



Eastern Mass OWL

Fall 2011 Newsletter

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Calendar

November 4, 2011,

8:15 AM to 12 PM

Discovering What's Next, Second Annual Encores Summit "What is your Encore: Working to Make a Difference"

<http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07e4uflkno9d52f400&llr=ku5hpwn6>

Charles Mosesian Theater-Arsenal Center for Arts,
321 Arsenal Street (next to Panera), Watertown, MA 02472

Contact: Devra Simon,

Discovering What's Next, info@discoveringwhatsnext.com,
617 467-5438

November 9th, 2011, 11 AM to 2 PM,

Wang Theater, 270 Tremont Street

Join the rally to stop the attack on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid!

For more information, visit <http://masssenioraction.org/>
or call 617-284-1234

Nov 15, 2011, 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM

Next Eastern Mass OWL Meeting

W-3-99 Wheatley Building,

UMass Boston

You may also call in:

1-270-400-2000,

Access code 2927952#

OWL Fall Event: Influencing Public Policy - The Role of Midlife and Older Women



On October 18, 2011, Eastern Mass OWL hosted an inspiring Fall Event featuring Victoria Reggie Kennedy at the JFK Kennedy Library. Edris Kelley welcomed the 31 OWL members and 23 friends, a total of 54 attendees. Then, Ellen Bruce discussed OWL's history and current vital issues of interest to midlife and older women; followed by Beverly Johnston, who provided a personal introduction of Victoria Reggie Kennedy. Vikki began by noting that there is a silence in Washington - we have lost her late husband Ted Kennedy's roar. She is deeply committed to fighting for his legislative agenda including the CLASS act, which was recently dropped from the new health care legislation and the Healthy Families Act for paid sick days. She assured us that her late husband, Ted Kennedy's agenda matched OWL's and urged that OWL can be part of the lion's roar. A major focus of Vikki's current work is to build The Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate (the

EMK Institute) which will be an interactive center of learning engaging participants in the reenactment of all the major legislative decisions made in the Senate throughout its history. A crucial issue for the late senator was "How do we create a new generation of public servants"? Vikki says that Ted believed everyone knows about our presidency, but we need to know about our legislative body. A film was shown, produced by Vikki's late stepdaughter Kara. The film was an introduction to The Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate (the EMK Institute) which will be open by the end of 2013. Donations can be made at emkinstitute.org Vikki also says if we can deal with Civil War, treaties, etc., we can deal with our current budget issues. Vikki closed by supporting the Mass Paid Sick Leave Bill. In regards to paid sick leave, Vikki says we really need to rally around the issue-we can't afford not to; it is also an issue of public health.

Vikki opened the floor for questions and received a grand round of applause.

-Lorilei Michaud Richardson & Joan Ditzion

Letter to Senator Kerry

September 26, 2011
The Honorable John Kerry
One Bowdoin Square
Tenth Floor
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Senator Kerry:

The Older Women's League (OWL) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, national grassroots membership organization which conducts research, education, and advocacy to improve the lives of midlife and older women. OWL was formed in 1980 and works to improve women's access to high-quality, affordable health care, and to ensure that all women have the tools to build their economic security. Through research, education events, and advocacy activities, OWL aims to improve the status and quality of life of midlife and older women. More information about OWL National can be found at: www.owl-national.org and our local chapter, Eastern Massachusetts OWL: www.massowl.org .

Over 90 percent of older Massachusetts residents rely on Social Security benefits; the program protects the middle class retiree population and vulnerable people in our communities. Social Security is especially important to women, nearly half of older women are kept out of poverty with Social Security. Of those age 65 and older receiving Social Security benefits, 56 percent are women. Because of taking time out of the workforce to have children and to provide caregiving to family members, women have lower savings and less access to pensions, leaving them dependent on Social Security benefits.

OWL opposes cuts to Social Security and Medicare benefits. OWL supports policies that maintain and strengthen Social Security. Medicare is being addressed in the greater context of health care reform

which is appropriate. We oppose any additional cuts which would jeopardize the health and economic well-being of older, retired individuals generally and women in particular. We would like to discuss with you further how the budget deficit might be addressed while preserving Social Security and Medicare, two of our most successful programs.

We understand that you are on the Debt Committee. We respectfully request a meeting in your Boston office to discuss how Social Security and Medicare protect older women and how to maintain the programs for current retirees and future retirees.

Sincerely,
Ellen A. Bruce, JD
Chair, Eastern Massachusetts Chapter

Update on Paid Sick Leave Act



Members of the Mass Paid Leave Coalition (MPLC) testified on behalf of the Paid Sick Leave Act at a hearing in the Gardner Auditorium at the State House on July 14, 2011 before the Labor and Workforce Development Committee. There was a great turn out and press event with powerful testimony. Senator Dan Wolf, the Senate chair of the committee called it "excellent". Testimony was presented by a range of organizations urging the lawmakers to require all business, regardless of size, to offer all employees the ability to earn up to 7 paid sick days per year.

Witnesses testifying represented Labor, Public Health, Business, Women's Groups, School Nurses, Children and Family Health and Faith Based leaders. Joan Ditzion testified on behalf of OWL. According to Mass. AFL- CIO more than 1 million people lack paid sick leave. In a Research study conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) results show that the Commonwealth could save \$22.7 million dollars in Emergency Room costs with a paid sick leave policy. Since the hearing the labor and Workforce Development Staff are working on the bill with the bill's House and Senate leads to work out a compromise that will address the needs of small business owners. On Wednesday November 16, 2011 at 11am in the State House, Room 222 the MPLC will hold a Legislative briefing on the upcoming flu season and the vital importance of paid sick leave in preventing the spread of flu. Check the home page of the MPLC's website <http://www.masspaidleave.org> for updated information.

Eastern Mass OWL has been a major supporter of this bill. We want this bill to pass in this legislative session and be the 2nd state in the country with paid sick leave following Connecticut which passed a law in July. We have the momentum to do that!

-Joan Ditzion

Join the rally to stop the attack on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid!

Join the rally! On Wednesday November 9th, 11 am -2pm , Wang Theater, 270 Tremont Street, seniors and community groups, including Eastern Mass OWL, along with private and public sector unions, are leading a campaign in Massachusetts to stop the attacks on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. U.S. Senator John Kerry is 1 of 12 members of a very powerful Super Committee in Congress charged with deciding how to cut the federal budget by \$1.5 Trillion by November 23rd. Congress will then have to accept or reject the proposal, by December 23rd.

Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid may be on the chopping block if we don't stop it. These programs are essential for day to day survival of millions of Americans. They create countless jobs, and they have been crucial to the economic security of many generations. They will also be in the future, as more and more jobs move overseas, wages continue to stagnate and our pensions erode or in some cases

disappear.

Please stand with us to demand that Sen. Kerry and Sen. Brown deliver the message to Washington that we the residents of Massachusetts and the Northeast will not tolerate cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Wednesday Nov. 9th over a 1000 people will gather at the Wang Center to defend our future. The numbers and excitement continues to grow each day. Buses of concerned citizens will be joining us from Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Connecticut and Rhode Island. Following an exciting program at the Wang, we will then reload buses for a rolling rally to Sen. Brown and Sen. Kerry's offices and deliver letters asking them to stand against cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

The time is now. We can make a difference and your voice is important. It is time to stand together as a country and say hands off Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. The organizations currently participating are:

1199 SEIU, AARP, Coalition for Human Needs, Community Labor United, Disability Policy Consortium, Eastern Mass OWL, Greater Boston Labor Council, IUE-CWA Local 201, Latinos for a Secure Retirement, MA AFL-CIO, Mass Association Older Americans, Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants, Mass Council on Aging, Mass Peace Action, MassUniting, Massachusetts Nurses Association, Massachusetts Senior Action Council, Mass Home Care, Move On, National Committee Preserve Social Security and Medicare, New England United for Justice, North Shore Labor Council, Progressive Democrats of America, SEIU Massachusetts State Council, Social Security Works, And the list continue to grow.....

We need YOU!

For more information, visit <http://masssenioraction.org/> or call 617-284-1234

Letter from Congressman Keating

On July 25, 2011, OWL hosted a breakfast with guest of honor Congressman Bill Keating, however, he was unable to attend due to a debt ceiling meeting in Washington. Congressman Keating sent the following letter in support.

Dear friends and neighbors,

I apologize for not being able to attend this morning's event, but I was unexpectedly called to Washington due to scheduling changes precipitated by the debt ceiling challenge currently facing our country.

Many politicians in Washington keep saying that America is broke. Their solution to this problem is to cut Medicare and Social Security - two vital programs for our seniors. At the same time, though, they refuse to cut taxes for the wealthiest 2% of this country or for Big Oil companies receiving subsidies.

I don't believe this is a valid solution. I agree that we need to get our fiscal house in order and have already crossed the aisle to do that on a number of occasions since coming to Congress. But, we cannot get our fiscal house in order on the backs of the people who have built this country for the past 50 or 60 years. It's not right and it's certainly not fair.

Because many news outlets covering the debt ceiling story haven't actually explained what the debt ceiling is, I wanted to take a moment to do that. The debt ceiling is the limit for the amount of money the United States can borrow. This is different from the deficit, which is the amount of

money the United States owes. It's important to note that we are not raising our debt ceiling so that we can spend more. We are raising it so that we can pay our current bills.

In a 1987 radio address, President Reagan said of the raising the debt ceiling:

Congress consistently brings the Government to the edge of default before facing its responsibility. This brinkmanship threatens the holders of government bonds and those who rely on Social Security and veterans' benefits. Interest rates would skyrocket, instability would occur in financial markets, and the Federal deficit would soar. The United States has a special responsibility to itself and the world to meet its obligations. It means we have a well-earned reputation for reliability and credibility - two things that set us apart from much of the world. The debt ceiling was raised under President Reagan seventeen times. It was raised seven times under the second President Bush. In fact, the debt ceiling has been raised seventy-four times since 1962 without controversy. So, why are certain people in Washington bringing us to the brink of default today?

The answer is sadly simple.

The United States is essentially being held hostage by a group of people in the House who are advancing an extremely conservative agenda. What this group fails to realize is that they are not playing with Monopoly money. They are playing with people's Social Security checks and veterans' benefits and mortgage rates. They are playing directly with our citizens' lives.

Worse, their radical bills and ideas have no chance of passing the more moderate Senate, making it only more evident that they are not taking our fiscal crisis seriously. This sort of ideological posturing and extreme partisanship is exactly what is wrong with Washington.

We like to think of America as a prosperous country, but prosperity isn't about how much personal wealth citizens can amass. It's about how many citizens can join in and experience the benefits of our country's prosperity. By those standards, America does not look like a very prosperous country right now. Millions of citizens are starving for work, hard-working families are barely living paycheck to paycheck, children are seeing their education benefits taken from them and our seniors are living under a constant fear that their Social Security and Medicare benefits many be eliminated.

Thus, our discussion about raising the debt ceiling shouldn't center around how that will affect America's credit rating or our financial markets. Of course we need to consider those factors because they are important, but our discussion should be centered around how default will hurt our citizens - the people who have built this country, the ones who have paid into the programs that the majority in the House of Representatives is threatening to eliminate.

It has been estimated that if our country defaults on its obligations we could lose over 600,000 jobs. Mortgage payments could increase by over \$1,000 for the average family, credit card interest could increase by \$250, the cost of food could go up \$318 per year and the average cost of utilities increased by \$182 per year. This is all in addition to the billions of dollars that would be added to our already-high debt.

America cannot default on its obligations, but similarly, the solution cannot be extreme cuts to or elimination of Social Security and Medicare. Those two programs have become the poster-children for entitlements, but something is not an entitlement when you have paid in for it.

With respect to both Social Security and Medicare, there is one overwhelming fact that always resonates with me when discussions to change or eliminate those programs come up. It's that the average income for a senior citizen is \$19,000. \$19,000 is nothing when we think of all the costs a senior faces. When you're living on \$19,000, the value of receiving health insurance in the form of Medicare cannot be quantified and every Social Security check you receive is vital.

And turning Medicare into a voucher program, as the majority in the House has suggested, would only lead to increased costs. Over 17% of the residents in our district are age 65 or older. That would have a devastating and immediate impact right here for many of you in this room, your friends and loved ones.

Under this proposed program, the vouchers our seniors would receive might not even pay for a health insurance plan's base premium. Before Medicare, over half of our seniors had no health care and over thirty percent lived in poverty. If the House majority succeeds in turning Medicare into a voucher program, we could be looking at those numbers again.

I am in Washington right now fighting to make sure that does not happen.

The other major thing I am fighting for in Washington is jobs. It has been 202 days since this current Congress started and the House majority has not offered one jobs bill. Instead, they are advancing their ideological agenda.

We need stop fighting an ideological war in Washington and start fighting an economic one. We need to start coming together to create jobs, secure our seniors retirements and help our children get a proper education. We need to start focusing on jobs and promoting legislation that will create them. I vow to continue working each day to make sure we get our priorities straight and start putting the people of this country first.

I want to close by thanking the dedicated members of Owl, the Marshfield Council on Aging and the Gerontology Institute: UMass Boston, in particular Carol Hamilton and Ellen Bruce. I also want to take a moment to thank Edris Kelly as well as my dear friends Sue Thomson and Norma Fenochietti, who helped organize the event.

Again, I extend my sincerest apologies for not being able to attend this morning and I hope to see you all in the near future.

Warm regards,
Bill