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Senate President Therese Murray Speaks on Healthcare Reform

On October 23, 2009, Senate President Therese Murray met with over 35 OWL members and friends to discuss Massachusetts Healthcare Reform and answer questions on issues important to midlife and older women. President Murray spoke extensively about her signature legislature in her post, the Healthcare Cost Control Act. Because of that act and the health care reform legislation of 2006, access and cost issues are being addressed in our state.

New proposed legislation would improve access to primary care; enhance transparency and accountability between insurance companies and doctors; have commitment to health technology and electronic records; and make smarter decisions for the way monies are spent. Senator Murray pointed out that there is a lack of primary care providers and she is exploring third party billing for nurse practitioners and putting clinics in local pharmacies so they can provide minor services for colds or flu vaccines-keeping people out of long lines and out of emergency rooms. Early detection is key to prolonged health and avoids expensive procedures, keeping healthcare costs down. She believes that if we require all doctors to use the same codes on the same forms, it would make for less paperwork and improve inter-doctor communication, cutting administrative costs. Improvements in technology also offer more efficiency, benefits for patients and reduced costs.



OWL members stated their opposition to age rating, where a person 60 years of age would pay twice as much for health insurance as would a younger person. See www.owl-national.org for our position. President Murray also discussed future changes in long term care which may entail the Medical Home Model where people are encouraged to live in their homes and are visited by nurses rather than living in a nursing home. Another way to reduce costs is for people to take responsibility for their own personal health-stay on routine, stay educated about your health, eat right, and, exercise.

President Murray expressed concern about paid sick leave legislation, pointing to the cost for small businesses which are barely hanging on in this economy. OWL strongly supports paid sick leave legislation because individuals can't afford to lose their jobs due to illness and public health concerns of having waitresses, nurses, and cooks working when they are sick. We are very grateful that Senate President Therese Murray was able to meet with us to discuss these important issues and answer our questions.

- Lori Michaud Richardson

Calendar

December 1, 2009

Ellen A. Bruce, will be speaking on the topic of **National Health Reform and Issues for Midlife and Older People**. The talk will take place at "The Center Communities of Brookline" 100 Center St, Brookline, MA on Tuesday, December 1st at 1:30 pm. Ellen, founding member of Eastern MA Chapter of OWL, is the Director of the Gerontology

Update: Paid Sick Leave Bill

The Paid Sick Leave Bill hearing before the Labor and Workforce Committee on October 7th of was a great success. There was in- person testimony from 15 experts, labor leaders, workers, businesses, grass roots groups and a number of legislators including lead sponsors and Senator Tolman. Prior to the hearing there was a Press Conference where the Paid Leave Coalition released the Health Impact Assessment of Paid Sick Days (HIA), see [website](#) for full details. The report makes a compelling argument for the need for Paid Sick days to address a major public health issue. Speaking was: Phil Johnston, chair of BCBSMA Foundation, Bob Hayes, President MA AFL-CIO, Jonathan Heller, Director of Human Impact Partners, which conducted the assessment as well as a number of Public Health Officials.

The goal of the Paid Leave Coalition is to favorably move the

Institute at UMass Boston and President Emerita of OWL. There will be time for questions and discussion. For more information, please call Joanne at 617-363-8068.

December 7 - 9, 2009

The Third **National Positive Aging Conference** will be held at Eckerd College, St. Petersburg, Florida, from Dec. 7-9, 2009. The Conference focuses on four themes: Life Transitions, Creativity, Wellness, and Community. Dr. Bill Thomas, founder of the Eden Alternative, will be Keynote Speaker; other speakers include Richard Leider, Meg Newhouse, Susan Perlstein, and Peter Whitehouse. For details about the event and registration, visit their [website](#).

bill out of committee and move it forward as soon as possible. Although there is a lot of building momentum supporting the bill, the legislature is dealing with the implications of huge budget cuts and pressure from small businesses that are impacted by the economic downturn. The initial follow-up strategy was to make outreach efforts, calls and emails, Oct 27th -Nov 3rd to Reps asking for support and to reach out to speaker DeLeo to pass the bill. The Legislature goes on recess starting November 18th but Committees will make decisions on bills during the recess before reconvening in January. The Coalition is in process of developing a strategic plan on how to proceed. Thank you all OWL members who contacted your legislators and keep your eye out for further outreach requests as plans unfold.

*Joan Ditzion,
Eastern Mass OWL Liaison to the Paid Leave Coalition*

Don't forget to renew your membership

We value your participation as a member of Eastern Mass OWL and hope that you take the time to renew your membership for the year. If you have renewed, we thank you. Your membership dues allow us to advocate for the OWL agenda on state and national levels. They also provide you with state and national OWL information and online communication. Renewal dates are in January and July. If you are on the July schedule we hope you will renew today.

To join or renew go to the Eastern Mass OWL website, www.massowl.org. For questions [e-mail](#) Edris Kelley, Membership Committee Chair.

National Healthcare Reform Update

OWL's national office continues to hold monthly calls for members to discuss the progress of national health care reform. As you all know, the House passed a healthcare reform bill on November 7th. The bill includes a public option. This is a step in the right direction. A lot of the funding for the bill will come through some changes in how Medicare payments are made, including changing how hospitals are paid to ensure that hospitals are trying to provide the best care the first time around and changes to Medicare abuse, fraud and waste provisions. Full details of the bill that passed on November 7 are available on the [web](#).

Elements under consideration for the final legislation include: a provision that would gradually close the donut hole, a 50% rebate on name brand prescription drugs while in the donut hole, and reduce the size of the donut hole by \$500. In January 2010, there will be a 20% to 21% cut in physician payment rates if nothing is done about it. Between 3% and 7% of doctors do not accept Medicare patients and some are worried that large rate cuts will limit access. Gender rating is still off the table. Pre-existing health condition rating has been eliminated, but the house bill includes 2 to 1 rating on age-which OWL opposes as it is age discrimination. Now the debate moves to the Senate. Please contact both Sen. Kerry and Sen. Kirk to tell them how important it is to pass health care reform with a public option and no age rating.

- Lori Michaud Richardson

Volunteers Needed!

Volunteers needed for a Research Study: Parent-care arrangements among adult children

A research team at the University of Massachusetts Boston is looking for volunteers to participate in a research study to understand how adult children who have siblings decide which of them gives care to a parent and what each sibling does for the parent. You and your sibling will each receive a \$20 gift certificate.

If you would like to learn more about the study, please contact Alison Gottlieb at the Gerontology Institute, University of Massachusetts Boston by telephone (617-287-7413), or by [email](#) .

News from National OWL

On Friday October 30th, OWL had its annual meeting in Washington, DC with over 50 members from all over the country attending. The group heard from Bob Blancato, the National Coordinator of the Elder Justice Coalition who complimented OWL on its recent Mother's Day report and our efforts to bring elder abuse to the attention of legislators and policy makers. Ann Widger, from the White House Office of Public Engagement also spoke. She is a former OWL staffer and is now working to bring seniors and the White House policy makers in closer contact. She explained that although the Republicans are trying to use seniors and Medicare to kill national health care reform, cost containment and reforms to Medicare are necessary regardless whether health care reform passes or not.

After the meeting, OWL members went to Congress to meet with legislative aides on health care reform. In Massachusetts we are fortunate to have two Senators who are strong supports of the public option. Senator Kerry was key in having gender rating prohibited in the bills being considered and he has pushed to keep age rating to 1-2 ratio. We pressed that any age rating was unfair to poorer women and men in their late 50s and early 60s.



All of us visiting the hill carried feathered Halloween masks in honor of the coming holiday and to draw attention to our presence. It was both fun and worked to get us notice. I was the only member of our chapter in attendance. Hopefully next year, more of you can come.

-Ellen Bruce

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