



# NRLN Focus



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Summer 2010

## **The NRLN Clarion Call...Grassroots Face-To-Face Time**

By Bill Kadereit, NRLN President



It is your willingness to take action as a Grassroots Network member that in large measure determines how successful the NRLN can be in influencing members of Congress.

The NRLN has an Executive Director and a Legislative Strategist who spend many hours

each week on Capitol Hill meeting with members of Congress and their staffs and attending hearings on retirement-related issues. But it is our Grassroots Network members who are the constituents of the Representatives and Senators who have the power to reinforce the messages that our Washington, DC team delivers. We can count on a nucleus of Grassroots Network members to send emails and make phone calls to their elected representatives each time the NRLN issues an Action Alert, but we need the involvement of many more individuals.

### **Easy to Send Emails**

If you have never sent an NRLN sample letter to your elected representatives, I urge you to do so the next time you receive an NRLN Action Alert. I think you will find the process on the NRLN website relatively simple. In order to email your letter, you will be asked for your contact information. This is not an NRLN requirement, but a requirement established by members of Congress so they know they are receiving a letter from an actual constituent and not some computer automatically generating a "canned" message.

### **Need More Grassroots Face-to-Face Meetings**

While we must continue to motivate thousands of individuals in our database to take action through emails and calls from the "voters back home," we must also expand our Grassroots Network's

influence beyond emails and phone calls. We must recognize that constituent voters who meet "face-to-face" with their elected officials represent a very powerful and the most influential lobbying tool of all. All politicians bow to the prospect of gaining or retaining a vote. This is what Tip O'Neil, the deceased speaker of the House of Representatives, meant when he said "all politics is local."

Phone calls to district and state Congressional offices add credibility to the points we are

### **September 2010 Capitol Hill Fly-In:**

**The face-to-face meetings that Grassroots Network members had on Capitol Hill last September during the NRLN's first Fly-in/Drive-in were successful enough that serious consideration is being given to conducting the event again this September, provided there is a sufficient show of interest. The briefing for Grassroots Network members would take place on the afternoon of Monday, September 13th and the next day, September 14th, would be spent on Capitol Hill meeting with members of Congress and/or staff members.**

**A webpage for a preliminary show of interest from Grassroots Network members has been created. If you think there is a fairly good chance that you would go to Washington, DC for this event, please go to [www.nrln.org/flyin.html](http://www.nrln.org/flyin.html) to do a tentative registration. This will give us an idea on whether planning for the event should move forward.**

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attempting to emphasize. Face-to-face meetings with Representatives and Senators and their local staff members build the foundation for them to understand the concerns of retirees. Meeting with them or their staffs in Washington is also a part of that foundation (Please note the boxed insert about the possibility for face-to-face meetings on Capitol Hill in September.)

### **NRLN White Papers Essential**

The NRLN has advanced retiree support for health care and pension issues that count in Washington from obscurity to a point where our views on retiree issues are respected on the Hill and among various national ally organizations. We started as a single issue reactionary organization without an agenda, but today we have a well-developed set of health care and income security goals for which we proactively lobby. Over the past two years we have refined our approach and have developed professionally researched and prepared cases, or white papers, for each of our top priority goals. The topics for these white papers include:

- Pension Asset Protection
- Maintenance of Cost Payment (MCP) Benefits Protection Proposal
- Medicare Buy-In for Ages 55 – 64 at Cost
- Medicare Catastrophic Coverage
- Lowering the Cost of Prescription Drugs
- Corporate Bankruptcy Reform for Fairer Treatment of Retirees
- Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp Rules Reform to Protect Pension Income

Because more and more American companies face the potential of mergers and acquisitions, an additional white paper is currently being developed on this issue. It will advocate legislation that would clarify a parent foreign owner's pension plan obligations to abide by ERISA law should its U.S. subsidiary be spun off or dissolved. Clarification must include situations where foreign corporations that own U.S. subsidiaries are also acquired by a third party, foreign-owned corporation.

The white papers are presented to members of Congress and their staffs to educate and inform them about the need for legislation. The executive summaries from the white papers serve as the basis for a number of our Action Alerts and are made available to state and district Grassroots Network leaders to present to local Congressional offices. The executive summaries also serve as the

basis for "Talking Points" for all Grassroots Network members to use in their communications with members of Congress.

### **Mini Survey to Stay Current**

Based on the input we have received from the leaders of retiree associations that are members of the NRLN and our extensive 2007 and 2009 surveys of all Grassroots Network members, we believe we have a good grasp of issues that are important to retirees. To make sure that our issues data remains current, we will do a "mini" survey of Grassroots Network members later this year that will have fewer questions than our major surveys conducted every other year.

Additional initiatives directed toward escalating actions by Grassroots Network members are identified in an article in this issue by Bob Martina, NRLN Vice President – Grassroots Network. I urge you to read the article.

### **You Provide NRLN's Credibility**

All of the NRLN's efforts are directed toward making your retirement years more secure. It requires a team effort by the NRLN staff, retiree association leaders and all Grassroots Network members. Our credibility in our nation's capital comes from our Grassroots Network members who are retired from 114 companies and public entities, live in all 50 states and vote in practically every Congressional district. Please do your share to help advance the NRLN's legislative agenda for the fair and equitable treatment of retirees. You are the NRLN!

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### **Retiree Leaders Comment on Value of Communicating with Members of Congress**

The NRLN invited a few Retiree Association leaders to comment on the importance of a strong Grassroots Network to communicate with members of Congress. Here are their comments:



**Joe Dombrowski, Mountain Region Director, Lucent Retirees Organization (Scottsdale, AZ) -**

"The first contacts with Representatives and Senators are important but what happens next is critical for success. A 'pipeline' for communications needs to be established with local and Washington,

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DC offices. They must learn who you are and the organization you represent. The access to meetings with Congressional staff members is a focal point to deliver NRLN messages."

"The best method for recognition is achieved through follow-up. When I send a letter to my elected representatives, I wait a brief period then I make a telephone call to ask for feedback. This approach makes them aware of my level of interest. After some time of constantly making personal contacts, the following occurred: The staff alerts me to Town Hall meeting dates in my area and conference calls on topics that are of interest to retirees. Recently, Senator McCain's staff member with whom I had a meeting during the NRLN's January conference in Washington, DC sent an email to me to check on my availability in Arizona to meet him and the Senator."



**Bill Gabbard, President, JDRO - A Family of John Deere Retirees (Silvis, IL) -**

"Early on in the organization of the John Deere retirees (FRO), now JDRO, we realized the importance of contacting our Congressmen & Senators to explain our situation and request their support. Much to our surprise we discovered that Deere & Company had been to at least the Iowa U.S. Senators to review the pending changes to our health benefits before we knew what they were. That was a lesson that John Deere retirees also needed to communicate with members of Congress."

"In January this year, JRDO attended the NRLN conference in Washington, DC. We did the Capitol Hill visits and at each office of the Iowa / Illinois Congressmen and Senator we met with staffers. The name John Deere was recognized at all offices along with the NRLN name. It is imperative that we retirees become a 'force' to become reckoned with in our nation's capital."

**Evan Gost, Vice Chairman, Delta Disabled Pilots and Survivors Association (Laguna Hills, CA) -**  
"Congress originally passed the Employee Retirement Income Security



Act (ERISA) with the intention of protecting hard earned employee retirement benefits. Over the years as employers have modified or terminated retiree benefits, ERISA regulations unfortunately have not provided adequate protection. Because court decisions arguably have distorted the original intent of ERISA, legislation is needed to align ERISA with its original intent - fool-proof protection of retirement benefits."

"The NRLN Grassroots Network is a vital to efforts of convincing Congress to amend ERISA regulations in a manner that accomplishes the goal of protecting retirement benefits."

**Donnetta Mitchell, Utah President & Area Chair, Association of U S WEST Retirees - Utah/Idaho/Montana (Murray, UT) -** "The AUSWR and the NRLN will keep Grassroots Network members informed of the key issues we are working on that impact retirees but Grassroots Network members' help is needed to reinforce this with our legislators."



"Each of us needs to take responsibility to let our elected officials know what we expect of them. Please take the opportunity to contact your legislators - either by phone, email, regular mail, or in-town meetings. Talk with neighbors, family and other friends to encourage them to do the same. The only way our legislators will listen is if our collective voices are louder than the lobbyists! Please help us by doing your part."

**Deb Morrissett, Vice President, National Chrysler Retirement Organization (Troy, MI) -** "I



Deb Morrissett talks with former President Bill Clinton

often compare Grassroots activities to charitable contributions. If a charity doesn't communicate with me, the only time I would make a contribution is if its mission was already known and personally important to me. I receive hundreds of letters annually from many

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charities requesting that I make a contribution. Most of the letters are never opened. However, I have to admit that I can never pass a Salvation Army bell-ringer or the VFW folks selling poppies on the street corner. It's not that their missions are any more important than the thousands of other charities. It's because they have made personal contact and have shown me their dedication and commitment. It's impossible to walk away from someone standing in the freezing cold, ringing a bell and collecting coins!"

"If you do nothing, expect to receive nothing. Write the letter and there is a chance that your Congressperson (or staff) will read it. Meet with your Congressperson and you've made it personal. You look them in the eye, give them the facts and make a heartfelt plea. If enough of us do it and do it often, we have a chance to make real change."

**Ken Raschke, Founding President, Lucent Retirees Organization (Winston Salem, NC)** - "Persistence is the key to communications with members of Congress and their staffs.



Sending letters to Representatives and Senators are important. Equally important is face-to-face communication with the lawmaker or staff member."

"NRLN Grassroots Network members should not be hesitant to call the Washington, DC or district or state office to express the need for stronger legislation to protect retirement pensions and benefits. It is beneficial to our cause to develop an on-going dialogue with a staff member in a nearby office of Representatives and Senators. Meeting with a staff member a few times a year and emailing, faxing or dropping off NRLN messages between meetings will keep retirement issues on their radar screen."

"Attending Town Hall Meetings conducted by elected representatives is another good way to call attention to retiree concerns. Some members of Congress regularly conduct Teleconference Town Hall Meetings. Ask the local office for a schedule of Town Hall Meetings and let the office know that you

are interested in participating in Teleconference calls."

"As constituents and voters we have a right to be heard by our elected officials. We shouldn't be reluctant to expect their help in Congress to protect the pensions and benefits we've earned during decades of labor. Remember, the politicians know that all we seniors vote."

**Bob Volpe, President, EKRA - Kodak Retirees (Rochester, NY & Sarasota, FL)** - "NRLN Grassroots Network



Bob Volpe talks with New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

members can be a powerful influence on members of Congress. Responding to

NRLN Action Alerts to send emails, make phone calls and visit local offices are actions to which elected representatives pay attention."

"When I was a lobbyist for Kodak, elected officials told me that the two things important to them are votes and money, and votes trump money. They also told me that they start paying attention when they receive about 50 contacts from voters expressing their views on an issue. This is significant when you consider that each Congressional District has about 600,000 people, and Senators represent the population of their entire state. Voters' expression of a view on an issue becomes even more significant when you consider that in most elections, less than 50% of the people actually vote!"

"Take the time to respond to NRLN Action Alerts by sending the suggested emails to your Representative and Senators. Follow up with a phone call or gather a group of fellow retirees, make an appointment and visit your officials. Let them put a face with a vote."

## A View From Washington



By **Marta Bascom, NRLN Executive Director**

**Mid-Term Elections in November 2010 – Time to Ask Questions is Now**

On issues affecting retirees,

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(Continued from page 4) **A View From Washington**

Congress has been working over the past year on health care reform and restrictive temporary relief for companies to make contributions to pension plans while they recover from the economic downturn. Much of this work continues as implementation of health care reform and deliberations on pension relief move forward.

There are other very important issues being debated in Congress of importance to all Americans as well, such as financial reform and job security. As retirees, however, it is vitally important to keep Congress' attention on the particular issues which will have the greatest impact on older Americans, especially as incumbents and challengers begin campaign season in earnest during the summer months.

During an election cycle, it is very easy for politicians to divert everyone's attention from those issues that affect one's daily life. It is true that as a country, we have serious national security and financial institution crises which scream from the headlines every day. We are grappling with an economic downturn which has left too many Americans out of work. These are all serious issues, but they are not the only ones that are important.

Politicians need to be reminded that America's seniors face an economic crisis particular to them as they deal with health challenges, rising prescription drug costs, catastrophic illness leading to economic distress and/or bankruptcy, an embattled Social Security system, uncertainty in Medicare – a whole host of issues that were not either directly solved by health care

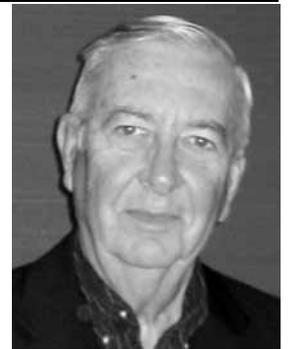
reform or were simply not addressed at all in that or any other legislation.

Congress is definitely suffering from fatigue as a result of the legislative debates and difficult votes. Political life is not easy, nor should it be. We are dealing with tough issues and have to wrestle with even tougher realities. The signing of health care reform into law should not give Congress a pass to leave unfinished business for another day.

Retirees need to keep politicians focused on retiree-specific issues, doing so by visiting district offices and attending town hall meetings, writing letters and encouraging their fellow retirees to do the same. Retirees aren't getting a pass from dealing with the burdens of rising costs; politicians – both incumbents and challengers – should not get a pass from committing to help.

## **MAKING NRLN GRASSROOTS NETWORK STRONGER**

**BY BOB MARTINA, NRLN VICE  
PRESIDENT – GRASSROOTS  
NETWORK**



**YOU are the key resource  
for the NRLN's Grassroots Network!**

**While I and others who work with me develop messages and other resources, the success of the NRLN Grassroots Network depends on whether you take action to communicate with U.S. Representatives and Senators.**

**Responding to the NRLN's Action Alerts by sending the NRLN's sample letter to members of Congress and calling Congressional offices to urge the desired action are important. However, stronger communications links are highly desirable. These include face-to-face meetings with Representatives and Senators and their staffs by visiting in-state offices,**

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(Continued from page 5) **MAKING NRLN GRASSROOTS NETWORK STRONGER**

attending Town Hall meetings and talking one-on-one with the lawmaker before or after the meeting, local office phone calls, and mailings. This should not be a one-time occurrence, but needs to be a continuing effort.

The primary resource to support your communications is our Grassroots Network organizational structure. Our Grassroots Network divides our 50 states among 10 Regional Vice Presidents. Our goal is to have at least one State Grassroots Leader for each state and one or more Congressional District Grassroots Leaders for each of the 435 Congressional Districts.

### **Grassroots Directory Webpage**

Our organizational directory is available on the NRLN website at [www.nrln.org/directory.html](http://www.nrln.org/directory.html). Where there are vacancies in our structure, Regional Vice Presidents and State Leaders are working with me to fill the positions. If you would like to serve as a State or Congressional District Grassroots Network Leader, please send me an email with your name, contact information and Congressional district at [rfjm9870@aol.com](mailto:rfjm9870@aol.com). I'll work with your Regional and State Leader to get you involved.

Individuals who become state and district leaders are provided a "training packet" that includes information on how to communicate the NRLN's Legislative Agenda to members of Congress. When you access the Grassroots Network directory webpage, note the links to three different websites where information about members of Congress can be found.

### **Online Activity Log**

Recently completed is a new webpage designed for any Grassroots Network member to report on his or her contacts with a Representative or Senator or a member of his/her staff. Go to <http://www.nrln.org/grassroots-log.html> to access the Grassroots Network "Activity Log" and enter your report. Your report can be based on a phone call, a face-to-face meeting, dropping off NRLN information, or participation in a Town Hall Meeting (on-site or

teleconference).

If you have email access, you are familiar with the Action Alerts issued by the NRLN when there is a need to send a letter to your members of Congress, and in some cases the President or the head of a federal agency. It is extremely important for Grassroots Network members to react and send the NRLN's sample letter with their personal comments added.

### **Letters to the Editor**

In April, we concluded that we would try to amplify the NRLN's emails to Washington, DC through letters to the editor. As a starting point, I asked Grassroots Leaders to send a letter to their local newspaper stating their support for two issues:

1. Repeal the provision in the new health care law that denies employers the tax deduction for federal subsidies for providing retirees with a Medicare Part D prescription drug plan;
2. Enact the NRLN's proposal that would assure continuation of benefits and would also offer tax credits to companies who commit to maintain retiree health care benefits. This saves the Medicare program from the high costs of covering retirees entirely. The proposal is a win-win for retirees and the government.

A newspaper in California and one in Texas published the letter sent by its readers who are Grassroots Network Leaders. We'll try to build on these first two successes in the future.

### **No Substitute for Your Action**

We will continue to seek additional ways to spread the NRLN's messages for the benefit of retirees. But the one proven effective method is for YOU, the Grassroots Network member, to take the responsibility for voicing your views to your elected representatives that retirees must receive fair treatment under our nation's laws.



## Judy Stenberg Considers NRLN Best Channel to Congress

Judy Stenberg, Pension Equity Council (PEC) President of the Oregon-

Washington affiliate of the Association of U S WEST Retirees, has been an NRLN Board member since 2008. She took early retirement in 1996 from her position as an Information Technology (IT) manager at U S WEST. During her 30-year career with the telecommunications company that was acquired by Qwest, she worked in "almost all departments."

A member of PEC since 1997, she became secretary of the organization in 2003 and assumed the presidency in 2005. She and her husband, Donald, live in Issaquah, WA.

"I'm involved with the NRLN because we retirees worked long and hard for our pensions and benefits, which I consider deferred earnings," Stenberg said. "In addition, we also worked to earn Social Security and Medicare. These are critical and necessary components to a retiree's quality of life that the NRLN endeavors to protect."

Stenberg said she believes the NRLN is the best channel to have retirees' demands heard in Washington, DC.

"The NRLN does not wine, dine, or give money to those in Congress, yet it is an effective channel to have our voices heard in unity to make our demands known," she said. "Further, the NRLN provides its members up-to-date information on legislation in Washington and gives members easy to use tools to communicate with their elected representatives regarding legislation."

As the NRLN's Pacific Northwest Regional Vice President, she said she has three top objectives:

1. She will continue to get the word out to retirees about the existence of the NRLN and the critical role that it can play in

their lives. Some retirees are not aware of the NRLN or they do not understand the value that the NRLN represents.

2. She will continue to encourage people to watch for NRLN Action Alerts that are sent out asking that retirees contact their Senators and Representatives regarding legislative action. These contacts are critical to successfully providing retirement security.

She will also continue to be in contact with Senators, Representatives, and their staffs for the Pacific Northwest Region, including going to Washington D. C. to make known what retirees need and expect from Congress.

### National Retiree Legislative Network, Inc.

*The NRLN is the only nationwide organization solely dedicated to representing the interests of retirees and future retirees. Our mission is to secure federal legislation to protect retirees' employer-sponsored pensions and benefits plus keep Social Security and Medicare strong.*

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**How You Can Help The NRLN:** If you have Internet access and do not receive NRLN emails, you should sign up at <http://capwiz.com/abtr/mlm/signup/> and ask your friends to sign up. When you receive an NRLN Action Alert, email the NRLN's letter to your members of Congress. Also, please make a financial contribution of \$25, \$50, \$75 or more. Any amount you can contribute will be appreciated. You may make your check or money order payable to **NRLN, Inc.** and mail it with the Contribution Form below. Or, you may make your contribution online with your credit card through PayPal on the NRLN website at [www.nrln.org](http://www.nrln.org) by clicking on the "**Membership**" tab on the home page and selecting "**Support the NRLN**".

**NRLN MEMBERSHIP CONTRIBUTION**

**FOCUS**

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**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **AGE:** \_\_\_ **UNDER 55;** \_\_\_ **55-64;** \_\_\_ **65 OR OVER**

**ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_ **CITY:** \_\_\_\_\_ **STATE:** \_\_\_ **ZIP:** \_\_\_ **ZIP+4:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PHONE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-MAIL ADDRESS (IF AVAILABLE):** \_\_\_\_\_

*I get my pension check from* \_\_\_\_\_ *(name of company)*

*Mail this form with your check or money order (no cash please) for \$25, \$50, \$75 or more (any amount is appreciated) payable to: **NRLN, Inc., PO Box 18757, Washington, DC, 20036-8757***



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