

NRLN Challenge in 2010 - Protect Social Security and Medicare

After the dust settles on the national health care debate, we will be challenged to lobby harder than ever to protect Social Security and Medicare benefits. Congress never intended to address Medicare benefits in a meaningful way in health care reform legislation. But the President and some members of Congress have announced that 2010 will be the year when they form task forces and committees to address Medicare and Social Security.

We are making progress on pension asset protection legislation and hope to wage a strong campaign to protect existing health care benefits and not just maintain Medicare benefits but to get catastrophic coverage (out-of-pocket limits) added to Medicare. A summary version of the Top Priorities and the rest of our 2010 Legislative Agenda are shown below.

The NRLN board and retiree association leaders from across the country met in Washington D.C, last week, to set the NRLN 2010 Legislative Agenda for lobbying to protect your income and health care related benefits. They approved our budget and lobbying plans and met with guest speakers from Capitol Hill and federal agencies to discuss what can and must be done to maintain and advance retiree benefits. Topics ranged from pension security to bankruptcy and Medicare. Executives from the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC), the Department of Labor, and Congressional committees spoke and responded to questions.

Perhaps the best part of our NRLN Annual Leadership Conference was when conferees walked to appointments on the Hill to tell their members of Congress about our Legislative Agenda and what they want Congress to do about it. NRLN members made appointments and met with forty-six different members of Congress and their staffs on January 13.

Leaders from the GM, Chrysler, Kodak, and Lucent Technologies retiree associations met with House and Senate Judiciary staffs and legal counsel and hope to get a hearing scheduled to air the need for corporate bankruptcy law reform. The Delta Pilots, Chrysler and Alcatel Lucent members met with Congressional leaders on PBGC rules reform and grilled our PBGC speakers. Lucent, Qwest, Detroit Edison, and AT&T retiree attendees met on pension security and prescription drug legislation. We all expressed concern over the future of Medicare, Social Security and other issues specific to our retiree associations. Prospective NRLN members, association leaders from John Deere and Raytheon met with seven (7) different members of Congress. We will highlight details of the entire conference in our first 2010 issue of the FOCUS Newsletter. Soon we will invite you and others to another Fly-In lobby day that will take place probably in September.

Be sure to express appreciation to your retiree association presidents and others from your associations who attended last week and do your part by contributing time and money to the NRLN-affiliated retiree associations and the NRLN if you can. They are very serious on your behalf and unlike other larger U.S. organizations that claim to be friends of the retiree, they actually work hard to support just you. They don't have to be doing this, please support them.

Most of all, sign up your friends and neighbors, send us email distribution lists and work hard to help us grow a strong grassroots network in your hometown. Tip O'Neil, a deceased Speaker of the House once said "all politics is local". That is so true, meet with your hometown members of Congress and ask them what they are doing to support your retiree agenda.

Bill Kadereit
President, National Retiree Legislative Network