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RI ARA

*"Fighting for the future of our members,
NOW, more than ever!!!!"*

Affiliated with the Rhode Island AFL-CIO



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RECEIVED AN E-MAIL FROM SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS



Dear John,

I want to take this opportunity to wish you and yours a very happy new year. I also want to express my gratitude to you for the political support that you have given to me, and for all of your efforts in trying to move our country and the world in the direction of peace, justice and environmental sanity.

As we survey our country at the end of 2013 I don't have to tell you that the problems facing us are monumental, that the Congress is dysfunctional and that more and more people (especially the young) are, understandably, giving up on the political process. The people are hurting. They look to Washington for help. Nothing is happening.

- The middle class continues to decline with median family income some \$5,000 less than it was in 1999.
- More Americans, 46.5 million, are now living in poverty than at any time in our nation's history. Child poverty, at 21.8 percent, is the highest of any major country.
- Real unemployment is not 7 percent. If one includes those who have given up looking for work and those who want full-time work but are employed part-time, real unemployment is 13.2 percent -- and youth unemployment is much higher than that.
- Most of the new jobs that are being created are part-time work at low wages, but the minimum wage remains at the starvation level of \$7.25 per hour.
- Millions of college students are leaving school deeply in debt, while many others have given up on their dream of a higher education because of the cost.
- Meanwhile, as tens of millions of Americans struggle to survive economically, the wealthiest people are doing phenomenally well and corporate profits are at an all-time high. In fact, wealth and income inequality today is greater than at any time since just before the Great Depression. One family, the Walton family with its Wal-Mart fortune, now owns more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of Americans. In recent years, 95 percent of all new income has gone to the top 1 percent.
- The scientific community has been very clear: Global warming is real, it is already causing massive problems and, if we don't significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the planet we leave to our kids and grandchildren will be less and less habitable.

Clearly, if we are going to save the middle class and protect our planet, we need to change the political dynamics of the nation. We can no longer allow the billionaires and their think tanks or the corporate media to set the agenda. We need to educate, organize and mobilize the working families of our country to stand up for their rights. We need to make government work for all the people, not just the 1 percent.

Continued on next page

When Congress reconvenes for the 2014 session, here are a few of the issues that I will be focusing on.

- ◆ **WEALTH AND INCOME INEQUALITY:** A nation will not survive morally or economically when so few have so much while so many have so little. It is simply not acceptable that the top 1 percent owns 38 percent of the financial wealth of the nation, while the bottom 60 percent owns all of 2.3 percent. We need to establish a progressive tax system which asks the wealthy to start paying their fair share of taxes, and which ends the outrageous loopholes that enable one out of four corporations to pay nothing in federal income taxes.
- ◆ **JOBS:** We need to make significant investments in our crumbling infrastructure, in energy efficiency and sustainable energy, in early childhood education and in affordable housing. When we do that, we not only improve the quality of life in our country and combat global warming, we also create millions of decent paying new jobs.
- ◆ **WAGES:** We need to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. We should pass the legislation which will soon be on the Senate floor which increases the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour to \$10.10 an hour, but we must raise that minimum wage even higher in the coming years. We also need to expand our efforts at worker-ownership. Employees will not be sending their jobs to China or Vietnam when they own the places in which they work.
- ◆ **RETIREMENT SECURITY:** At a time when only one in five workers in the private sector has a defined benefit pension plan; half of Americans have less than \$10,000 in savings; and two-thirds of seniors rely on Social Security for more than half of their income we must expand Social Security and make sure that every American can retire with dignity.
- ◆ **WALL STREET:** During the financial crisis, huge Wall Street banks received more than \$700 billion in financial aid from the Treasury Department and more than \$16 trillion from the Federal Reserve because they were "too big to fail." Yet today, the largest banks in this country are much bigger than they were before taxpayers bailed them out. It is time to break up these behemoths before they cause another global economic collapse.
- ◆ **CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM:** We are not living in a real democracy when large corporations and a handful of billionaire families can spend unlimited sums of money to elect or defeat candidates. We must expand our efforts to overturn the disastrous *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision and move this country to public funding of elections.
- ◆ **SOCIAL JUSTICE:** While we have made progress in recent years in expanding the rights of minorities, women and gays, these advances are under constant attack from the right wing. If the United States is to become the non-discriminatory society we want it to be, we must fight to protect the rights of all Americans.
- ◆ **CIVIL LIBERTIES:** Frankly, the National Security Agency (NSA) and some of the other intelligence agencies are out of control. We cannot talk about America as a "free country" when the government is collecting information on virtually every phone call we make, when they are intercepting our emails and monitoring the websites we visit. Clearly, we need to protect this country from terrorism, but we must do it in a way that does not undermine our constitutional rights.
- ◆ **WAR AND PEACE:** With a large deficit and an enormous amount of unmet needs, it is absurd that the United States continues to spend almost as much on defense as the rest of the world combined. The U.S. must be a leader in the world in nuclear disarmament and efforts toward peace, not in the sale of weapons of destruction.

Let me conclude by once again wishing you a happy and healthy new year -- and by asking you to share this email with friends, family and co-workers. **[They can sign-up for our occasional emails by clicking here.](#)**

This is a tough and historical moment in American history. Despair is not an option. Let us stand together as brothers and sisters and fight for the America our people deserve. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,



Senator Bernie Sanders

The Hill runs Parkinson, Coalition Piece on Observation Stays

By Claire Krawczyn



Last week, a DC-based online publication, The Hill, which is widely read by members of Congress and their staffs, featured a piece penned by the observation stays coalition. The 1,100-word article, “Don’t deny seniors nursing care,” focuses on how observation stays impact Medicare beneficiaries and the proposed legislation that seeks to address the issue. As noted in the opinion-editorial, the coalition writes:

“The issue is gaining ground in Washington, and we are here to ensure that it does not fade away – that Congress continues to listen to Medicare patients and their advocates. We must continue this momentum. More can be done – and more must be done. Patient advocates and provider groups alike are calling on policymakers to fix this problem once and for all, and enact into law the Improving Access to Medicare Coverage Act. Now is the time. Our aging population simply cannot afford to wait any longer for this issue to be addressed.”

The coalition members who participated in penning the article are: AARP; AMDA; **Alliance for Retired Americans**; American Case Management Association; American Health Care Association; American Medical Association; Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.; The Jewish Federation of North America; LeadingAge; Medicare Rights Center; National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys; National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers; National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs; National Center for Assisted Living; National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare; National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care; National Senior Citizens Law Center; Society of Hospital Medicine.

ARA Joins Find Me 911 Coalition to Address Location Accuracy Issue

The Alliance for Retired Americans (ARA) joined Find Me 911, a coalition of emergency responders, 9-1-1 dispatchers and others interested in helping first responders accurately locate people facing emergencies. “Find Me 911 is working to address the critical issue of accurately locating 9-1-1 callers, which is an important safety issue for our members,” said Richard J. Fiesta, executive director, ARA. “We look forward to working together to ensure emergency response personnel receive fast and accurate location information for all 9-1-1 calls, because every second counts.”

The ARA is a nationwide organization of 4 million members with a primary objective to mobilize retired union members and other seniors and community activists into a nationwide grassroots movement. They work to make their voices heard on the laws and policies that shape our lives and to strengthen retirement security.

“We are excited that the Alliance for Retired Americans is joining us in this important effort,” said Jamie Barnett, director of Find Me 911. “Data released by the Federal Communications Commission shows that many wireless calls to 9-1-1 do not have accurate location information associated with them. With an increased number of seniors using wireless phones it is vital that dispatchers receive faster, more accurate information to keep seniors and others safe.”...[Read More](#)

The New England ARA state affiliates are still actively pursuing the Petition. So, if you haven’t already done so, PLEASE sign our Petition on the 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

ADD
YOUR
NAME

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

Medicare, Other Health Care Spending Slowing but Cost Controls Must Be Implemented

New England Journal of Medicine study finds health spending rose just 0.8% per person in 2012, Affordable Care Act measures to control costs may be contributing to biggest slowdown in decades

The growth of health care cost is slowing and at least a portion is due to actions stemming from Obamacare (Affordable Care Act), but regardless of the causes, the U.S. needs to try to control health spending. An analysis, published today in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, also finds that a broad, bipartisan consensus about strategies that will be effective in controlling costs has emerged.

According to a new study by David Blumenthal, M.D., and Kristof Stremikis of The Commonwealth Fund and David Cutler, Ph.D., of Harvard University, health care spending rose only moderately last year for the third year in a row, increasing by 0.8 percent per person, slightly less than the rate of growth of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita.

This trend marks a departure from the previous five decades, and may be fueled in part by payment reforms contained within the Affordable Care Act (ACA)...[Read More](#)



Medicare to Open Advantage Plan Disenrollment; Other Key Information in Marci's Medicare Answers

Marci's Q&A has information about Medicare in the new year that may be critical to some senior citizens: **changing back to original Medicare, changes in 2014, getting Extra Help**

Although Medicare just closed "Open Enrollment" earlier this month, there is a new "Disenrollment" period about to open, when seniors enrolled in Medicare Advantage can switch to Original Medicare. This and other important information about Medicare in 2014 are explained below in the "Dear Marci" Q&A from the Medicare Rights Center.

Dear Marci,

I was told that I could switch from a Medicare Advantage plan to Original Medicare during the Medicare Advantage Disenrollment Period. What is the Medicare Advantage Disenrollment Period? — Carlie

Dear Carlie,

The Medicare Advantage Disenrollment Period (MADP) occurs January 1 to February 14 of each year. During this time, people who have a Medicare Advantage plan, also known as a Medicare private health plan, can switch to Original Medicare, the traditional Medicare program administered by the federal government...[Read More](#)



Study is First Linking Stroke Directly to Anxiety; Earlier Study Finds It Deadly for Heart Patients

In older adults, anxiety disorders often occur at the same time as depression, heart disease, diabetes, and other medical problems



Congratulations, you have survived the period of peak anxiety during this holiday season. The greater your anxiety level, the higher your risk of having a stroke, according to new research published in the American Heart Association journal *Stroke*. And, heart disease patients who suffer anxiety have twice the risk of dying.

Heart patients with both anxiety and depression have triple the risk of dying, researchers said, in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* published earlier this year.

The stroke study is reported to be the first in which researchers linked anxiety and stroke independent of other factors such as depression. Anxiety disorders are one of the most prevalent mental health problems. Symptoms include feeling unusually worried, stressed, nervous or tense.

Over a 22 year period, researchers studied a nationally representative group of 6,019 people 25-74 years old in the first National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES I)...[Read More](#)