



NRLN Focus

NRLN
NATIONAL RETIREE
LEGISLATIVE NETWORK

Volume 17, Issue 3

Fall 2020

The NRLN Clarion Call... Tumultuous Times

By Bill Kadereit, NRLN President



So far, 2020 has been a very tumultuous year. Fires in the West, Hurricanes in the South, negative political rhetoric everywhere, senseless riots, a general election and the monster, COVID-19. We need a break, a vaccine for sure, but far more.

Alyson Parker and Ed Beltram have written articles in this FOCUS about what we face today and will face after the election on the Hill and about our revised prescription drug whitepaper, respectively. My contribution is about personal and political challenges we face in 2020 as individuals and our NRLN commitment to remain non-partisan and focused on retiree issues only moving forward.

Stressful Events This Year

COVID-19 leads the parade of stressful events this year. All seniors have been dealing with this major health threat personally, compounded by the fact that our children and other family members face not only a health threat, but many are now suffering from the aftermath of serious economic and social consequences including domestic and public violence.

Job losses, delayed but pending home foreclosures, credit rating deterioration, fears associated with just venturing out to buy groceries or an ice cream cone and recently watching and wondering about school-aged children facing the challenge of on-line learning. Add to that all of us having to gain an appreciation for new challenges like using Zoom instead of traveling on vacation or visiting family or friends. If there is a plus in all this bad news maybe it's learning how to use the Zoom "Mute Button"?

If we are fortunate to stay safe and healthy, we may gain a heightened appreciation for family, friends and neighbors. To those of you who have lost a loved one or anyone close in life, my sincere condolences. There are better days ahead, please be safe and stay positive.

Political Indecency

I don't know what you have experienced but I have never experienced or read about a more bitter three-year nine-month period of political indecency leading up to a general election in my life. Neither political party deserves credit for leadership. Neither set a tone or sent signals to reassure Americans that political thinkers and those who blindly follow will go away, once the election is behind us.

While in general there is bias in the news media, we have reached a point where even balanced reporting that includes equal or unequal but truthful reporting of candidate records, is viewed as purposeful bias by readers with blind obedience for a party or candidate. Much of the news media bias, in my opinion, is due to a lack of good old-fashioned investigative journalism and reporting of unflavored facts that we can rely on to make our own decisions. This new journalism and the fact that political spin morphed into lying have created a new industry of fact-checking companies.

General Lack of Integrity

The danger for us as retired NRLN members is that the bitterness among parties, a political media, Super-PAC payoffs and general lack of integrity is not a trend, it is very real today. It seems to have become ingrained and is a real challenge to an organization that follows the law and its own by-laws in remaining non-partisan and bound not to support a party or candidate for office. We lobby for improvements for retirees and will continue to point to issues and members in Congress and the federal agencies who don't help retirees regardless of their personal electability or party affiliation.

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NRLN's Support for Retirees

Keep this in mind every time you read our monthly report about how much work our Legislative Advisory and Grassroots Committees do to support you and remember they spend countless hours of volunteer time every month creating and lobbying for our proposals and bills in Congress for you.

When you open our emails and read NRLN messages and Action Alerts, have no doubt that to the best of our knowledge, which is very extensive, that you are reading unbiased facts you can rely on. Also, know that despite the bad times of 2020, a bitter election campaigns, a leaderless Congress that is not paying attention to its constituents, the media and PACs and Super-PACs stacking the deck; know that that NRLN's support for retirees and positive attitude is in good shape and working every day for you.

Let's pray for those less fortunate, the eradication of COVOD-19 and even hapless politicians and the media – bring on 2021.



A View from Washington, DC What The 2020 Elections Could Mean for NRLN

By Alyson Parker, NRLN Executive Director

With the presidential and congressional elections days away, the Presidency and Senate are up for grabs. Earlier in the fall, it appeared that the Senate would stay in the hands in the Republicans, and Trump was gaining on Biden, but everything has changed very quickly, according to the polls.

After the disastrous first presidential debate, and the President contracting COVID-19, Vice President Joe Biden has widened his edge in several polls. Pollsters, as of October 6th, believe that Joe Biden will likely win the White House and the Democrats will take the Senate, unless President Trump changes the trajectory of the race now.

Control of Congress?

Currently in the House of Representatives, Democrats control with 232 seats to Republican's 197 seats. There are currently 5 vacancies and 1 seat being held by a Libertarian. In the upcoming 2020 race, Republicans would need a net gain of 17 seats to retake the majority in the House. According to the pollsters, Democrats are expected to gain between zero to ten seats.

The Senate is much trickier to predict. The Senate is currently split 53 Republicans to 47 Democrats. For the Democrats to take control of the Senate, they need a net gain of 3 seats if Biden wins the White House because his Vice President would break a Senate tie. If Trump manages to hold on to the White House, the Democrats would need a net gain of 4 seats.

The jeopardy that Senate Republicans face is evidenced by Republicans diverting resources and time to the Kansas Senate race, a state that hasn't voted Democratic since 1964. Currently, Republican Senators Martha McSally (AZ), Cory Gardner (CO) and Thom Tillis (NC) all face uphill battles. Senators Susan Collins (ME) and Joni Ernst (IA) races are improving, but still facing serious challengers. The latest news, however, that Senator Lynsey Graham's race in SC has been changed from "Likely Republican" to "Too Close to Call" shows that a Democratic sweep is gaining traction.

Election Outcome and NRLN

What do the election results mean to the NRLN and its' members? It depends on the issue. Clearly, if the Democrats control all three bodies, legislation that they agree on can quickly move through the legislative process. There will be no need for compromise. I expect that the multiemployer pension issue and pension recoupment, which is supported by Republicans and Democrats would move quickly. I believe that Social Security would be addressed and be similar to Rep. John Larson's (CT-01) Social Security 2100 Act, which the NRLN supports.

On other issues that are top priorities for the NRLN, such as Medicare, prescription drugs, surprise medical billing and pension issues such as mergers and acquisitions, Section 420 transfers and Annual Funding Notice changes, it is not clear whether their path would be made easier by a Democratic majority.

For instance, like Republicans and Democrats equally accept campaign contributions from the pharmaceutical industry, which can impact prescription drug legislation. On Medicare, Democrats are split

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on what the correct solution is for Medicare. Some in the party endorse Medicare for All, while others believe that will lead to socialize medicine. Thus, I don't expect quick action on this issue. On the Social Security front, there seems to be a large block of Democratic support for raising the taxable income limit and other elements of Rep. Larson's Social Security 2100 Act; whereas the Republican's proposal center around raising the age eligibility limit.

NRLN Will Continue Its Efforts

These are just examples of the issues that impact our members. Regardless of who wins, we need to continue our efforts to have our voices heard on issues that matter to us. We also need to hope that regardless of who wins the White House and the House and Senate, they start fresh, work together and compromise when necessary.

On Capitol Hill Talk Is Cheap – Drugs Are Not

By Ed Beltram, NRLN VP-Communications

Few issues have been debated more on Capitol Hill during the 116th Congress (2019-2020) than prescription drug prices. Despite a lot of talk about making prescription drug prices more affordable, a comprehensive bill has not been passed into law. Talk Is Cheap – Drugs Are Not!

Through July 2020, pharmaceutical companies implemented more than 800 price increases. On average, the increase was about 5%, well above the projected 2020 rate of inflation of less than 1% and the actual 1.8% inflation rate in 2019.

As recently as September 30, the House Oversight Committee held a hearing on the initial results from the committee's 18-month investigation into prescription drug price increases. The committee report provided details that the drug companies' CEOs raised prices exponentially for no reason other than to meet company revenue targets, boost profits, increase shareholder earnings and inflate executives' bonuses.

Seniors Caught in Perfect Storm

The 64 million Americans age 65 and older and people with disabilities on Medicare, are caught in the terrible perfect storm of prescription drug price gouging. They are taking more expensive medications while living on fixed incomes. Even with their Medicare Part D prescription drug plan they are paying substantial out-of-pocket costs. This means that they especially feel the pain of pharmaceutical companies' relentless price increases.

Many seniors depend on Social Security for much, if not all, of their retirement income. Since 1992, the growth in out-of-pocket healthcare costs, including prescription drugs, has outstripped Social Security's cost-of-living adjustments by more than a third. Far too often, seniors must decide between taking their medicines or purchasing food or paying for housing.

NRLN's Lobbying on Prescription Drugs

The NRLN was the first retirement advocacy organization to lobby Congress to pass legislation to address the high prices of prescription drugs by:

- Removing the prohibition on Medicare negotiating drug prices and replace it with competitive bidding.
- Ending pay-for-delay and other brand name drugmakers' tactics that obstruct generic drugs from coming to market.
- Importing safe and less expensive drugs from Canada and other countries that meet Federal Drug Administration safety standards.

House Passed Bill, Senate Has Not

H.R. 3, Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act, that was passed by the House on December 12, 2019, and sent to the Senate. The bill included authorizing Medicare to negotiate prices for 250 commonly used costly medications using a formula based on lower prices paid in other economically advanced countries.

The Senate has not taken up the House bill. Nor has the Senate passed a comprehensive bill to lower the price of prescription drugs. The NRLN supports S. 4199, Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act of 2020, introduced on July 2, 2020 by Senate Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (IA) and Ranking Member Ron Wyden (OR).

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NRLN President Bill Kadereit's August 4, 2020 letters to Senators Grassley and Wyden stated the NRLN's support for S. 4199 but pointed out it should be amended to remove the prohibition on Medicare negotiating prescription drug prices and replace it with a competitive bidding mandate. Also, there should be language in S. 4199 to end pay-for-delay and other brand name drugmakers' tactics that keep generic drugs off the market.

Congress Passed CREATES Act

Congress did take a step in the right direction to speed up generic drugs reaching the market when it passed Creating and Restoring Equal Access to Equivalent Samples (CREATES) Act in the fiscal year 2020 appropriations bill. It makes it easier for generic manufacturers to obtain samples of brand-name drugs necessary to develop generic versions.

Executive Order Allows Drug Importation

The NRLN's efforts to gain prescription drug importation was addressed in an executive order issued on July 24, 2020. This creates a pathway for pre-authorized U.S. wholesalers and pharmacies to purchase safe and lower priced prescription drugs from Canada and other countries for selling to Americans.

Congress' 'Lame Duck' Session

It remains to be seen whether Congress will take up and pass prescription drug legislation during its "lame duck" session in November and December. If prescription drug legislation is not enacted before the end of 2020 all bills will die at the end of this 116th Congress. The NRLN will lobby for important prescription drug bills to be reintroduced in 2021 in the 117th Congress.

NRLN members, as well as millions of other Americans, should be very concerned whether comprehensive legislation to reduce the price of prescription drugs will be enacted. If no legislation is passed, the powerful pharmaceutical industry lobby in Washington, DC wins again.

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