



OWL Newsletter

Volume 2, Number 3

August 2007

Please **JOIN US on Tuesday, September 11th** at UMass Boston for our chapter meeting. After a summer hiatus, we are continuing to plan discussions/events/campaigns to inform and support mid-life and older women. We look forward to seeing you there! Details in the Calendar below!

And mark your calendar for a special October 4 meeting featuring guest organizer extraordinaire **Judy Meredith of Boston's Public Policy Institute**. A meeting not to be missed! See the Calendar below for details.

In this issue

- Notes from the Chairs
- Secretary Suzanne Bump Speaks at OWL Mother's Day Event
- Legislative Update
- From National OWL
- Calendar

Notes from the Chairs



Poised at the end of the summer, and anticipating our first meeting of the new season, we two have been feeling considerable satisfaction with Eastern Mass OWL's past year. One great success was this past spring's Mother's Day event, featuring Suzanne Bump, Massachusetts Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development (described below). A warm and appreciative thanks to everyone who helped make this event such a success.

Looking ahead, we are excited about a variety of activities that are in the planning stages for the fall. Grassroots lobbyist and trainer Judy Meredith, of the Public Policy Institute, is joining us on October 4, for a special meeting to help our chapter plan an action agenda for 2008. Several members are exploring the possibility of a community film showing on an aging-related topic, to be followed by critical discussion. In order to improve outreach on the UMass campus, we would like to host a series of brown-bag lunches, featuring speakers on such topics as caregiving, retirement planning, and work-family balance. Finally, we will partner with the Greater Boston OWL chapter to host the Northeast Regional OWL (NERO) meeting in Boston on October 20. We'll say more about that in the next newsletter.

We are gratified by the fact that Eastern Mass OWL's membership has more than doubled in the past year. Further, several members have discussed holding house parties designed to introduce OWL to potential members. One such event held this past spring helped connect us to nearly a dozen new members! If you would like to

consider hosting a house party for friends who might be interested in OWL, please let us know.

Your energy, ideas, and participation are all very welcome as we move into a new calendar cycle. Together we can make Eastern Mass OWL an ever more powerful advocate for a host of measures that can improve the quality of life for midlife and older women.

*Elizabeth Johns and Kim Johnson*

### *Secretary Suzanne Bump Speaks at OWL Mother's Day Event*



On May 8, 2007, Eastern Mass OWL welcomed the Hon. Suzanne M. Bump, Massachusetts' new Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development, to the UMB campus to speak on "Women, Work and Family Across the Life Course."

In her address to an audience of approximately 60 people, Secretary Bump acknowledged that we need "a broad shift in this state as to how we create work and find employment opportunities." She pointed to lagging efforts to open up

women's career advancement opportunities as an arena ripe for new strategies. What is more, she indicated that the administration is now primed to "rethink the golden years" to keep more mature workers active in the labor force. At a time when the Commonwealth has in fact been "hemorrhaging" young people, older people now constitute 45% of the state's workforce. Moreover, mature workers in this state are healthier than their elders were, are better educated than the workforce as a whole, and, added Ms. Bump (to the amusement of her audience), are more likely to pass drug tests! However, there are gaps in the Commonwealth's efforts to forecast workforce needs. For example, the state's research efforts do not currently track older workers as a separate group.

An audience member pointed out that there is no state funding earmarked for retraining efforts aimed specifically at care workers, particularly older care workers, taking care of older adults. Ms. Bump acknowledged that since "the need for extended care [workers] is blossoming" as the number of frail elders escalates, the administration will surmount the fiscal difficulties it presently confronts to continue funding such successful efforts as the ECCLI (Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative) program catering to the needs of this vulnerable population.

The issue of the immigrant role in the state's workforce continues to be a major concern. During the last decade, the continued inflow of immigrants was the sole factor preventing our labor force numbers from declining. Acknowledging that most immigrants enrolling in adult education and English language programs attend classes so as to be better equipped to find work, Ms. Bump affirmed that only 10% of the state funding supporting these services currently goes to workplace education. Indeed, there exists a "terrible churning" in and out of adult education programs, which merits a reexamination as to how best to utilize limited resources to make for the most effective programming.

In conclusion, Secretary Bump acknowledged that there are gender disparities that her new office needs to address: e.g., women leaving welfare are not adequately informed about the state's rules regarding to what extent enrollment in education and

training programs 'counts' toward their total work hours. Moreover, Susan Moir, director of the Labor Resource Center at UMass Boston, pointed out that the state has recently done away with the tuition reimbursement program it had provided for mature workers enrolling in state college courses. This has affected enrollments in such UMB programs as the Gerontology certificate program, which trains students, particularly older students, to work in a field that will be increasingly relevant.

Thus, as OWL ponders how best to mount the education and organizing efforts needed to address the needs of an aging population, the question left unanswered in this forum was how to address the needs of mature workers and elders without competing for resources with other equally pressing needs at the other end of the life span, such as for preschools and quality childcare.

*Linda Moussouris*

## *Legislative Update*



### **In Massachusetts:**

**The Paid Sick Leave Bill** - which has been assigned to the Labor and Workforce Committee chaired by Rep. David Torrisi, will be heard sometime in September. During the summer, the Paid Sick Leave Coalition has sought support from small business owners, spoken with legislators, and planned for the hearing. The Coalition would appreciate your calling Rep. Torrisi at 617-722-2014 and asking him to support the bill. Also if you know any small business

owners who have a paid-sick-leave policy or would sign a letter of endorsement in support of the bill, please contact Joan Ditzion (617-864-9305 or [jditzion@comcast.net](mailto:jditzion@comcast.net)). Joan is Eastern Mass OWL's representative to the coalition.

**Massachusetts Elder Caucus** - The next meeting of the Massachusetts Elder Caucus will be held on Wednesday, September 26, 2007, from 10:30 to 12:00 in Room A2 at the State House. The goal of this event is "to develop a comprehensive mental health system that (better) serves our Commonwealth's elders." Please save the date for this important meeting and attend if at all possible. As Ellen Bruce, OWL national president notes below, comprehensive mental health care is one of the prime goals of National OWL.

**And a note about Massachusetts' new health policy** - "Older people shopping for health insurance through the state's new initiative are discovering a sobering reality: Prices for unsubsidized plans are twice as expensive if you're 60 than if you're 27, making insurance unaffordable or barely affordable for many in their later years." -- *Boston Globe*, August 17, 2007

### **At the federal level:**

**The Family and Workplace Balancing Act of 2007** - In May Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA) introduced an important bill designed to support working families by providing, among other provisions, paid leave for new parents, greater access to quality child care, and family-friendly workplace policies, including prorated benefits for part-time workers.

Known simply as the Balancing Act, H.R. 2392 has attracted 62 co-sponsors in the

House, including Massachusetts Reps. Delahunt, Frank, McGovern, and Olver. If your Congressman is not one of the co-sponsors, we suggest contacting his office and urging that he actively support this break-through legislation. More information about the Balancing Act is available at: <http://woolsey.house.gov> or through Thomas.gov.

**Careworker Wages** - On June 11, 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously upheld the right of agencies employing "companionship workers" not to pay these hard-working individuals the minimum wage or overtime pay. Evelyn Coke, the woman who brought the suit, has provided a name and face to a problem of inadequate wages for people who deliver essential personal care and household tasks for the sick or disabled. The majority of these workers are women, who often earn low wages and receive few, if any, benefits. As many Eastern Mass OWL members may know, Local 1199 SEIU has been organizing in Massachusetts to provide union representation to direct-care workers to improve their wages and benefits.

Given OWL's dedication to the economic well-being of midlife and older women, we ask members to stay alert to these issues at both the local and national level in the coming months.

### *From National OWL*

The Board of Directors of OWL is developing a strategic plan for the next three years. This is our chance to look at what we have accomplished and build on that.

Universal health care for all has been and will continue to be an important issue for OWL members. We plan to build on the momentum generated by our 2007 Mother's Day Report that calls for Medicare for All. While in Washington, two board members, Shirley Harlan and Tencha Vasquez Wilcox, passed out our Medicare for All postcards to an enthusiastic crowd exiting the premier of Michael Moore's new film *Sicko*. They recommend similar actions for chapters around the country. Throughout the coming year we will look for multiple opportunities to push for universal health care. We in Massachusetts are in a unique position to promote universal health care by monitoring the state plan while continuing to advocate for truly universal coverage.

Caregiving and its effect on midlife and older women continues to be an issue at the core of OWL's agenda. The return of wounded soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan has added a dimension to this issue for many families, which is of concern to our members. Our government's support for our soldiers will also need to be monitored. Finally, OWL has built a coalition and reputation in Washington, DC around mental health for older adults, which we will continue to work on and expand.

While these three issues were identified at the national board meeting for particular attention, we will not lose track of our complete OWL agenda, including income security and quality of life for all midlife and older women.

I would like to encourage all our members to share your ideas and suggestions as our discussion of these issues goes forward. You can email me at [info@massowl.org](mailto:info@massowl.org) to join the discussion. I look forward to your ideas.

*Sincerely,*

*Ellen A. Bruce, President, OWL National Board*



**September 26, 2007** - Massachusetts Elder Caucus meeting, 10:30 - 12 noon, Room A2, State House, discussion of comprehensive mental health.

**October 4, 2007** - Special Eastern Mass OWL meeting, UMass Boston, 12:00 to 1:30 p.m., featuring special guest and long-time organizer Judy Meredith, director of the Public Policy Institute in Boston. Judy will lead a discussion on how OWL's policy priorities can be translated into an action agenda in 2008. Interested members are strongly encouraged to come to this important agenda-setting meeting. For more information: 617- 287-7305 or email [info@massowl.org](mailto:info@massowl.org).

**October 16, 2007** - "Be Fair to Those Who Care," Longwood Medical Area, 3:30 to 5:30, 1199SEIU Healthcare Workers, not yet unionized hospital workers, and community activists will join together to urge employers to respect the voice of caregivers" and "to agree to a free and fair union election code of conduct." For more information, call Becca Gutman at 617-284-1199 ext. 133 or toll free: 877-409-1199, or email at [rebecca.gutman@1199.org](mailto:rebecca.gutman@1199.org)

**October 20, 2007** - North Eastern Regional OWL (NERO) meeting, Brookline Senior Center, 39 Winchester Street, 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. OWL business meeting in the morning; featured speaker in the afternoon, catered box lunch. For more information: 617-287-7305 or email [info@massowl.org](mailto:info@massowl.org).