

Elder Economic Security Initiative™ Program

Weekly Update – March 28, 2008

Remember to stop by our new blog: <http://wow-eesi.blogspot.com/>

Take a look, post a comment, or respond to our weekly poll today!

ON THE HILL ...

It was another relatively quiet week in Washington as Congress was in the second of a two week recess. Activity will pick up again when Congress returns on Monday for a long stretch of work before Memorial Day break. First up on the Senate calendar will be a motion to reconsider the February 28th vote in which the Senate rejected a motion to proceed to S. 2636, a mortgage foreclosure relief package. The bill, sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D, NV), includes a contentious provision that would allow bankruptcy court judges to modify the terms of a homeowner's mortgage. Current law allows bankruptcy judges this authority when it comes to mortgages on second homes, commercial property, investment property and family farms, but not for primary residences. The measure also includes increased funding for Community Development Block Grants for local communities to purchase and rehabilitate foreclosed properties and some tax provisions for businesses. If the motion to proceed is successful, the housing package likely will consume the bulk of next week's schedule.

The House is expected to take up H.R. 5501, legislation to reauthorize the president's global AIDS plan through 2013. The bill would increase funding and authorize \$50 billion for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria programs over five years. The House also is likely to consider HR 4847, legislation to reauthorize the U.S. Fire Administration.

Upcoming hearings of interest ... The Joint Economic Committee will hear from Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke on the U.S. economic outlook on Wednesday; the Senate Banking Committee will take a look at the turmoil in the financial markets on Thursday; and also on Thursday, the Senate Special Aging Committee will hold a hearing on "Scrambling for Health Insurance Coverage: Health Security for People in Late Middle Age" at 10 a.m.

IN THE ADMINISTRATION

Medicare Trustees Report

This week, the Department of Health and Human Services responded to a report released by the Medicare Trustees that both the Medicare Hospital Trust Fund and the Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Fund expenditures are growing faster than the rest of the economy. The Trustees report expenditures were \$432 billion in 2007, or 3.2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), and are projected to increase to nearly 11 percent of GDP in 75 years. To see the full response, go to <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2008pres/03/20080325a.html>.

Treasurer, AARP, Dept. of Labor Urge Women Join Forces to Unveil Tools to Help Put Women on the Road on to a Secure Retirement

Planning for a secure retirement isn't easy and for half of the 60 million women in the workforce, it's a goal they aren't on track to reach at all. That's a picture, the Illinois State Treasurer, the United States Department of Labor's Women's Bureau and AARP Illinois are looking to change. Against the backdrop of women's history month the groups announced they are joining forces to help women turn things around, by overcoming the retirement and economic security challenges they face.

- Of the 59 million women currently earning a salary in the nation, less than half – just 47 percent – has a pension plan.
- Retired women are more likely to be poor than elderly men, and the risk of poverty increases with age (AARP).
- Nearly half of all women work in jobs without retirement plans or 401(k)s (Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement)
- A retired woman's median income in 2004 was \$12,080, compared to \$21,102 for men (Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement).
- In Illinois, less than 1 in 3 women receive income from pensions. (Institute for Women's Policy Research).

The group's efforts are aimed at helping women access the resources they need to learn how to save more; be better educated to participate in retirement plans, and increase their contribution rates in existing retirement plans. Additionally, the tools can also help people estimate how much they'll need for a secure retirement, how to manage existing savings; take advantage of tax incentives for savings; and protect themselves from identity theft, fraud and scams. More information can be found at <http://www.dol.gov/wb/media/pressAARP.htm>.

RESOURCES...

Economic Stimulus Online Tool

The AARP Foundation and the National Council on Aging (NCOA) launched a user-friendly online tool to simplify the economic stimulus payment application process for millions of Americans who are not otherwise required to file income tax returns. The online tool can be found at www.aarp.org/stimulus. The new online resource allows users to print out a completed economic stimulus form after answering a few simple questions. This tool can also be used by trusted loved ones and volunteers to help those in need without Internet access.

Economic Stimulus Payments: What service providers and advocates need to know...

The IRS has asked nonprofits and community organizations to provide outreach and basic information on the Economic Stimulus payments to clients, especially low-income clients and elders who wouldn't normally file a tax return. To receive a check or payment by direct deposit, one must file a 2007 federal tax return. This is true for elders and others who are not required to

file a tax return. For those just filing the return to receive their payment, **they may wait until Oct. 15 to file their return, while everyone else must file by April 15.**

For low-income clients, assure them that receiving this stimulus payment will not affect their other public benefits like TANF, SSI or food stamps. Advocacy groups should also alert clients to scams and stress the importance of not giving out your SSN, credit card numbers or bank account numbers to phone calls and e-mails from the "IRS." The IRS will be sending out letters but they will not ask for personal information.

Economic Stimulus payments will be sent to individuals and families beginning in May and continuing through December. Eligibility requires a valid Social Security number and income of at least \$3,000 in 2007. An eligible individual will receive a payment of \$300 to \$600; \$600 to \$1,200 for couples. Parents may also be awarded \$300 for every child under 17.

The IRS will sponsor a special Economic Stimulus Payments Awareness Day on Saturday, March 29. More information on the payments, may also be found on the IRS Web site.

Other organizations also have fact sheets and Web sites providing information. These include:

www.mymedicarecommunity.org/forumdisplay.php?f=32

www.reitour.org/news/2008econstimpmt.htm

www.aarp.org/stimulus

www.tax-coalition.org

Scam Alert by the Elder Rights Project

MANY Scam artists are scheming new ways to get your economic stimulus payment from you by any means necessary. Be on the look out for these schemes or anything that seems unusual.

You don't have to pay a fee to get your stimulus payment or to receive your payment faster. There are individuals who claim they can speed up your payment- for a fee. Some will even ask you to sign away your benefit to them. This is a scam. No one can speed up your payment.

If someone claiming to be from the IRS calls or emails you about the payments and asks you for a Social Security, bank account or credit card number, it is a scam. The scammers are trying to get your personal and financial information so they can empty your bank account, run up charges on your credit card or steal your identity.

Do not give out personal information if you are contacted by phone or e-mail.

Please keep in mind that only the IRS can send you an official letter regarding your tax situation. The IRS will NEVER do any of the following:

- NEVER call you and ask for Social Security Number or bank account information
- NEVER e-mail you and ask for Social Security Number or bank account information
- NEVER send a letter that tells you to respond by phone
- NEVER send a letter that tells you to respond via e-mail
- NEVER come to your home

To report IRS scams, contact the IRS at 1-800- 829-1040. If you receive an unsolicited e-mail communication claiming to be from the IRS, please forward this message to: phishing@irs.gov using the instructions provided below.

IN THE NEWS...

Older People Want to Use Technology to Help Them Remain at Home

By:PR NewsWire

March 28, 2008

Study finds people 65-plus willingness to try technology like sensors to detect falls and devices to regulate temperature, lights, and appliances, but cost, perception, and technical issues remain challenges

WASHINGTON, March 28 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Older adults want to use technology so they can age safely in their home. Family caregivers agree believing technology can ease some of the challenges of caregiving. Concerns such as cost to install and maintain equipment remain barriers for people 65-plus and for caregivers. These are the conclusions of two new reports, one from AARP and the other from the Center for Aging Services Technologies (CAST) of the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA).

The AARP Foundation commissioned this report which examined the attitudes of people 65-plus and caregivers towards technology and found that both groups are concerned about costs. The study identified a willingness to try technology like home security services, sensors to detect falls and devices to regulate temperature, lights and appliances. But cost remains a factor with seventy-five percent of caregivers and eighty percent of those 65-plus willing to pay \$50.00 or less per month for the service.

"The ground is fertile for the use of caregiving technology to flourish," said Elinor Ginzler, AARP Sr. Vice President for Livable Communities. "Almost nine in ten older Americans want to be able to stay in their own homes and they are willing to use technology that can help them do that. Cost, however, is the elephant in the room--how to pay remains a big obstacle."

There is also a conflicting perspective between caregivers and those likely to need care. People 65-plus report a high willingness to use technology, but more than eight in ten caregivers believe they would have some, or a great deal of difficulty convincing those they care for to adopt technology. Large majorities of both caregivers and potential care recipients believe technology would make them feel safer, give them more personal peace of mind and provide peace of mind for families and friends.

The CAST study lays out the categories of technologies that exist to ease the burden of caregiving for informal and paid caregivers. These include:

-- Sensors can detect and notify a caregiver if a person being cared for does not get out of his chair or turn off the stove.

-- Health technologies can monitor blood pressure, respiration and other conditions in real time while the person is at home, reducing the need for doctor's visits and notifying caregivers immediately of significant changes.

-- Medication dispensers provide the appropriate medicines at the appropriate time and remind a person being cared for to take them.

-- Computer games provide social networking, brain stimulation and even monitoring of cognitive abilities through the use of diagnostic games.

The study also includes interviews with expert researchers, who concluded that factors ranging from interconnectivity between different systems to usability, affordability and the availability of technical support and training will determine how widespread aging services technologies can become.

"Our study shows that we can create a network of technology-driven services to help elders stay at home and achieve better outcomes," said Majd Alwan, PhD, director of CAST. "Technology can help create a new paradigm for caring for elders, and consumers should be as aware of these options as they are aware of their cell phone plans or cable television offerings."

Research commissioned and funded by Blue Shield of California Foundation to the AARP Foundation and the Center for Aging Services Technologies (CAST) of the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging. Both reports are available on the foundation's web site, <http://www.blueshieldcafoundation.org>.

For more information on Healthy @ Home visit:

http://www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/inliving/healthy_home.html.

For more information on the CAST study visit: <http://www.agingtech.org>.

AARP (<http://www.aarp.org>) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. We produce AARP The Magazine, published bimonthly; AARP Bulletin, our monthly newspaper; AARP Segunda Juventud, our bimonthly magazine in Spanish and English; NRTA Live & Learn, our quarterly newsletter for 50+ educators; and our website, AARP.org. AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands

About CAST

The Center for Aging Services Technologies (<http://www.agingtech.org>), an international coalition of more than 400 technology companies, aging-services organizations, research universities, and government representatives that is leading the charge to expedite the development, evaluation and adoption of emerging technologies that can improve the aging experience.

About AAHSA

The members of the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (<http://www.aahsa.org>) help millions of individuals and their families every day through mission-

driven, not-for-profit organizations dedicated to providing the services that people need, when they need them, in the place they call home. Our 5,800 member organizations, many of which have served their communities for generations, offer the continuum of aging services: adult day services, home health, community services, senior housing, assisted living residences, continuing care retirement communities and nursing homes. AAHSA's commitment is to create the future of aging services through quality people can trust.

Harleysville National Bank is Honored for Hiring Practices

By: Bob Keeler , Montgomery Newspapers

March 26, 2008

Almost one of every four workers at Harleysville National Bank is age 55 or older.

"Probably that's more than twice what the average employer has," said Marcia Wilson, chairwoman of a statewide committee that chose HNB as a champion of older workers.

"The award is to hold up as examples employers who recognize the value of older employees," Wilson said. "Employers who recognize that the older employees have a great deal of experience and knowledge and make very dedicated workers are going to be ahead of the curve when the labor force shrinks as the baby boomers retire."

The workforce is aging, she said, and along with people staying in jobs, others retire, then decide not to stay retired.

"That might be financial," said Wilson, an employee of the Mechanicsburg offices of Experience Works, a nonprofit organization that helps seniors get jobs, "or it might be the personal satisfaction and the healthful effects of remaining active and involved."

This is the 24th year that the award is being presented through the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry and the PA Hall of Fame of Older Workers.

Award ceremonies will be May 8 in Hershey. Harleysville National Bank is this year's winner in the large company (more than 100 employees) category, and Kipp's Bus Service, Curwensville, is the winner in the small company category.

HNB has about 925 employees in eastern Pennsylvania, Liz Graham, senior vice president for human resources, said. Although she doesn't normally monitor how many are 55 or older, Graham said, a check for the awards application showed it was 24 percent of the workers. A combination of the work environment, benefits and flexible work hours help attract and keep the older workers, she said.

In some cases, Wilson said, employees who are full-time at the bank are able to switch to part-time, which many older workers prefer.

"They don't want to lose all the knowledge and the training those people have," Wilson said. Along with people moving from full-time to part-time, there are also times when other jobs move from part-time to full-time, Graham said.

"Our needs do change and so do the needs of our workers," Graham said. "I like when we're able to do that. It's good for us and it's good for the employees."

The award isn't just for hiring older workers, Wilson said. It's also for keeping workers on the job.

"About one-quarter of the bank's employees have been with the bank for more than 10 years," Wilson said. "This bank has a very good record of retaining the employees that come to them at any age and encouraging them to stay on."

The employees that are 55 or older are spread out throughout the company in a variety of jobs, Graham said.

"It is truly an honor for our organization to receive this award," Deb Takes, president and CEO of HNB, is quoted in a release announcing the award. "We are a company that believes in hiring and retaining the best employees possible, regardless of age."

Harleysville Senior Center nominated the bank for the award.

"Not only does this award look favorably on Harleysville National Bank, but it puts the spotlight on Harleysville as a great place for seniors to live," Robin Burstein, Harleysville Senior Center executive director, is quoted in the release. "Harleysville National Bank is to be applauded for having the foresight to hire older adults, to understand the benefits that mature workers provide to a business, and to demonstrate the value of engaging older individuals as active participants in the local economy."

If you haven't already, please subscribe to the Initiative listserv for weekly updates by sending an email to: EESI-NATL-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Wider Opportunities for Women

Celebrating Over 40 Years of Building Pathways to Economic Independence