

Setting Our Agenda for 2018

I had been going through my previous Senior Digest columns to see if any were worth posting on our Website. One that definitely remained relevant was a February 2011 column about our agenda for that year. It called for our state's leaders to take action to reach five goals: 1) Rebalancing spending on Medicaid long-term care for seniors toward more community-based care and less nurs-

On the Senior Agenda



By William F. Flynn Jr.

ing home care; 2) Improving salaries for homecare workers such as CNA's; 3) Maintaining subsidized transit services for seniors; 4) Making major improvements in state-provided information and counseling about senior care options; and 5) Increasing funding to provide more respite care for seniors' family and volunteer caregivers.

Six and a half years later I was struck by how lit-

tle progress we had made towards achieving four of those five goals. Restoring the no-fare bus pass was our only clear-cut win. This begged the question: why hadn't we been able to win more despite our best efforts?

There is a saying that "if you want things to change, you've got to do something different." This year we did something different.

Through community organizing in April we filled a room with 320 people for a Legislative Leaders Forum. At that event the Speaker of the House and Senate President agreed to restore no-fare bus passes for seniors and persons living with disabilities. The lesson learned was that we had demonstrated power through mobilizing people in numbers, something that politicians understand is not easy to do. They also understand that large numbers of peo-

ple motivated about an issue equal even larger numbers of voters.

We have decided to be

organizing. The keynote will be followed by a panel discussion on influencing legislation and legislators.

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much more focused building the power to achieve our goals. We will continue that effort with a new format at our Tenth Annual Senior Conference and Expo on October 20. Its theme is "Building Senior Power," and its two morning sessions will be plenaries—involving the entire Conference audience. Our keynoter will be someone who has helped other communities build political power through community

The panel will include state legislators, a lobbyist, and advocates. We expect both sessions to include a lot of audience involvement and discussion.

Our Conference's luncheon session will honor Speaker of the House Mattiello and Senate President Ruggiero for restoring the no-fare bus pass, and will also honor the R.I. Senior Center Directors Association for bringing many of the 320 people at the Leg-

islative Leaders Forum. The Conference afternoon session will feature seven workshops including one on "Setting Our Agenda for 2018" where we will hear from our constituents about important issues and discuss our strategies.

We can make 2018, an election year, become a pivotal year for improving seniors' lives in Rhode Island. We invite everyone to join us on October 20 at the Crowne Plaza to discuss how we can increase senior power. Conference information and on-line registration will be available at our Website www.seniordigest.org, or by calling 351-6710.

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Senior Digest

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