



## **National Retiree Legislative Network Highlights of 2008 Actions & Accomplishments**

- The number of members in our Grassroots Network has grown by 41 percent during 2008.
- The number of retiree associations affiliated with the NRLN grew to 24 with the addition of retiree organizations from Chrysler, Ford, General Motors. In addition, Communications Workers of America locals and individual CWA retirees continue to join the NRLN.
- We contested the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission Rule that allows employers to reduce or eliminate health care benefits without fear of an age discrimination lawsuit when a retiree turns age 65 and becomes eligible for Medicare. And, there are no provisions in the EEOC Rule to protect health care benefits for retirees under age 65. The NRLN called on Congress to overturn this Rule.
- While it does not appear that Congress will act to roll back the EEOC Rule, the NRLN is advocating health care legislation that would restore much of what the Rule has taken away from many retirees. The NRLN's proposal for Maintenance-of-Cost Payment would protect retiree health care benefits by assuring that all retirees would be able to purchase health care offered by company-sponsored plans or on the open market. Adding catastrophic coverage to Medicare would provide coverage for major medical expenses that many employer plans had included. Allowing retirees under age 65 to be able to buy into Medicare at a price that does not increase the overall cost of Medicare to taxpayers would provide a level of health care protection for younger retirees.
- We voiced opposition to the Treasury Department Rule that allows companies under certain circumstances to freeze the pensions of older workers.
- Grassroots members' sent letters that helped convince members of Congress to add low-income retirees living mainly on Social Security to the participants list of those benefiting from the 2008 economic stimulus package. We expressed outrage with news releases and letters to Congress when Chrysler eliminated life insurance for its salaried retirees; when Qwest threatened to eliminate life insurance for salaried retirees because of the retirees' lawsuit, and when General Motors announced that it would eliminate health care benefits for its salaried retirees.
- In June, NRLN Washington team members learned that the staff of the Senate Finance Committee was working on a proposal that would allow employers to use "surplus" pension plan funds to pay health care insurance for active employees. We promptly developed a whitepaper opposing this action, held a conference call with the Committee staff members to voice our opposition and asked you to email the NRLN's sample letter if your Senator was on the Finance Committee. Within a few days of these actions, we were informed that the proposal was being withdrawn.
- When news articles were published that financial firms were lobbying to gain regulatory changes that would allow them to purchase pension plans, the NRLN immediately sent letters to the Treasury Secretary and key members of Congress pointing out why this is a bad idea. Our current assessment is that this proposal is on the shelf but could later be pursued.
- For the first time, the NRLN developed questions on important retirement issues and sent them to the 2008 Presidential and Congressional candidates. We received and posted on the NRLN website the responses from 191 Congressional candidates.
- The NRLN developed and submitted to the Democratic and Republican National Committees proposed platform planks on retirement issues. While we can't be certain that the ideas were taken from our proposal, the party platform adopted at the Democratic National Convention has some plans very similar to our recommendations.

- On September 25, NRLN President Bill Kadereit represented NRLN members in giving testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor for its hearing on "Safeguarding Retiree Health Benefits." It is hoped that the testimony and the extensive whitepaper filed after the testimony will have influence when the House takes up health care legislation during the next session of Congress. This provides the NRLN a foundation upon which we can build support in 2009.
- In late October, as the nation's economic conditions worsened, the NRLN issued a national news release pointing out that if you combine pension plan under-funding with the risks created by corporate misuse of pension assets in paying for layoffs, the threat of third-party finance company purchases of pension plans, and the use of pension assets to pay of executive pensions we have the conditions for a "perfect storm" that could sink retirees pensions.
- In response to an NRLN Action Alert, thousands of our Grassroots Advocates emailed our sample letter to Washington stating that if Congress is to suspend or delay portions of the Pension Protection Act of 2006 that the NRLN's proposals for pension asset protection be included in the legislation. While not included in The Worker, Retiree, and Employer Recovery Act passed on Dec. 10, 2008, our Washington team has been regularly meeting with Congressional staff members in an effort to gain support for including our proposals in legislation that could be considered soon after the 111th Congress convenes in January 2009.

The NRLN's proposals are:

- Protect pension plan assets by preventing companies from using assets for restructuring expenses, such as paying lump-sum severance or layoff payments.
- Prevent the purchase of pension plans by third parties such as financial firms.
- Prevent the use of pension plan assets to enhance deferred compensation of executives.

***For more information about the National Retiree Legislative Network, please visit our website at [www.nrln.org](http://www.nrln.org) . To receive emails from the NRLN, sign up at <http://capwiz.com/abtr/mlm/signup> . To become an Association Member or Individual Contributing Member go to <http://www.nrln.org/JoinUs.htm> . Contact the NRLN at [contact@nrln.org](mailto:contact@nrln.org) or call toll-free 1-866-360-7197.***