Three Stooges comedy.

We’re talking about Medicare Part D. It’s entering its second full year, still plagued by technical pratfalls, glaring omissions and widespread confusion among beneficiaries.

A few highlights:

- Many drug plans failed to notify their enrollees of changes in premium, formularies and other plan features that took effect January 1, 2007. Notice of changes was supposed to have been sent out by October 31. An official at UnitedHealth Group, one of the largest plans, admitted his company had failed to notify “perhaps 200,000” of its enrollees.
- When they do send out the required “annual notice of change,” it may be a fine-print document of 30 to 40 pages. Pity the senior with failing eyesight!
- Insurers complain about long delays in getting Medicare to correct the records on

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Election's over...the work begins

By Verna Porter, President, Oregon Alliance for Americans



The elections of November, 2006 are long over. Now, it's time for the people we sent--or sent back—to the state legislature and

Congress to get down to unfinished or badly done business that the deposed regime covered up with hypocritical rhetoric and scare tactics. There's a new dynamic at work in both Salem and the District of Columbia.

The Democratic majority wants to do something about getting health care to all citizens and making the environment safer and more livable for all of us. There are also more voices demanding a sane, moral ap-

proach to the mess we created in Iraq.

Because we--both active working members and retiree groups like ORARA and Pacific Coast Pensioners Association of the ILWU (PCPA) -- played a central role in getting people elected (AGAIN!), elected officials are very aware of our strength and what we are asking of them. I've already been asked what the Oregon ARA's opinion is on important issues by both state and national legislators. Many of us have made ourselves highly visible to them so they are, at this point, making an attempt to be accountable to us. Now, our problem is that we need to make our **entire** membership understand that the job isn't finished just because we've gotten some people elected who will listen to us.

We know that union membership is getting smaller nationally. We know that attendance is very low at both union and retiree meetings. Unions have given some of us a quality of life that a huge portion of the citizenship does not have, even though very many of them have worked as hard as we have.

We live the dream that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had for all Americans; the dream that millions fought for on picket lines and bread lines, in combat in Europe and the Pacific, and again when peace and prosperity merged in the 1950s. If we don't give of our time (and money) as a way to be actively involved in the societal and political activities of our unions and retiree groups; if we don't support efforts to enlarge and strengthen the political voice that we helped create, we CAN and WILL lose the things we take for granted. We could cease to live that dream.

Dreams can be reality, but only with ongoing effort. Showing up, speaking up, and stepping up all matter. We know there's strength in numbers. Let's get out there and demonstrate our strength to the politicians, and to those who want to return to the America that FDR, the labor movement, and your grandparents and great-grandparents helped to change.

(Continued from page 1) *Bumbling along*

which their payments are based. And insurers say they're not getting guidance from Medicare on how to compute the 1% a month surcharge imposed on beneficiaries who delay enrolling past the deadline.

- Medicare has placed misleading ads in major media that say "if you're satisfied with your current coverage, you don't need to do anything." The ads fail to mention that costs and coverage have changed in many plans.

- "Medicare and Social Security are still trying to straighten out problems in the withholding of prescription drug premiums from Social Security checks," reports Robert Pear in the New York Times.

"Medicare mistakenly sent premium refunds to tens of thousands of people, and it failed to make the proper deductions for others."

Will Parry is the President of the Puget Sound ARA, and the Editor of The Retiree Advocate.

(Continued from page 1) *Lemonade*

We then led a workshop to develop strategies to move these recommendations forward, to supplement them, and to address issues involving pension security and universal health care. The results of our work will be reduced to writing and posted to the Oregon ARA website (www.orara.org). The full ARA report is also available there, and at www.retiredamericans.org.

Oregon ARA President Verna Porter (Congressman Blumenauer's delegate) and Northwest ARA Organizer Steve Dzielak also spoke. The Alliance was repeatedly recognized as the pre-eminent organization that prepared delegates to take control of the Conference, and that is now pushing for implementation of a progressive agenda on behalf of aging Americans over the next decade. We agreed to work closely together in our two states on this ongoing campaign.

In February, joint efforts are expected to continue with Davis and members of the Washington delegation to create activities that keep these urgent issues alive in the Pacific Northwest.

The report is an excellent vehicle to carry our message that things must

The **Alliance for Retired Americans Retiree Review** is published by the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans, 4125 NE 72nd, Portland, OR 97218-3616;

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The corruption that gave us Medicare Part D

The story of how former Rep. Tom DeLay, lobbyist Jack Abramoff and their sleazy associates, masterminded a year-long campaign that squeezed the 2003 Medicare prescription drug bill through Congress was told for the first time in a superbly researched article by Barbara T. Dreyfuss in the November issue of the Washington Monthly.

If you hadn't heard, don't be surprised. The tale has been overlooked or ignored by major print and broadcast media.

Dreyfuss notes that DeLay drew on "more than 800 pharmaceutical lobbyists, millions of dollars in campaign contributions, and the efforts of numerous business and health care groups" in pushing the legislation toward passage.

"Using a nest of nonprofits flush with corporate cash, the discredited lobbyists played a vital, albeit hidden, role in whittling down congressional opposition to the bill for more than a year before the final vote." Ed Buckham, a former DeLay staffer, founded both the Alexander Strategy Group, a consulting firm, and the so-called U.S. Family Network, the nonprofit that linked DeLay to Abramoff's clients. Tony Rudy joined Alexander Strategy as a partner.

For more than a year, Alexander Strategy, the U.S. Family Network and a DeLay political action committee called Americans for a Republican Majority (ARMPAC) shared a Washington, D.C. townhouse where DeLay sometimes made fund-raising phone calls. Alexander Strategy employed three "senior" nonprofits – the United Seniors Association, the Seniors Coalition and 60 Plus – and a Christian evangelical group, America 21. All four groups were heavily funded by the pharmaceutical industry. All three "senior" organizations were shell organizations with no real membership base.

In 2000, Alexander Strategy acquired its biggest account, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association (PhRMA), the drug industry's lobbying arm, compliments of Abramoff.

To ensure a congressional majority for the Medicare drug legislation, Alexander Strategy employed what Dreyfuss describes as a "shadowy network" of nonprofits, including the phoney "senior" groups, who were "havens for unlimited, untraceable corporate wealth" and who were "used to run 'grassroots' campaigns for partisan causes and political candidates."

The United Seniors Association was founded in 1991 by Richard Viguerie, a notorious right-wing fundraiser, but was taken

over in 2000 by Charles Jarvis, a Reagan Administration operative, who recruited Jack Abramoff, among others, to its board. Under Jarvis' direction, United Seniors' revenue rose to \$25 million in 2002 -- \$20 million contributed by a single unidentified donor, quite possibly PhRMA. The Senior Coalition and 60 Plus definitely received substantial sums from PhRMA.

The evangelical nonprofit, America 21, raised less than \$25,000 in both 2000 and 2001, but \$3.6 million from a single source in 2002, the year of Alexander Strategy's sophisticated campaign aimed at firming up a handful of doubtful congressmen. In America 21's tax return, the identity of the \$3.6 million donor was largely blacked out, but Dreyfuss said that the words "pharmaceutical" and "association" can be made out.

In 2002, Tony Rudy, DeLay's former deputy chief of staff, joined Alexander Strategy as a partner. Rudy had worked to befriend Abramoff while on DeLay's staff. With the 2002 mid-term elections approaching, DeLay and the Republican House leadership were anxious to neutralize the Democrats' historic advantage on healthcare issues. At 2:30 a.m. on June 28, 2002, the Republicans pushed their Medicare drug bill through the House on a party-line vote. At that time, the bill was blocked by the Democratic majority in the Senate. Nevertheless, passage in the House achieved the Republicans' key objective: It converted Medicare into a Republican issue in many close 2002 races.

Dreyfuss notes that the 2002 election was held shortly before the McCain-Feingold campaign financing law took effect. That meant that 2002 was the last election year in which the parties could raise unlimited, unreported money and "in which corporations could secretly fund nonprofit 'issue' ads." With Alexander Strategy calling the plays, Republican leaders made the most of the window of opportunity. Together, the three "senior" groups and America 21 waged TV or direct mail campaigns in 39 mostly competitive House and Senate races. United Seniors led the pack.

In May and June they ran a \$4.6 million TV campaign in support of the bill then before the House. In July, they spent \$2 million thanking members who had voted for it. And in September, they targeted members in competitive races with a \$4 million campaign. The placement of the ads and the content of the message were secretly orchestrated by PhRMA lobbyists, including Buckham and Rudy at Alexander Strategy.

"The 2002 elections set the stage for the passage of the Medicare drug bill the following year," Dreyfuss summarized. "The large sums poured into competitive races by the seniors' groups served as a warning to lawmakers who had doubts about the leadership's Medicare drug proposal. No one wanted this kind of money directed against them if they opposed the plan." The DeLay leadership was determined to force the drug bill through Congress before the 2004 election. They intended to campaign on the theme that Democrats couldn't pass a drug bill in 30 years "and we did it in 10."

As the Abramoff team calculated, the bill attracted staggering sums of money from the drug industry into the GOP's campaign coffers. With the Democrats united in opposition, the fate of the bill rested with a bloc of 30 fiscally conservative Republicans who opposed the measure as a costly and irresponsible expansion of an entitlement program.

Dreyfuss describes how Rudy and Buckham met frequently with Dave Mohler, PhRMA's chief congressional lobbyist as the bill moved through Congress in 2003). As a final vote neared, DeLay and his network began planning for a floor vote. Around a dozen lobbyists from hospitals, physicians, drug companies and business associations met regularly in a cozy room near DeLay's Capitol office." This "war

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change in Washington D.C. Wasteful spending on misplaced priorities must end, and programs that help regular people need to be protected and strengthened. The administration's abandonment of the aged and aging, and their attempts to misrepresent our accomplishments one year ago, can now be exposed in oversight hearings before the new Congress. At last we have a political environment that gives hope to committed progressive activists. We felt it in Oregon and Washington State. It will not die.

(Steve Kofahl is president of Local 3937 of the American Federation of Government Employees, representing front-line workers in the Social Security Administration.)



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**

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room” was directed by Susan Hirschmann, DeLay’s chief of staff. The United Seniors Association was brought into play, spending more than \$23 million on radio and TV ads targeting 15 senators and more than 50 House members.

At 3 a.m. November 22, 2003, the House brought to the bill to the floor. When it fell 15 votes short of passage, the arm-twisting began. At 5 a.m. Bush personally called hesitant Republican House members from the White House. At 5:50 a.m., the last two Republican holdouts caved in, ending the longest fifteen minute roll-call in congressional history. “Without the Alexander Strategy-run lobbying campaign,” Dreyfuss concluded, “DeLay’s Medicare vote could never have hinged on just two vulnerable lawmakers.”

“ . . . One of the main objects of the organization is the elevation of the lowest paid worker to the standard of the highest, and in time we may secure for every person in the trade an existence worthy of human beings.”

Samuel Gompers
1850—1924

Check out the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans website:
www.orara.org, currently under construction. You will find valuable information there. If you have suggestions of additional information you would like to see on the website, please email to vvjporter@aol.com.

Calendar of Events

Oregon ARA Meeting Schedule:

- Membership Meeting, Jan. 25, 10 am, Westmoreland Union Manor**
- Board Meeting, Feb. 8, 10 am, NOLC
- Membership Meeting, Feb 22, 10 am, Westmoreland Union Manor**
- Board Meeting, Mar. 8, 10 am, NOLC
- 4th Annual Convention, Mar. 17, 9:30 am, Longshore Hall, 2435 NW Front, Portland

** Westmoreland Union Manor, 6404 SE 23rd Ave, Portland, Portland, OR



The Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans
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CONVENTION INFORMATION
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Saturday, March 17, 2007