



NRLN Focus



Volume 18, Issue 1

Spring 2021

The NRLN Clarion Call... Why We Need YOU!

By Bill Kadereit, NRLN President



As you may have observed in the NRLN monthly News Reviews emailed by Ed Beltram, Executive Director Alyson Parker's articles or when you may have read or heard about actions by VP-Grassroots Bob Martina's team of Regional VPs and state and congressional district leaders, we have been very busy from the December post-election period through March.

When there is a changing of the guard in Washington, D.C. the NRLN team assembles a package of our proposals and bills previously introduced that we believe would help pass legislation favorable to retiree's issues and that might be appealing to a new Congress and/or Administration and would be most likely to be at the top of the Congressional agenda in the 1st year of the new regime.

In December, our Legislative Advisory Committee (LAC) developed a list of previously introduced bills from 2020 and recommended we ask members of the new 2021 Congress to reintroduce these bills. Request letters were sent to members of Congress in January and direct contacts were made to get this reintroduction effort off to a good start.

The presentation and lobbying for our proposed legislation (bills) began with executive staff members on President Biden's Transition Team, House Speaker Pelosi's staff and Senate and House relevant committee staffs in late December (1st with the Biden transition team).

When you hear about Medicare benefit reductions, prescription drug price negotiations, the Social Security Part A trust fund going bust, pension plan and savings reform, protection against unwarranted pension benefit recoupments, loss of benefits caused by corporate cost cutting and bankruptcies or life insurance coverage that could be saved by Congress, and you want to learn more about the bills or proposals we have already positioned this year, check out www.nrln.org (the Legislative Agenda tab).

Now, the hard work begins and you have to help. Throughout 2021 we will be on Capitol Hill lobbying for you at every opportunity. Don't just watch for and read emails and Action Alerts then do nothing! First, open all NRLN emails, we only send messages that are about helping retirees. Some may not help you but if everyone else did nothing to help others, we would that leave us if and when we need support?

We have some very smart NRLN members from many different companies and skill sets on our leadership team. Many of your NRLN leaders know as much or more and work harder as volunteers than many paid Capitol Hill staff members and certainly many elected members of Congress.

Without your grassroots support and financial contributions, nothing is possible. You can't be a squeaky wheel alone in Washington, D.C. With your continued support, the job won't get easier, and results may come slow and infrequently but always know you can ask and get answers and that we are always on the job.

Stay safe!



A View from Washington, DC Legislative Outlook for Issues Important to Retirees

By Alyson Parker, NRLN Executive Director

The end of 2020 and the new year brought big changes of power to Washington, DC with Democrats taking control of Congress and President Biden being sworn in as the 46th President of the U.S., but many issues that impact retirees were carried into 2021. The NRLN wasted no time contacting and meeting with Administration and Capitol Hill staffs to discuss Medicare, Social Security and pension issues.

At the end of 2020, we reached out to President Elect Biden's transition team regarding Medicare. We provided them with the NRLN's materials regarding our concern with the inequity in benefits between traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage and the subsidies being paid to insurance companies to offer Medicare Advantage plans at the detriment of traditional fee-for-service Medicare. All materials shared with the transition team can be found on the NRLN's website.

In mid-January, Bill Kaderiet and I started conducting virtual meetings with Hill staffs on Medicare. One of our first meetings was with Speaker Pelosi's leadership staff who handles the Medicare issue. We also met with Chairman Ron Wyden's (OR) staff on the Finance Committee in addition to Senator Tim Kaine (VA), Senator Bob Casey (PA), and the Aging Committee staff. Additionally, on the House side, we contacted Chairman Richard Neal (MA-01) and Ranking Member Kevin Brady's (TX-08) staff with our position on Medicare.

We thought it was important to reach out early to members that shape the policy on Medicare as they make policy decisions that will impact this important issue. From our meetings, we learned that Congress is looking at addressing the lack of parity between Medicare Advantage and traditional Medicare in the benefits offered. For example, Medicare Advantage participants receive taxpayer subsidized Prescription Drug (Med-D), Dental and Vision coverage, installation of shower bars, etc. whereas participants in traditional Medicare do not. NRLN applauds this effort if it results in true parity, but we have asked them also to look at the subsidies paid to insurance companies that offer Medicare Advantage plans. If they are truly competitive with traditional Medicare, subsidies should not be needed.

We also met with all majority and minority staffs on the House Ways and Means Committee and Commerce Committee and the Senate Finance Committee and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee regarding pension issues. Additionally, we met with Senator Rob Portman (OH) and Senator Ben Cardin's (MD) staff who are very active on pension issues. In addition to discussing Section 420, recoupment, Annual Funding Notice (AFN), plan mergers, we also discussed the "smoothing language" that was inserted into the COVID-19 relief bill. Smoothing allows single employer pension plans to reduce their plan funding obligations which creates the false impression that a plan is better funded when in fact it is not. In fact, it is worse off and more underfunded than before. Underfunding increases plan failure risk that often results in more plan terminations. We were not successful in stopping Congress from including this language because it provided much needed funding for their \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 bill, but our voices were heard.

We did learn from our many meetings these past three months that there will be a bipartisan pension bill this year addressing issues that are important to NRLN members. This will be a prime opportunity to push for some of our pension priorities to be addressed. Additionally, in addition to Medicare, I expect movement on the solvency of the Social Security program and prescription drug prices.

I thank all of the NRLN members that respond to the Action Alerts and who assist me in reaching out to their Congressional members when an issue is hot. This looks to be a promising year for some of the issues NRLN members care about. I hope we can continue to count on your support when the time is right.



NRLN Asks Members of Congress to Reintroduce Key Bills

When the 116th Congress ended on December 31, 2020, bills introduced in 2019 and 2020 that had not been enacted expired. On January 3, 2021, the first day of the 117th Congress (2021-22), NRLN President Bill Kadereit sent letters to Representatives and Senators requesting that bills important to retirees be reintroduced.

Chairman Richard Neal (MA-01) and Ranking Member Kevin Brady (TX-08), leaders of the Committee on Ways and Means, were asked to reintroduce the **Securing a Strong Retirement Act**. The NRLN had lobbied for Section 301 in the bill that is particularly important to millions of retirees with pensions. It clarifies that a pension plan does not have a fiduciary duty to recoup overpayments, but if it chooses to do so, it must be done within three years of the initial overpayment. (Currently, there is no limit on back years) Further, the company may not recoup more than 10% of the amount of the overpayment per year, and it may not recoup against a beneficiary of a participant.

The bill also includes important provisions for future retirees including, automatically enrolling in their company's saving plan; financial incentive for small businesses to offer retirement plans and providing federal tax credit for contributions to a retirement plan.

A letter to Chairman Frank Pallone (NJ-06) requested that the **Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act** which was passed by the House on December 12, 2019, but died in the Senate, be reintroduced. (The title of the bill honored the late Representative Elijah E. Cummings.)

Among the provisions of the bill important to retirees are:

- Cap Medicare recipients' out-of-pocket costs for medicines at \$2,000 a year.
- Medicare would be authorized to negotiate prices for 250 commonly used costly medications.
- The Congressional Budget Office estimated that price negotiations would save \$456 billion over 10 years. Medicare would use \$360 billion of the projected savings to provide dental, hearing and vision coverage.

Senator Chuck Grassley (IA) was asked to reintroduce the **Prescription Drug Pricing Act**. The bill was not taken up by the Senate Committee on Finance in 2020.

Among the provisions in the bill important to retirees are:

- Limit out-of-pocket medication costs for seniors to \$3,100, starting in 2022.
- Limit prescription drug price hikes for Medicare to the rate of inflation.
- Direct insurers to cap the amount of out-of-pocket-costs that a beneficiary has to pay in any single month.
- The Congressional Budget Office projected the bill would save \$95 billion over the next decade, reduce out-of-pocket spending by \$72 billion and reduce drug premiums by \$1 billion.

The NRLN will lobby for the passage of both prescription drug bills. If that happens, the two bills would go to a conference committee. The NRLN hopes this will result in a compromise bill that both the House and Senate would pass and the President would sign into law.

A letter to Representative Bradley Schneider (IL-10) requested that he reintroduce the **Protecting Medicare Beneficiaries with Pre-Existing Conditions Act**. Under current law, many Medicare beneficiaries desire to enroll in supplemental Medicare plans, known as "Medigap" coverage sold by private insurance to help cover deductibles, copays and other healthcare expenses. These plans are not protected against pre-existing conditions after the first 12 months of enrollment in Medicare or Medicare Advantage plans.

Enacting Representative Schneider's bill would extend the "guaranteed issue" without underwriting to Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans. Specifically, it would "guarantee issue" of a Medigap plan to

National Retiree Legislative Network, Inc.

601 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.

Suite 900, South Building

Washington, DC 20004-2601

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Medicare beneficiaries and allow Medicare Advantage enrollees switching to traditional Medicare a one-time enrollment in a Medigap plan regardless of pre-existing condition and passage of time.

Senator Dick Durbin (IL) was asked to reintroduce the **Protecting Employees and Retirees in Business Bankruptcies Act**. The letter requested that Senator Durbin amend his bill to include provisions in the NRLN's whitepaper on Protecting Retiree Benefits in Bankruptcy. To read the NRLN's proposed amendments to corporate bankruptcy laws, go to www.nrln.org, click on the Legislative Agenda tab, select whitepapers and select the bankruptcy title.

A letter to Representative Susan DelBene (WA-01) requested reintroduction of the **Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act**. Each of the private insurance companies providing Medicare Advantage (MA) plans has a unique way of handling its requirement for prior authorization. This takes precious time away from patient care and can lead to a delay of needed medical intervention.

Enacting the bill would improve the delivery of medical care for seniors in MA plans by standardizing prior authorization while also providing oversight and transparency of health insurance companies.

Letters asked Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL-23) and Senator Marsha Blackburn (TN) to reintroduce the **Protecting Access to Lifesaving Screenings (PALS) Act**. Enacting the bill would ensure that women in their 40s and older continue to be covered for breast cancer screenings at no cost. Early detection of breast cancer is key to survival.

The NRLN Legislative Affairs Committee and the NRLN Legislative Action Planning Committee are reviewing bills introduced in the 117th Congress and letters from the NRLN President and/or Action Alerts will either support or oppose identified retirement-related bills.

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The NRLN is a nonprofit organization. Because we lobby, contributions are not tax deductible.

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payable to: **NRLN, Inc., PO Box 69051, Baltimore, MD 21264-9051**. Or, make a contribution with your credit card on the NRLN website at www.nrln.org. Click on the red flashing "Support NRLN's Work" icon and use the credit card form.