

Region 1– B Mid-Term Election Results: Incumbents Return to Washington, Newcomers Head to Lansing

Voters in Region 1-B have chosen to return nearly all of their delegates to Washington, D.C. for the 112th congressional session, which begins January 3, 2011. Tim Walberg, the only non-incumbent elected, defeated Democrat Mark Schauer for the U.S. House of Representatives District 7 seat. Walberg returns to the House after a two year absence.

Region 1-B Congressional Delegation

- Tim Walberg, District 7—parts of Washtenaw County
- Mike Rogers, District 8—which includes Livingston County
- Gary Peters, District 9—parts of Oakland County
- Candice Miller, District 10—parts of Macomb County
- Thaddeus McCotter, District 11—parts of Oakland County
- Sander Levin, District 12—parts of Macomb County
- John Dingell, District 14—parts of Monroe & Washtenaw Counties

This is expected to be the last congressional election using congressional districts apportioned based on the 2000 Census. Because its population is growing more slowly than other states, Michigan stands to lose a U.S. House seat when the 2010 Census results are finalized. U.S. Senators who represent Michigan, Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow, were not up for reelection in 2010.

State legislative representation in Region 1-B will change significantly in 2011. Of the 31 State House seats in Region 1-B, 14 will be filled by new lawmakers. Nine of the 14 newcomers are replacing term-limited legislators. Of the 12 State Senators in Region 1-B, only five are new faces; the remaining seven are incumbent Senators or have crossed over from the State House.

The non-partisan Area Agency on Aging 1-B will work with new and veteran legislators to educate them on the value of home and community-based programs, how they provide solutions to keep seniors healthy and independent, how they contribute to local economies, and how they work to bend the cost curve of the growing entitlement programs, Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security.



Advocates Gather to Discuss Older Americans Act Reauthorization

Special *Senior Advocacy Network* Presentation by Nancy Whitelaw, PhD, Vice President, National Council on Aging

In 2011, the Older Americans Act (OAA) will be presented to Congress for reauthorization. This landmark 1965 legislation strengthened the nation's commitment to addressing the needs of older Americans and serves as the focal point for federal grant funding, training, and research to improve the delivery and effectiveness of locally provided aging services.

To prepare for the 2011 reauthorization, the Administration on Aging (AOA) has encouraged Area Agencies on Aging and local commissions on aging to collect suggestions from consumers and providers on how to strengthen and modernize the OAA to better respond to the current and anticipated needs of the aging network.

Reauthorization of the OAA provides an unprecedented opportunity to rebalance the long term care system to rely less on entitlement programs and more on local supports developed through evidence-based research, training, and best practices.

On November 12, the Area Agency on Aging 1-B hosted "Speak Out to Improve the OAA." The event, attended by consumers, advocates, and service providers, included an overview of the OAA – its history and notable initiatives that have shaped the aging network, and a keynote presentation by Dr. Nancy Whitelaw, Vice President at the National Council on Aging (NCOA), and the President-elect of the Gerontological Society of America.



Whitelaw challenged participants to think about the role the OAA can play in responding to the geometric growth in the number of older adults while also reducing reliance on costly government programs. Reauthorization can strengthen the connection between the OAA, the U.S. Administration on Aging, Area Agencies on Aging, and local service providers to improve advocacy efforts, better serve consumers,

and maximize public and private resources. Whitelaw shared a number of common themes that have emerged in the aging network, themes that can shape innovation within the framework of the OAA:

- Long-Term Care solutions should be driven by:
 - Individual preferences and family situation; consumer-directed services for *all* older adults.
 - Flexibility, autonomy, and accountability at the federal, state and local level.
- Demonstration projects designed to strengthen home- and community-based support services are loosely embedded in the OAA, and are not part of a lasting federal appropriation. Reauthorization should include a more organized, coordinated strengthening of long term care supports that provide compelling rationale for additional funding.
- Inattention to the value of self-care, away from a medical setting, has made health care so expensive. Strengthening Title III-D (Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Services) through increased evidence-based research will improve health outcomes and reduce health care spending.

Advocates from Region 1-B contributed a myriad of suggestions, including:

- Create a federal cabinet-level Secretary of Aging—to emphasize the critical needs and obligations to the growing older population.
- Establish a common message among national aging leaders, and advocate with one voice.
- Encourage new ideas, programs and research which, through measurable results, would stimulate additional funding.

Suggestions from “Speak Out to Improve the OAA” have been recorded and will be sent to the Administration on Aging.

Share Your Ideas for Improving the Older Americans Act

The Exchange

Throughout 2011, NCOA is hosting an interactive, web-based forum to engage advocates. Click on The Exchange, at the left, or go to www.agingexchange.org to post suggestions, vote and comment on ideas already put forth. NCOA or other advocacy organizations may incorporate suggestions into a public policy platform.



ADVOCATE SPOTS NEED FOR CHANGE— AND TAKES ACTION

About once a month, Southfield resident Reva Barahal stops by the Area Agency on Aging 1-B to talk about her latest advocacy efforts. She does not ask for help, or even complain about the slow process of getting things done. Barahal, 87, just wants to let the agency know that she's out there advocating for simple changes that can make things better not only for older adults, but for everyone.

After 50 years in the workforce, Barahal now enjoys retirement by sewing quilts for needy children in hospitals and shelters, visiting with friends, and...advocating. Her biggest advocacy challenge these days? Having grab bars installed in public restrooms, such as theaters, airports, and houses of worship. Grab bars are required to be placed in the larger handicap-accessible stalls, but Barahal wants them added to the smaller stalls as well. "Seniors who wish to go to a concert or movie have to think twice about going. They worry they won't be able to use the restroom. Grab bars are good for everyone, older people, people with disabilities and prostheses, injured veterans, women in their third trimester of pregnancy, and people who are temporarily injured."

After meeting with the local staff of U.S. Representative Sander Levin, Barahal traveled to Okemos for the July 2010 meeting of the state's Barrier Free Design Board. Officials at the meeting told her that building owners have the right to install anything above and beyond the building code, and urged her to contact venues herself and ask for upgrades. So, as she can fit it into her schedule, Barahal now writes letters and leaves telephone messages to building owners. She is slowly seeing change. As a result of her advocacy, the city of Oak Park plans to add grab bars to restroom stalls in its library. "It's going to be slow going," Barahal accepts, "but it's got to happen. We're not looking for luxury, just comfort."

Health Reform Myths Tackled in New Online Quiz

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) is a non-partisan organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. which advocates improving public policies by being a national voice for older adults in greatest need and those who serve them. They have created a 12-question quiz to test your knowledge of how the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (health care reform) will affect older adults. The quiz addresses some health care reform myths as well. Click on the logo above to reach the NCOA website and the Straight Talk Quiz.

Straight Talk
for Seniors on
Health Reform **QUIZ**