

I attended the biennial convention of the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans (WiARA) recently. The National ARA was founded in 2001 and was the first retiree's organization to affiliate with the AFL-CIO. The Wisconsin chapter was founded in 2005. Below are some tidbits from the convention.

**John Nichols** gave his usual rip roaring talk. He talked about what a misnomer "right to work" is. It suggests you have a right to a job which of course it doesn't deliver. He talked about all the limitations the employer can impose. Don't want to wear the silly uniform? You have a right to work ... elsewhere. Don't like closing up at midnight and returning to open at 5:30 am? You have a right to work ... elsewhere. Don't like forcing an artificial smile all day? You have a right to work ... elsewhere.

Then he moved on to voting rights. A few years after the civil war ended, the constitution was amended to allow black men to vote. That started other groups thinking about the right to vote. Over the years, additional voting rights and protections were added. [Below is a list I got from Wikipedia]

15 <sup>th</sup> amendment	Can't deny right to vote based on race, color or servitude	1870
19 <sup>th</sup> amendment	Can't deny right to vote based on gender	1920
24 <sup>th</sup> amendment	Can't deny right to vote based on payment of poll tax	1964
26 <sup>th</sup> amendment	Can't deny right to vote of citizens 18 years or older	1971

Nichols said he was giving a talk at an elite eastern university recently and a young man stood up and said getting constitutional amendments was hard. Getting the right to vote for women was easy, but ... I think Nichols' point was that we have a history of groups working for voting rights and we shouldn't give up. We've done it many times in the past.

He mentioned that the poll tax amendment was going through the state ratification process during Kennedy's administration and that on the last day of his life, Kennedy was working the phones to get states to support it. (For more information, see <http://www.thenation.com/blog/177328/honor-jfk-renewing-his-constitutional-commitment-extend-voting-rights>) [*I knew about the poll tax but I didn't realize it was a constitutional amendment that did away with it.*]

He talked about the civil rights movement and the labor movement. They were different groups but fighting for many of the same goals. [*Nichols didn't cite it, but I found this MLK quote: "In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans, such as 'right to work.' It is a law to rob us of our civil rights and job rights. Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining by which unions have improved wages and working conditions of everyone..."*]

Then he told us about "Operation Dixie", which was a post-world war II labor project to organize workers in southern states. Organizing means organizing all workers and racial divisions in the south made that a tough fight. In 1947, Congress passed an anti-labor law called Taft-Hartley to undercut the years of labor growth during FDR's administration. Taft-Hartley included a prohibition against contracts that included fair share agreements in states that had "right to work" laws. The bill passed Congress, but President Truman vetoed it. Proponents made an appeal to southern Democrats based on their desire for continued segregation and the veto was overturned. Taft-Hartley became law and with it, "right to work".

Finally, he encouraged people to watch the movie Selma to watch how a group of people fought repeatedly even after being beaten down (literally) to achieve their goal.

**Dr. Robert Kraig from Citizen Actions of Wisconsin** (CAW) spoke on Comprehensive and Affordable Health Care for all. He said Robin Vos is worried about the Senior Care provisions in the budget. Taking away affordable health care from 200,000 Wisconsinites is going to make for some angry people. Taking away a right people have already experienced is always harder than preventing a right they never had. He said he believes RTW was pushed forward at this particular time in order to take attention away from the recently proposed budget. He said after the RTW vote is over, CAW will go back to focusing on Senior Care and the Budget. The Legislative Fiscal Bureau has already estimated that Wisconsin could save \$345 million by accepting the Medicaid expansion money. That would be enough to reverse the UW cuts with \$45 million to spare. He also thinks Walker's views on Medicaid Expansion may work against him in Iowa since that state did take the money. He encouraged people to like CAW's Facebook page and also noted that they have a rapid response team.

**Dean Baker from the Center for Economic and Policy Research** spoke on the importance of Retirement Security. He gave some easy to understand summaries of some issues. He said the TPP (Trans-Pacific-Partnership) isn't about free trade. There aren't that many barriers (like tariffs) that remain. What it really is about is building a corporation-friendly infrastructure. It would make it easier for corporations to sue countries while bypassing their court system. The talks have been kept secret and the involved parties are mostly businesses. So corporate interests could take precedence over a country's protection against health and safety issues. [*Sounds like Citizens United on steroids, doesn't it?*] One big example he cited is that the pharmaceutical industry could get even stronger patent protections that could delay cheaper, generic versions. It might also include stronger prohibitions against letting Medicare someday negotiate drug prices.

He next talked about the Federal Reserve System. His main point was raising interest rates is designed as a way to slow down the economy. Raising interest rates at this time would be a job killer. However, as noted by one attendee, prolonged low interest rates are hard on people (like retirees) who are dependent on interest income.

He touched briefly on "right to work" and said it was really a matter of contract law. What it's doing is prohibiting one side of the contract from negotiating how the costs of bargaining and enforcement are covered by employees. Currently, if the employer doesn't want to agree to that, they would have to bargain against it. Both sides have to ratify the contract and if they really don't want something, it should be dealt with in the contract.