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Affiliated with the Rhode Island AFL-CIO



Publication 2014 / Issue 48
Published in house by the
RI ARA

December 1, 2014 E-Newsletter

Rhode Island Labor Movement Fought to Keep Workers at Home, Not Work on Thanksgiving

By John Killoy, RI AFL-CIO

Among the chain stores feasting on their workers and customers family time are a litany of corporate suspects, including Walmart, Kohl’s, JC Penney, Sears, CVS, Target, Macy’s, Best Buy and Kmart, which is opening stores at 6 a.m. on Thanksgiving.

Where are the family values conservatives and Fox News anchors to complain about this intrusion on the most family-centric of all American holidays? Norman Rockwell’s famous illustration of a family seated around the table as grandma carries a plump turkey from the oven is a famous symbol of Thanksgiving.

Nowadays, the premature shopping start by predatory profits-over-people retailers fall mostly on lower paid workers, many of whom make little more than minimum wage. Once again in a society riven by inequality and the growing chasm among the haves, the have nots and the have-mores, it is the bottom rung of workers who bear the sacrifice.

Banks, law firms and universities are all closed on Thanksgiving. So their white-collar employees can enjoy Thanksgiving in the traditional manner, with food, football and family. Not so for the retail workers who must spring to work before the mince and pumpkin pie is served.

It’s bad enough that these retail chains pay their workers so little that the rest of the taxpayers subsidize their big box profits by picking up the tab for the Medicaid and Food Stamp benefits that low-wage employees need to make ends meet.

Maybe it is time to fight back by patronizing stores that refuse to open on Thanksgiving, including Costco, Patagonia, Marshall’s, T.J. Maxx, Nordstrom, American Girl, Barnes & Noble and the Burlington Coat Factory.

Rhode Islanders are luckier than most other Americans on Thanksgiving. Our state is one of the few that bars retailers and supermarkets from opening on Thanksgiving. Back in the 1970s, Rhode Island labor leaders successfully lobbied the General Assembly to enact this law. “We saw the Christmas creep trend and decided let’s have a family day on Thanksgiving,” recalls George Nee, President of the Rhode island. AFL-CIO.

“It’s something we’ve never given an inch on,” says Nee. Maybe other states should think about following our lead.” **Read Scott MacKay’s Commentary: The War Is On Thanksgiving, Not Christmas**

GivingTuesday Movement Rivals Black Friday and Cyber Monday

You have heard of Black Friday and maybe even Cyber Monday. We’d like to introduce you to our second year of GivingTuesday, a relatively new and growing holiday tradition that takes place next Tuesday, December 2nd.

The Alliance for Retired Americans joins non-profits from all 50 states in coming together to make the Tuesday after Thanksgiving a day when Americans counter the consumerism of Black Friday and give back to the causes that they believe in. We hope that this day will launch an even larger giving season when individuals, families, businesses, and citizens groups give to their communities and their neighborhoods.

After feasting, football, and shopping, you can make giving back part of your family's celebrations by participating in GivingTuesday with the Alliance for Retired Americans. Click here to make a donation to the Alliance: <http://tinyurl.com/pe63t67>. Every donation will help engage local communities in activism and educate policymakers and the public on issues of importance to people ages 60+, like protecting and improving Social Security and Medicare.

This year’s GivingTuesday can begin another chain reaction of people giving back and standing up for one another throughout the holiday season this year. Please join—and encourage your friends and family to do the same.

Don’t forget to share the message and news with your social networks and contacts: <http://tinyurl.com/pe63t67>.

Senior Citizen Obesity Counseling Medicare Benefit Goes Largely Unused

Only about 120,000 seniors have participated, including about 50,000 last year

By Phil Galewitz, Kaiser Health News



Three years ago, the Obama administration offered hope to millions of overweight seniors **when it announced Medicare would offer free weight-loss counseling**. But less than 1 percent of Medicare's 50 million beneficiaries have used the benefit so far.

Officials estimated that about 30 percent of seniors are obese and therefore eligible for counseling services, which studies have shown improve the odds of significant weight loss.

Experts blame the government's failure to promote the program, rules that limit where and when patients can go for counseling as well as the low fees for providers.

Since November 2011, about 120,000 seniors have participated, including about 50,000 last year, according to federal data.

"It's very disappointing," said Dr. **Scott Kahan, an obesity medicine specialist at George Washington University**.

"It's a huge lost opportunity," said Bonnie Modugno, a registered dietician in Santa Monica, Calif., who advises doctors how to provide weight loss counseling....[Read More](#)

New Alzheimer's Disease Fighter may be Protein that Awakens Brain

Eliminating protein called orexin made mice sleep longer and strongly slowed the production of brain plaques

Scientists at Washington University, who earlier established links between sleep problems and Alzheimer's, now say a protein that stimulates the brain to awaken from sleep may be a target for preventing Alzheimer's disease.

The researchers at WU School of Medicine in St. Louis have shown in people and in mice that sleep loss contributes to the growth of brain plaques characteristic of Alzheimer's, and increases the risk of dementia.

The new research, in mice, demonstrates that eliminating that protein - called orexin - made mice sleep for longer periods of time and strongly slowed the production of brain plaques.

"This indicates we should be looking hard at orexin as a potential target for preventing Alzheimer's disease," said senior author David M. Holtzman, MD, head of the Department of Neurology. "Blocking orexin to increase sleep in patients with sleep abnormalities, or perhaps even to improve sleep efficiency in healthy people, may be a way to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's. This is important to explore further."

The research appears Nov. 24 in *The Journal of Experimental Medicine*...[Read More](#)



All Senior Citizens Under 76 Should Consider Statins to Reduce Cardiovascular Risks

All men and most women 66 to 75 qualify for statins in new study – 97 percent of all

Nearly all individuals in their late 60s and early 70s - including 100 percent of men - now qualify for, and should consider, starting a statin medication to reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease, under the recently released cholesterol guidelines from the American College of Cardiology (ACC) and the American Heart Association (AHA).

That's according to a research letter published today in the 11/20/2014 (*JAMA-IM*) by Michael D. Miedema, MD, MPH, a research cardiologist at Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation and cardiologist at Minneapolis Heart Institute at Abbott Northwestern Hospital.

Released in November 2013, the ACC/AHA guidelines for the treatment of blood cholesterol attempt to target individuals that are most likely to benefit from cholesterol-lowering statin therapy.

"The guidelines are a significant change from prior guidelines that relied heavily on levels of bad cholesterol to determine who to treat," states Dr. Miedema.

"Instead, the new guidelines recommend focusing statin therapy on the individuals that are at the highest risk for heart attack and stroke, even if their cholesterol levels are within normal limits."....[Read More](#)



"Granny scam" tricking elderly out of billions



They're known as "granny scams." Each year, older Americans lose millions of dollars to scam artists pretending to be loved ones who need money while traveling.

But a new weapon is being used to stop the scammers in their tracks. The ammunition comes from a place much closer to home, reports CBS News' Peter Greenberg.

Last January, Art Hurme, a retired government worker, received a frantic phone call from someone he thought he knew.

"It didn't sound quite right, but I have these hearing aids and I don't hear so good," Hurme said. "I said, 'Who is this?' and she said, 'Don't you know?' and so, I said my daughter's name, Kirsten."

The woman, now pretending to be his daughter, claimed to have been arrested for drunk driving in Los Angeles, more than 2,500 miles away from her home in Virginia.

"I said, 'You don't drink,'" he recalled. "And she said, 'Well, we went out for a party.' Okay, that seemed conceivable."

Despite his initial doubts about her, the woman on the phone -- his so-called daughter -- sounded desperate.

"They wanted \$3,000 to drop the reckless charges," Hurme said. "I said, 'well that sounds like bribery,' and he said, 'you want your daughter outta jail tonight or not?'"

Hurme followed instructions and purchased \$3,000 worth of gift cards and relayed the account information over the phone.

Hours later, Hurme's wife Sally, herself an expert in fraud prevention, realized what happened.

"I knew full well that once you wire money to one of these professional criminals the money is absolutely gone," she said.

The "granny scam" accounts for a growing part of the estimated \$2.9 billion seniors lose in financial scams each year.

Scammers now use social media to zero in on their potential victims. They often strike during school holidays and target seniors whose grandchildren are traveling and posting details of their trip.

One of the key components of these scams is the notion of long distance travel. Now law enforcement in one state has decided to battle these scammers closer to home.

In New York State, prosecutors have launched a campaign where grandkids are being enlisted as virtual fraud fighters. New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman said the goal is to have grandparents and their grandkids prepared before the scammers hit.

"Part of this is trying to get them to take down some of the information that they leave hanging around social media, but the other is as simple as having a password saying, 'Look, if I'm ever in trouble grandma and grandpa, I will use the following word or phrase -- if you don't hear it -- it's not me,'" Schneiderman explained.

After he was scammed, Art Hurme got to work, reading up on the tactics used by the scammers. When they tried to dupe him again, he was ready.

"They called me up, like, a day or two later, and said my son-in-law had vandalized a car, or a house," he said.

He hung up and never heard back.

Calorie count rules cleared to add labeling to menus, vending machines

Weight-watching, health-conscious seniors expected to be big fans of help from FDA with choosing health foods

Senior citizens - among the most frequent consumers of restaurants and other eating-out places - will also be among the most pleased with the Food and Drug Administration's new rules requiring that calorie information be listed on menus and menu boards in chain restaurants, similar retail food establishments and vending machines with 20 or more locations. The goal is to provide consumers with more nutritional information about the foods they eat outside of the home.



The rules, finalized yesterday, are required by the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and were finalized yesterday

"Calorie control is key to reversing the nation's obesity epidemic. Thanks to these new FDA labeling rules, Americans will now have easier access to calorie counts for foods and drinks before they place an order or push the buttons on a vending machine," says American Heart Association CEO Nancy Brown....[Read More](#)

Going Gluten-Free May Not Be Good for Your Health: Consumer Reports

CR survey finds 63% of Americans believe a gluten-free diet would improve physical or mental health, FDA also says cutting gluten isn't always more nutritious or better for most people

Gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye, has become the latest dietary villain, blamed for everything from forgetfulness to joint pain to weight gain. But Consumer Reports (CR) is shedding light on common misconceptions about going gluten-free.

The full report, "The Truth About Gluten," is available online at ConsumerReports.org and in the January 2015 issue of *Consumer Reports*, which hits newsstands next week.

The report points out that a gluten-free claim doesn't mean the product is necessarily more nutritious, it may actually be less so; that consumers may increase their exposure to arsenic by going gluten-free, and a gluten-free diet might cause weight gain—not weight loss. And, most gluten-free foods cost more than their regular counterparts.

Still, a new survey of more than 1,000 Americans conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center found that about a third of people buy gluten-free products or try to avoid gluten. Among the top benefits they cited were better digestion and gastrointestinal function, healthy weight loss, increased energy, lower cholesterol, and a stronger immune system.

"While people may feel better on a gluten-free diet, there is little evidence to support that their improved health is related to the elimination of gluten from their diet," said Trisha Calvo, deputy content editor, health and food, at Consumer Reports. "Before you decide to ride the wave of this dietary trend, consider why it might not be a good idea."

The Truth About Gluten

Unless someone has a gluten sensitivity or celiac disease – an autoimmune condition in which gluten causes potentially life-threatening intestinal damage – Consumer Reports says there is little reason to eliminate gluten, and doing so may actually be a disservice to one's health. Less than seven percent of Americans have these conditions.

A quarter of the people CR surveyed thought gluten-free foods have more vitamins and minerals than other foods. But CR's review of 81 products free of gluten across 12 categories revealed they're a mixed bag in terms of nutrition. Many gluten-free foods aren't enriched or fortified with nutrients such as folic acid and iron as many products that contain wheat flours are...[Read More](#)



No Benefits to Gluten-Free: FDA

Consumers with celiac disease must avoid gluten—proteins found in baked goods made with wheat and some other grains. For people not sensitive to gluten, there is no health benefit to a gluten-free diet. **See more from FDA below.**

Spanish Friday Alert now Available

The *Friday Alert* will now be available each week in Spanish! To see last week's *Alerta Semanal*, go to <http://tinyurl.com/mq7gpry>. For the Alliance's Spanish language page, which includes fact sheets and other translated documents from the main site, go to <http://tinyurl.com/nllcz6n>. More outreach from the Alliance to the Hispanic elder community will be coming in the next few months.

The New England ARA state affiliates are actively pursuing these Petitions.

Petition Subject: Observation Status: "Current Hospital Issues in the Medicare Program"

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**Get The Message Out:
SIGN THE PETITION!!!!**

Petition Subject: House Concurrent Resolution 67 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 26 to get power doors installed in Post Offices and other federal buildings.

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Petition Subject: Elimination of the Unfair GPO and WEP Provisions of the Social Security Act to make sure the Congress of the United States enacts legislation, HR 3118 & S 896

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