

# AWARE

September - October 2015

Activists Working to Advance Retiree Education  
News and Commentary from the Alliance for Retired Americans in Ohio

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## Retirees Rally and March to Defend the American Dream

Over 3,500 working people and retirees from around Ohio came to Columbus on August 21 and marched to confront the false premise corporate CEOs like the Billionaire Koch brothers spread while putting our economy out of balance. Retirees got on the buses from Marietta, Gallipolis, Canton, Youngstown, Toledo, Akron, Cleveland, Dayton, and Cincinnati. The rally-march was a first visibility action to put our issues in front of the public as we enter the 2016 campaign.

Tagged the #DefendTheDream rally, average people assembled and heard from everyday workers and retirees who understand the policies front groups like Americans For Prosperity promote while trying to buy one election at a time. Editor's note: The workers march took the Twitter hashtag away from Americans for Prosperity.

"My American Dream is not for sale," said electrician and member of IBEW 683 J.D. Groves from Columbus. "Let's defend our American Dream and take on the corporate CEO's who are rigging the system for their benefit and let working people share in the wealth that they are creating."

Retired Urbana, Ohio teacher Mary Binegar, said, "...the strength of union brought us decent wages, working conditions and the ability to retire with a defined benefit pension in some dignity. That is an American value"

"Right to work is bad for your communities," UAW member Rick Ward said during the rally. "I'm telling you sisters and brothers 'right to work' does nothing but lower wages. It lowers wages and then you don't got any money to spend. And if you ain't got any money to spend, you ain't got any money to buy. And if you ain't got money to buy, then you ain't got no legislators getting no tax money so these fine policemen here aren't getting a raise; firefighters aren't getting a raise ...and they're abusing our school system and our teachers. They're overworked and underpaid — that's what 'right to work' is."

"The Americans for Prosperity, the Tea Party and The Republican Study Committee all work against retirement security be it defined benefit pensions, Social Security or Medicare", said Norm Wernet, president of the Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans. "I am glad our two-month organizing drive to promote the rally and march paid off in such a great showing of retired worker power", he said of the day.

*Editor's Note: In the last week Ohio General Assembly Representative Tom Brinkman a supporter of Americans for Prosperity from Cincinnati announced he was looking for sponsors to introduce another So-Called Right to Work bill to de-fund worker rights enforcement i.e. unions. Brinkman is part of the group that proposed getting rid of defined benefit pensions for Cincinnati City workers in the elections two years ago.*

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## Ohio Alliance Convention Reviews Issues In Play

The Ohio Alliance affiliated retiree locals and clubs sent 157 delegates to the Columbus fall convention to review state and local issues that will form the basis of our issues campaign heading into 2016.

Bentley Davis the national Alliance staff in the state reviewed the outcome of the two-year state budget that continued to shift taxes onto middle and moderate income Ohioans, increase tax breaks for those of higher income and businesses, and push the financing of local schools onto retirees while cutting state and local services that sustain retirees in their own homes. Reports on the Ohio General Assembly actions from Policy Matters Ohio and UHCAN-Ohio were included in the convention folders.

The officers reported the Ohio Alliance is on stable financial footing and is spending on a program of sustained communications to leadership, the visibility demonstrations and video production to promote retirement security and celebrate Medicare's 50<sup>th</sup> and Social Security's 80<sup>th</sup> birthdays and move our message to the Congress and the General Assembly. The Ohio ARA Executive Board acted to expand the board to welcome the affiliation of the UAW Retirees statewide.

Samantha Trueblood introduced herself as the national AFL-CIO field campaigns coordinator for Ohio. The national AFL-CIO has picked Columbus as a focal point for the Raise the Wage campaign as an avenue for the labor movement to build bridges and relationships into the greater metro area and move it common sense economics and movement for income equality messages looking forward to 2016.

Misha Barnes newly appointed Executive Director explained that the LEAD Ohio program. LEAD (Leadership, Education, and Development)-Ohio pulls together diverse stakeholders to collaborate, develop a common strategy, and implement innovative programs to create a safeguard against conservative super-majorities in the Ohio House and Senate and expand the base of candidates for higher office by recruiting and training potential candidates and activists in targeted municipal, local and county races to create a pipeline for higher office and enact progressive policies at the local level. **Ms Barnes encouraged the delegates to proactively look for people we think would make good candidates and refer them on for LEAD-Ohio's assistance**  
[leadohioprogressives@gmail.com](mailto:leadohioprogressives@gmail.com)

Bentley Davis presented the federal issues we are fighting for in the Strengthen Social Security bills, reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, push to keep Medicare from being redesigned or cut, and the immediate funding of the Social Security Disability Fund. The convention launched the Ohio ARA statewide signature campaign to Strengthen and Expand Social Security on the heels of the Ashtabula Retirees successful county fair drive netting 600 signatures. Director Davis urged delegates to listen and ask candidate questions on our core issue. **She further ask the delegates to write Letters to the Editor using what they have learn to spread our message about retirement security and what is in play.**

The Ohio ARA board presented its endorsement of the Keep Our Pension Promises Act that would work to protect multiemployer pension plan retirees from drastic precipitous cuts in their earned defined benefit pensions. Affiliate delegates from Teamster locals covered by the Central States Pension Plan spoke to the issue as they prepared to go to a Treasury Department hearing in Washington DC in the next days.

## Ohio ARA Fund Drive to Raise Program Money, Focus on Retirement Issues

The Board and Convention of the Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans will raise program money to keep the issues of retirement security in the spotlight in 2016. We will use our funds to hold those in public office making policy or administering programs and service accountable to retirees and seniors.

In 2011 we worked to protect collective bargain and repeal SB5. We won. In 2013 we worked to protect Cincinnati City worker pensions on the ballot and won. In 2014 that program money was used to inform members, family, friends and neighbors about the actions of the General Assembly and the Congress toward retirees and seniors. In 2015 we produced two videos rallies, demonstrations, and educational forums. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCJZPKO1A8A> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6IB6qO0r30>

The fundraiser again takes the form of a raffle with three prize categories 1st) \$3,000, 2nd) \$2,000, and 3rd) Five \$1,000 based on the number of tickets purchased of the 5000 printed. The drawing will be held April 12, 2016, Ohio ARA Convention, Local 189 Plumbers and PipeFitters Hall, Columbus, Ohio. More information on how to participate in the next newsletter.

### **Questions for Candidates: *Holding Them Accountable for Retirement Security***

Bentley Davis, State Director/Organizer

Last month the editorial talked about the candidates seeking retiree voters' support. With the primary campaigns in full force – this is the time to ask the candidates the hard questions. Below are a few questions to ask them:

- ***Are you in favor of raising the eligibility age for Medicare or Social Security?*** We know some candidates are tossing this ill-conceived idea around again. Anyone who is seriously thinking about this is someone who has never worked a hard job in their lives.
- ***Do you support lifting the earnings cap for Social Security?*** This proposal to have the wealthy pay their fair share into Social Security is one that the Alliance for Retired Americans has long supported. We need candidates to support it as well.
- ***Do you want to move Social Security into “private accounts”?*** Run, do not walk, away from anyone who says “yes” to this – as this is code for privatizing Social Security.
- ***How do you think the Cost of Living Adjustments should be made?*** Currently, Social Security adjustments are made using the CPI-W (Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers). We would prefer the adjustments be made based on the CPI-E (Consumer Price Index for the Elderly) as it would more accurately reflect the disproportionate amount retirees spend on medicine and other needs that differ from urban workers. The CPI-E would amount to a benefit increase. On the other hand, some have proposed moving to what is called a Chained CPI – which amounts to a benefit cut.

### **Watch out for these key phrases**

**“Won’t affect current recipients”** -- This means the speaker **knows** whatever proposal offered is an awful one. That is why they won’t try to sell it to retirees (who are more likely to vote). But they know the plan will be detrimental to future generations.

**“Entitlement reform”** – As a general rule, this tends to be code for “benefit cuts”. It might be something as drastic as privatization, which would end our Social Security and Medicare Systems as we know them – or a more piecemeal approach of dismantling the systems brick by brick. But either way, the phrase is used by those who want to get rid of retirement security.

**“Means testing”** – This is code for making our social insurance systems more like welfare which will in turn make them easier to dismantle.

**Letters to the Editor:** *Individual Local Action with Communitywide Impact*  
Bently Davis, State Director/ Organizer

Writing letters to the editor is an important way to move voters and decision makers about our issues. Delegates to the September Ohio ARA convention were urged and agree to write letters to the editor with some regularity (the goal is to submit at least two between now and our next convention). This is an action we can do at home locally as individuals or as representatives of our retiree organizations. A Letter to the Editor will keep our retirement security issues up front in the public eye.

While getting letters placed in the big papers is great, smaller/community publications get read well because of local interests. It is often easier to get a letter printed in a smaller publication – and because you are more apt to be known by those readers (being a member of the community), your letter will carry more weight with the readers. Below are some suggestions:

#### **Op-ed or Letter to the Editor?**

- Op-eds are typically longer (600 to 750 words) and feature self-contained arguments that stand alone.
- Letters to the editor are short (usually 150 to 250 words) and usually provide a direct response to an article that has appeared in the publication. If you have a brief point to make, a letter is your best bet; because publications run so many more letters than op-eds, your chances of getting letters published are much greater.

#### **Helpful Tips**

- Research the letters to the editor policy and guidelines for the publication you are targeting by visiting the newspapers website.
- Include whom the letter is from and how to reach the spokesperson for verification. Include your full name, title, organization name and contact information. **If you are a board member of the Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans, please put this information!** Otherwise, we would appreciate it if you indicate that you are a member. This helps get the word out about our organization.
- Write your letter as a direct response to recent coverage of a topic/issue in the publication and respond quickly. Make reference to the article or op-ed that you are responding to in your letter.
- Include your organization’s perspective on why the issue is important.
- Keep the letter concise (typically 150 to 200 words)
- Make one simple point or address one basic issue. The publication may shorten your letter to fit its format so the most important points should be in the first paragraph or two.
- Use statistics sparingly as they can get confusing.
- Remember your audience. Write with the average person in mind and try to remain reasonable and fair.
- Use short punchy sentences to make it easier for the reader and include a catchy first line.
- Keep in mind that not all letters to the editor are published. Don’t be discouraged if yours doesn’t make it to print. Keep trying.
- **Email/send a copy of your printed letter to the Ohio Alliance so we can distribute it further!**

*Editors Note: The following Op-Ed appeared in the Cincinnati Enquirer Thursday September 17 as a collaborative effort between the faith community and labor to draw attention to the need to change civil discourse in our public life together. This is an example of groups working together to raise our voices for the common good. The Ohio Alliance was invited to coauthor the Op-Ed and said yes. State Director Bentley Davis worked with the paper to get it published.*

The “Nuns on the Bus” are on the road again, heading from our nation’s heartland to Washington, arriving in the capital just in time to greet Pope Francis as he arrives in the U.S. for his historic visit. Along the way, the Catholic sisters are meeting with the people of Cincinnati.

This new trip is a direct response to the pope’s call to bring people together and transform our politics so all are served, not just those who are rich and powerful. As Pope Francis recently noted, “a healthy politics is sorely needed,” and we all know he’s right. Far too many politicians have become disconnected from the people they serve. Congress is mired in partisan bickering and the quest to maintain the status quo. Our nation is clearly angry about what we see today.

For our democracy to thrive, we have to do better. That is why the Nuns on the Bus have chosen “Bridge Divides; Transform Politics” as the theme for this new bus journey.

The Nuns on the Bus and most of the rest of us believe that listening and responding to what the people actually say about their lives is the only way forward. During this trip, the sisters are meeting with individuals and families in Cincinnati and elsewhere, listening to their stories so they can be shared with our elected officials. Building these very human connections can only strengthen the people’s call for a new politics focused on the good of all.

The bus will make stops in Ohio at St. Joseph Church in Cincinnati, the Yellow Springs Senior Center in Yellow Springs, the Mid-Ohio Food Bank in Grove City, and Kable Chapel in Columbus. At each stop the Nuns on the Bus will hear about real people’s live and community needs. It is those stories that our elected officials desperately need to hear and respond to personally.

The sisters also plan to listen to what the people say about how elected leaders can move us forward. Solutions to real-life problems come from We the People, not political posturing.

The timing of these visits is critical since Congress is now making important decisions about federal budget and tax priorities. The actions of the federal budget resolution, masked as deficit reduction, passed by the U.S. House and Senate earlier in May set the stage to do great damage to those who are vulnerable in our country, the retired and the very young, to the advantage of those with wealth and power. Our legislators must hear what the people say about programs and policies that foster economic justice and keep people from being pushed into poverty. Improvements in tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit need to be voted on and made permanent. And there is so much more that needs to be done.

Our goal of a transformed government is challenging, but achievable. We are convinced that, working together, We the People will move our nation to a new politics focused on the common good. This new Nuns on the Bus journey helps lead the way.

*Sister Simone Campbell (@Sr\_simone on Twitter) is the executive director of NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby, and author of “A Nun on the Bus: How All of Us Can Create Hope, Change, and Community.” Information about NETWORK’s “Nuns on the Bus” is available at [www.nunsonthebus.org](http://www.nunsonthebus.org)*

*Norman Wernet is the President of the Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans Educational Fund that advocates for a life after a life of work and continues the work for human equality and economic justice begun in the workplace.*

## Statewide Ballot Issue 1 Endorsement: *A start toward a more representative Legislature*

The Ohio AFL-CIO and the UAW Region 2B have endorsed the **Fair Districts For Ohio - Issue 1** campaign on the November 3, 2015 Ballot. **The Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans urges you to vote on the issue.** Issue 1 in short is explained below and read more at [www.Yesforissue1.org](http://www.Yesforissue1.org) :



### Who We Are

Fair Districts for Ohio is a bipartisan coalition seeking to improve the process of drawing state legislative districts in Ohio. Co-Chairmen Matt Huffman and Vernon Sykes began building the coalition after a near unanimous vote by state lawmakers from both parties to place a constitutional amendment before the voters of Ohio to reform the process of drawing districts. With overwhelming support from both Republican and Democratic lawmakers, the issue will appear on the ballot this November giving Ohioans the opportunity to ensure state legislative districts are fair for everyone.

### About The Issue

The first major overhaul to Ohio's process of drawing state legislative districts in over 40 years, this measure brings reforms to several key areas:

#### *Bipartisan*

- ✓ Creates a new seven-member bipartisan panel called the "Ohio Redistricting Commission."
- ✓ The commission must have at least two members from the minority party.
- ✓ Requires the commission to be co-chaired by two members, one chosen by each party.
- ✓ Requires at least two votes from each party in order to approve a district plan, otherwise a temporary plan is put in place and the commission must reconvene to redraw it.

#### *Transparent*

- ✓ Requires all commission meetings be open to the public and broadcast by electronic means of transmission using a medium readily accessible by the general public.
- ✓ The commission must hold a minimum of three public hearings.
- ✓ Before voting on a district plan, the commission is required to present the proposal to the public and to seek public input.
- ✓ Requires the commission to submit a statement to the public explaining their process.

#### *Fairness*

- ✓ Protects against gerrymandering by prohibiting any plan from primarily favoring one political party.
- ✓ Requires districts to closely follow the statewide preferences of the voters.

#### *Accountable*

- ✓ Creates a process for the Ohio Supreme court to order the commission to redraw the map if the plan favors one political party.

#### *Protects Communities*

- ✓ Keeps our communities together by requiring a district plan to split as few counties, municipal corporations, and townships as possible.

*Paid for by Fair Districts for Ohio*

## National Alliance Elects New Executive Officers

Today October 1 the Alliance for Retired Americans gains a new president, Robert Roach, Jr. of the Machinist from the Bronx, New York, succeeding Barbara Easterling and a new secretary treasurer, Joseph Peters, Jr. out of the UAW from Rochester Hills, Michigan replacing Ruben Burks.

“I am honored and excited to be joining the Alliance for Retired Americans,” said Roach. “Older Americans are paying record-high prices for prescription drugs, and extremists in Congress are again trying to cut the earned Social Security and Medicare benefits seniors need. Educating and mobilizing retirees is more important than ever and I am excited to join the Alliance team.”

Roach started his career as a ramp serviceman for TWA in 1975 and was a member of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) Local Lodge 1056 in New York. He was elected to and held several union leadership positions including serving as the General Secretary-Treasurer of the IAM from 2012 until his retirement in July 2015. He currently serves as an Auditor for the International Trade Union Confederation and is a board member of the Pension Rights Center. He holds a B.S. in Labor and Management Relations from SUNY Empire State College’s Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies and is a graduate of the Labor Liberal Arts Program at Cornell University.

“After a lifetime of work, Americans deserve a secure retirement. The Alliance has an important role to play in making sure that the rights of older Americans are protected,” said Peters.

Peters began his career at the Ford Motor Company. He was elected to a leadership position in the United Auto Workers (UAW) in 1978 and rose through the UAW ranks, culminating in his serving as regional director of UAW Region 1. He is a native of Michigan, graduating from Highland Park High School and attending Highland Park Junior College, Wayne State University and Oakland University. He currently serves on the boards of three charitable organizations: Care House, which provides shelter and care for abused mothers and their children; ConcaD'Oro, an organization which provides funding for "No Child Without Christmas"; and the John Dewan scholarship foundation, which provides scholarships for deserving college students.

AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Elizabeth Shuler, who is also Executive Vice President of the Alliance, expressed thanks to Easterling and Burks for their years of service to the organization. “Under Barbara and Ruben’s leadership, the Alliance has grown to more than 4 million members with 1800 chapters across the country. They have been terrific leaders and critical to the Alliance’s success defeating many efforts to privatize Medicare and cut Social Security benefits over the years.”

“It is with mixed emotions that the Ohio Alliance bids farewell but with many thanks to former president Easterling. As a worker who rose through the ranks from the shop floor in the Communication Workers of America here in Ohio, we appreciate Barbara Easterling’s life time of dedication to the union movement and the fight for human equality and economic justice at work and in retirement”, said Norm Wernet, President of the Ohio Alliance.

Visit the National ARA website [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org) for informative briefs on Medicare, Social Security, the Older Americans Act under the issue tab. Check out the newsclips from around the country and sign up for the weekly Friday Alert under the News tab. Join our campaign to Strengthen Social Security.



# Tell Congress: It Is Time to Strengthen and Expand Social Security

I agree that Social Security belongs to the people who have worked hard all their lives, contributed to it, and earn its defined benefit. Social Security does not belong to politicians in Washington to be used as a piggybank.

Social Security is the base for retirement security. Social Security does not contribute one penny to the federal deficit. It is time to strengthen and expand Social Security.

We need to strengthen Social Security, not cut it. We need a Cost of Living Allowance that reflects the cost of being an Older American. We need for all to pay their fair share into Social Security. We need to raise the level of benefits not the age of eligibility.

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