



NRLN FOCUS

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NRLN
NATIONAL RETIREE LEGISLATIVE NETWORK, INC.

Winter 2005

A VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

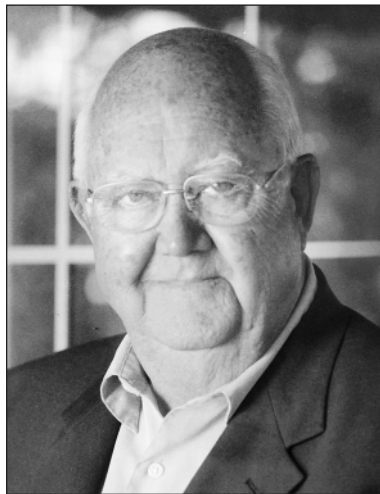
For those of you who are new to the NRLN thank you for joining with us in our worthy cause.

Another year is behind us, and it's time for a quick review of our past objectives, achievements and issues:

As always, new membership is an ongoing objective for NRLN. We have done rather well here: Aetna Insurance Retirees have formed an Association with our help and are now NRLN members. The Telephone Company Retirees from California/Nevada came aboard last year. Ameritech Retirees and the Daimler/Chrysler Retirees are now dues paying members. Delta Airline Retirees, even though not formally organized, are represented with more than 100 retirees. We're also involved with organizational activities for retirees from Hughes Aircraft, Polaroid, Motorola, 3M, Coke, and others.

We now have more than 5,000 individual "at large" members who are on our database and receiving this newsletter. We continue to search for ways to attract a wider population of individual members as well as new Associations.

We have achieved a 2004



Jim Norby

objective with the development and the successful publishing of three issues of the NRLN newsletter, The FOCUS. The reception has been excellent.

Thanks to some dedicated work by Bill Jones, Chairman of our National Grass Roots Legislative Network, we have made significant progress in recruiting volunteers who have agreed to serve as local contacts to congressional representatives on retiree issues. This has been a difficult, time-consuming project, but we now have an organizational framework in place. Our goal is to have at least one volunteer in each congressional district, so please get involved by

contacting Bill Jones and his staff (see related article on Page 3).

We don't think there's an advocacy group in the country with a Web site that includes a research document like our new "Legislative Directory." This is a tremendous tool for our field legislative people and a popular reference for thousands of retirees.

No review of the NRLN's activities, its challenges and successes would be complete without recognizing the extraordinary work by John Kotson, Barbara Wilcox and their 17-member committee of volunteers who researched and published a definitive report on attitudes of affordable health care in America. This is a major achievement for the committee and the NRLN.

With the help of the NRLN, a bill co-sponsored by U.S. Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-ND) was introduced addressing the importation of prescription drugs. Among our successes, our position on the "cash balance conversion" issue appears to be a victory for our side. Ultimately, the courts or congressional legislation will decide this issue.

In 2004, we suffered some major disappointments, beginning with the passing of Michael
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View from Washington *(continued from page 1)*

S. Gordon, general counsel and chief legislative strategist for the NRLN. Although our bill prohibiting post-retirement cutbacks in promised health benefits (HR1322) remains in the Committee of Education and Workforce, we continue to be firmly committed to its principles. We're also committed to changing several provisions of the so-called Prescription Drug Amendment.

On a positive note, we are poised to do great things on behalf of retirees in 2005 with the addition of our competent support staff in Washington. Our reputation continues to grow each week among the news media and congressional representatives. Our issues continue to gain awareness among the general public. Across the country, there is now a better understanding of the plight and injustices being imposed on retirees and older Americans. All things considered, an objective observer would probably give the NRLN a grade of "B" for its accomplishments during 2004. Obviously, we can do better, but we have made considerable progress and will continue to our momentum in 2005.

The Year Ahead

Now, let me report on our NRLN Board Meeting and Planning Conference in Washington, D.C. on January 11 and 12, 2005.

Repeating a format that has proven to be popular, our first day consisted of an open discussion of our issues and challenges. About 30 members representing 22 associations par-

ticipated in this discussion, along with our legislative director and two legislative counsels. The morning session consisted of several informative presentations on a variety of timely issues.

Our first speaker was Curtis Kennedy, Counsel for the US WEST Retirees, who outlined various strategies involving litigation against former employers. He was followed by Jeff Mahoney, counsel to the chairman of the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB); Barbara Kennelly, president of the National Committee to Protect Social Security and Medicare; Bill Jones, chair for our Grass Roots Legislative Network; and Michael Calabrese, our NRLN legal counsel and proxy expert. An expert in retirement issues for a national newspaper also summarized news events affecting retirees over the last decade.

With the exception of board elections, treasurer's report, and budget review, the remainder of the day was devoted to debate, discussion, and the resolution of our legislative issues and prioritization. Included in this discussion was the consensus by the board that we become more active legislatively and expand our grass roots efforts in order to influence members of Congress to favor our agenda issues. This includes strengthening coalitions to support issues of shared interest with other retiree groups including AARP, The National Committee for the Protection of Social Security and Medicare, The Senior

Coalition, The Pension Rights Center, and The National Coalition on Health Care.

2005 Legislative Agenda

After vigorous debate and study by member association leaders and the NRLN board and staff, the following legislative agenda was adopted for 2005:

- On the health care issue, specifically HR1322, the reality of the political climate makes it extremely difficult to move this bill out of committee. While continuing to support the principles on which that proposed legislation is based, we believe we can be more effective in the long run by lobbying and laying the groundwork for relevant congressional action to hold hearings on issues affecting retirees.

- Lobby Congress to strike down the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) ruling that allows employers to reduce or eliminate retiree health care benefits, particularly prescription drug plans, to Medicare-eligible retirees over 65 years old without risk of discriminatory lawsuits.

- Lobby for a variety of changes to the Medicare Prescription Drug Act. In particular, that element that allows subsidies for companies that diminish or cancel their prescription drug plans and the failure of drug companies to reduce costs.

- Support Sen. Dorgan's bill (S334) which legalizes importation of prescription drugs.

- Nullify the extension of USC SEC 420 by creating an amendment or amendments to be attached to proposed pension legislation. The SEC rule allows companies to take surplus from
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***"We do not
advocate any more
'Band-Aid' fixes."***



MAXIMIZE OUR EFFECTIVENESS -- VOLUNTEER!

The following article was prepared by Bill Jones, NRLN Board member; president and executive director of the Association of BellTel Retirees. He also serves as NRLN Chairman of The National Grass Roots Legislative Network.

NRLN utilizes many strategies to advance retiree friendly legislation and fight retiree hostile legislation. We participate in hearings, we lobby Senate and

House members and committee members, we communicate with appropriate federal agencies, we write to and visit members of Congress, and we issue press releases to raise public awareness of our issues.

Of all the strategies we employ, by far the most effective is a well-coordinated grass roots effort. When a U.S. Representative or Senator hears from many of their constituents about an issue, they listen. The more

constituents they hear from, the more powerful the message. That is why we organized a National Grass Roots Legislative Network in 2004. This network is made up of volunteers who have agreed to pass the NRLN message on to their elected representatives, friends, neighbors and relatives – thereby maximizing the impact of the message. The beauty of this network is that most of the work can be done on your
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Sign up today to make a difference!

E-mail to NRLN staff member jeanslade@aol.com

Provide: Your Name, Address, Telephone, E-mail Address, Company you retired from

View from Washington *(continued from page 2)*

their pension funds (trusts).

- Lobby to amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) to provide language that requires the use of pension trust funds to pay participants' vested pensions. The amended language also will prohibit unrelated voluntary separation allowances and pension "sweeteners" that induce selected target groups to accept retirement, thus jeopardizing the safety of other plan participants.

- Oppose all "cash balance conversions" that result in discrimination against older workers.

- Support Social Security reform only where it protects and supports retiree interests. All proposals, including those from the White House, will be

analyzed and tracked in Congress by the NRLN staff until such time as the details of the plan are clear and legislatively feasible. The NRLN will then develop and support friendly legislation.

Affordable health care issues remain on the list of priorities. We will continue to study and support the various proposals, such as The National Coalition on Health Care, and will solicit joint support from a variety of coalition partners. Mimi Hull, a newly elected NRLN board member from the US WEST Retirees will be the Chairperson for this issue.

If our legislative agenda seems ambitious, keep in mind that failure is not an option. In the short term, we are not going to persuade Congress on all our concerns. We must prepare ourselves for the long haul. After all, it took 11 years for the ERISA

legislation to finally get through Congress. We do not advocate anymore "Band-Aid" fixes. We must generate a national debate on issues that directly impact all of us, which include retirement protection, pensions, health care, Social Security and Medicare.

There's strength in numbers, obviously, and we continue to rely on your grass roots support in making sure that your congressional representatives know your feelings and ours in regard to the issues. Remember, you may access your letter writing activity through our Web site: www.NRLN.org.

One last word: If we don't look out for ourselves, who will?

A.J. Jim Norby



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computer by e-mail – all from the comfort of your home.

More volunteers needed

We have been quite successful in building this network, but we have a long way to go. Our objective is to have one or more volunteers in every single congressional district in the country – all 435 of them. That is why I am appealing to you for help. Let me explain how easy and satisfying this job is:

As a volunteer, you'll be supplied with instructions and background information when you sign up. When NRLN has an issue that requires action, you will receive an e-mail alert from the Grass Roots Network. The alert will explain the issue, why it is important, and what message we want conveyed. Further, the

alert will contain a sample letter or talking points that can be sent as is, or modified to make the message more personal. The letter can be e-mailed, faxed, sent by U.S. mail or all three. All network volunteers can also forward this alert to their friends. It is that easy! As a bonus, you will get the satisfaction of knowing that you are participating in the democratic process and making a difference in the drive for financial security for all retirees!

Please sign up now by e-mailing the requested information, shown on page 3, to: NRLN staff member, Jeanne Slade, at jeanslade@aol.com. She will send you more information and add you to our growing network of volunteers. Jeanne can also answer questions you may have about joining the Network.

**National Retiree
Legislative Network,
Inc.**

We seek to secure federal legislation that will guarantee the fair and equitable treatment of retirees in private and public sectors, health and pension programs, and will improve the adequacy of benefits provided by such programs. Also, we are committed to watch for and stop legislation that threatens retiree health and pension programs.

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