

## RETIREE

## news &amp; views



A PUBLICATION OF LOCAL 237 RETIREE DIVISION • VOL. 14 NO. 5 • MAY 2009

A new report detailing the 2008 voting record of every member of Congress on key issues affecting retirees found a continuation of a pro-senior trend that began with the 2006 midterm elections, when Democrats gained a majority in both houses. Last November, voters increased those majorities and made a dramatic change in the White House with the election of Barack Obama.

The annual survey, released in May by the Alliance for Retired Americans to mark Older Americans Month, found more perfect scores and fewer zeroes than in past years.

The Alliance examined ten key Senate votes and ten key House votes in 2008 on issues such as privatizing Social Security, funding the low-income energy assistance program, and increasing protections against elder abuse. Several votes addressed Medicare, including means testing for Part D prescription drug premiums and overriding President Bush's veto of a Medicare bill that adjusted asset tests so that more low-income beneficiaries could receive help and added preventive and mental health benefits. The report also rates lifetime voting records.

For 2008, 259 House members received higher than 60 percent (considered passing), with 197 achieving 100 percent. One hundred seventy-five received failing grades of 60 percent or lower; 14 received scores of zero. All of the perfect scores were earned by Democrats. All the failing grades went to Republicans. The 18 Republicans who received above 60 for 2008 had failing lifetime ratings.

In the Senate, 58 members received passing grades, with 47, all Democrats, achieving perfect scores of 100 percent. Forty-two senators, all Republicans, received failing grades, with one receiving a score of zero.

Senator Obama, who was then a member of the Senate, received a score of 100 percent. Senator John McCain missed all ten of the votes evaluated by the ARA in 2008.

New York State's two senators, Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton (now U.S. secretary of state), both cast pro-retiree votes 100 percent of the time in 2008; Clinton also received a 100 percent lifetime rating, while Schumer has a 97 percent score. Senator

2008 Voting Record ReleasedPro-Senior  
Trend in  
Congress

Kirstin Gillibrand, who replaced Clinton, was not a member of the Senate in 2008 but her score in the House for both 2008 and lifetime is 100 percent.

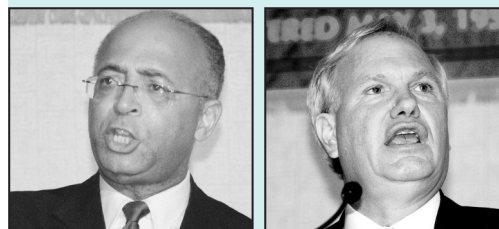
Among New York's 29-member House delegation, all 23 Democrats voted pro-retiree 100 percent of the time in 2008, and 16 have a perfect lifetime rating. The 17 others scored in the 90s, except for one, who received an 88. New York State's Republicans voted pro-retiree 50 percent or 60 percent of the time in 2008, except for Vito Fossella of Staten Island, who scored 33 percent (he resigned from the House). The Republicans' lifetime ratings are substantially lower, ranging from 7 percent (Thomas Reynolds, no longer in Congress) to 29 percent (John McHugh).

To see the entire report, go to [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org) or write to the Alliance of Retired Americans, 815 16th Street NW, 4th Floor, Washington, DC 20006.



Local 237 retirees Doris Welch and Laurel Euland and Retiree Division Director Nancy True with Rep. Nancy Pelosi, now speaker of the House, at an Alliance for Retired Americans rally to save Social Security on Capitol Hill in 2006.

## Candidates Political Forum



Photos by Gerald Schultz

**Top:** Candidates for public advocate (at podium, l-r) Eric Gioia, Norman Siegel, Mark Green, and Bill De Blasio speak before nearly 500 Local 237 shop stewards, members, retirees, union staffers, and friends at the local's first-ever Candidates Political Forum, held April 18 at the New York Hilton, as moderator Air America WWRL radio host Errol Louis looks on;

**Center:** Mayoral candidates: NYC Comptroller William C. Thompson (left) and City Councilmember Tony Avella;

**Bottom:** Local 237 President Gregory Floyd (center) with candidates for comptroller, City Councilmembers John Liu and David Yassky.

Floyd said the local will continue to examine the records and programs of all candidates before making endorsements. "Local 237 will put its voting power behind candidates whose policies support our members' interests," he said.

The forum was covered by the NYC Press Corps, the Daily News, and NBC and CBS News. Louis played excerpts from the forum on his "Morning Show" on WWRL/1600 AM.

SEE YOU AT FOUNDERS DAY JUNE 5!

9 a.m.-2 p.m., New York Hilton (6th Ave. &amp; 53rd St.)

**Note:** The Founders Day flyer that was mailed to retirees contains an error. The last name of the Tuskegee Airman being honored is Montgomery.



I have a few positive developments to report to you. First, as a result of our hard work and the support of our allies, \$423 million from President Obama's federal stimulus money has been allotted to the New York City Housing Authority for dozens of desperately needed upgrades and repairs. The money will create 3,255 jobs and improve the quality of life for NYCHA employees and the more than 400,000 public housing residents, among them many Local 237 members and retirees.

As the largest union representing NYCHA workers, we played a critical role in alerting lawmakers and the public to the deteriorating conditions in much of public housing through lobbying, demonstrations (in which Local 237 retirees participated), radio ads, and videos sent to city, state, and federal officials. Our fight in the halls of Washington and on the streets of New York has paid off, but the fight is not over.

Second, because of strong opposition from unions, Mayor Bloomberg dropped



## A Message from the President

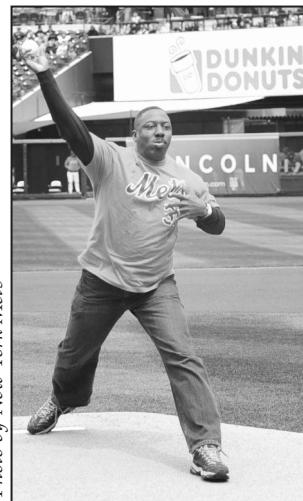
the demand that city employees contribute 10 percent of their health insurance coverage. However, he is continuing to press for an inferior Tier 5 pension plan for future employees and is threatening 3,700 layoffs, plus more job losses through attrition. We will continue to fight this.

Third, Local 237 held a successful Candidates Political Forum April 18 attended by nearly 500 shop stewards, including several retired shop stewards, and other members. Candidates for the offices of mayor, comptroller, and public advocate addressed us and answered questions about issues that affect the lives of city employees, including health benefits, pensions, layoffs, personal income taxes, affordable housing,

education, and transportation. It's particularly important that we, as public employees, keep an open dialogue with our elected officials and insist on accountability.

Last, but not least, I had the awesome opportunity to throw the first pitch at Citi Field, the new Mets stadium, in the April 19 game against the Milwaukee Brewers. Wow! Unfortunately, the Mets lost 4-2, but

it's an event I will never forget!



Greg Floyd throws the first pitch in the game between the Mets and the Milwaukee Brewers. The pitch was sponsored by EmblemHealth, the parent company of HIP and GHI.

Photo by New York Mets

May is Older Americans Month, a time to recognize the contributions and achievements of older Americans and call attention to their issues. New York State marked the month with a Senior Citizens Day celebration in Albany. I'm proud that two Local 237 retirees, Doris Welch and James Spicer, were selected to receive awards for their contributions to retirees and the community at large. (*Retiree News & Views* will have an article next month.)

The theme of this year's Older Americans Month is "Living Today for a Better Tomorrow," focusing on programs to "help older adults have better health as they age and avoid the risks of chronic disease, disability and injury." In this spirit, the Alliance for Retired Americans and other senior organizations are highlighting the needs of retirees in national health care reform. The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations, a coalition of 60 not-for-profit organizations chaired by ARA Executive Director Ed Coyle, recently sent recommen-



## Health Care Reform NOW

By Nancy B. True  
Director, Retiree Division

dations to every member of Congress. Among these proposals are:

- Create a national public health care option;
- Allow retirees 55-64 years of age to buy into Medicare;
- Enable the government to negotiate discounts from drug manufacturers;
- Close gaps in Medicare coverage such as the "doughnut hole";
- Expand Medicare coverage of preventive care and disease management;
- Increase training for workers who care for older adults and improve programs to support family caregivers.

Some people say that expanding health care at this time will create deficits for future generations. But economist Mark Weisbrot of the Center for Economic and Policy Research points out in a column entitled "Health Care Reform Is Needed Now More than Ever" that most of the government's long-term deficit is due to "exploding health care costs in the private sector." President Obama's health care proposals, he says, besides saving thousands of lives by providing health care to the uninsured, would both stimulate the economy in the short term and also reduce the long-term deficit problem.

Republicans, along with health insurance and business interests, oppose creating a public health care option, which President Obama proposes, because, they say, the public plan would be able to charge lower premiums and insurance companies won't be able to compete. The leaders of four congressional caucuses, however—the Progressive Caucus (CPC), the Black Caucus (CBC), the Hispanic Caucus (CHC), and the Asian-Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC)—sent a joint letter to President Obama, the Democratic leadership of the House and Senate, and key congressional committee leaders stressing that their support for health care reform legislation "firmly hinges" on the inclusion of a robust public health insurance plan like Medicare.

Rep. Mike Honda, chair of the CAPAC, summarized the basic reason a public health plan option is needed: "For too long, insurance companies have dictated the quality, quantity, and accessibility of health care to the American people. A robust public health insurance plan will ensure true competition with those companies that reap egregious profits, and will present the opportunity to make deep lasting changes in our health care system. A public plan will also provide a framework to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities in some of the most underserved communities."

Throughout the month, the Alliance is asking members to reach out to elected officials and the larger senior community to discuss these issues.

### RETIREE NEWS & VIEWS

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Retired Local 237 NYCHA housing assistant Dabney Montgomery said in a Local 237 Oral History Project interview in March that he lived “two major areas of impact” during his

### Local 237 Oral History Project

life. The first was with the Tuskegee Airmen, the all-black World War II bomber squadron he served as a ground crewman. The second was the historic 1965 voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery, led by Martin Luther King, in which Montgomery, who was born and raised in Selma, served as a bodyguard for King.

Montgomery knew King as a student years earlier, in Boston, where Montgomery studied economics and ballet, and the two of them have the same godmother.

Since Montgomery retired from NYCHA in 1988, he has continued a life of activism, as a social outreach worker for Project FIND, assisting older adults on Manhattan’s West Side, and with Harlem’s Mother AME Zion Church, where he says he “worked with a thousand youth” as director of the junior church from 1955 until a couple of years ago. He is also active on the Parks Committee and Harlem’s Interfaith Committee of the Tenth Community Board of Manhattan.

Montgomery’s contributions have earned him numerous awards. Most recently, on May 2, he was honored by Rev. Al Sharpton’s National Action Network at a ceremony at the Sheraton Hotel. Local 237 President Greg Floyd will present him with Local 237’s Trailblazer Award at the Retiree Division’s annual Founders Day celebration June 5.

Excerpts of Montgomery’s Oral History Project interview recalling the Tuskegee Airmen appeared in the April issue of Retiree News & Views. Following are excerpts about the “second impact,” the Selma to Montgomery march.

**I**n 1965 I was living in New York City. I was watching TV one night, a program about how Adolph Hitler went to exterminate and kill the Jews, about how he gassed them. The TV announcer said, “That could never happen in America.” Then the program was interrupted by a news broadcast, and I saw blacks being beaten and gassed in Alabama—in America—for wanting to vote! I decided I was going back to Selma to take part, to smell a part of the gas.

I worked for the Welfare Department as a social service investigator at the time. I told my director what I wanted to do. She said she understood.

The sun was setting as I got off the bus in Selma. It was March. I didn’t tell my mom and pop I was in town, or my friends. I had a small bag with my clothes. I went to the Brown Chapel AME Church, the march headquarters. There was a ring of policemen

## Dabney Montgomery civil rights fighter



Dabney Montgomery holds his Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, which he and the other 300 surviving Tuskegee Airmen were awarded in 2007, and Outstanding Alumni Award from the United Negro College Fund in 2007.

He was recommended for the UNCF award by the alumni association of Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina, where he earned a BA in religious studies in 1949.

around the church. You could see the tension, you could touch it with your fingers.

As I walked toward the ring I saw two groups marching, one east, one west. I didn’t know which march was which, I just joined one of them. I didn’t know it at the time, but the line I joined was meant to divert attention from the other line, which was going to break the segregation law. The police broke us all up and sent us into the church.

Later we all went to the courthouse steps and prayed. This was very dear to me. This was my home. These were the steps I climbed to register to vote in 1946 when I got out of the army. At the time, the lady working there gave me three forms. I had to get three white men to fill them out, affirming that I was a “good boy.” This, despite the fact that I had never been in trouble, that I fought for my country overseas, that I was part of the Tuskegee Experiment.

So that’s what I did. Everyone in Selma knew my father; I went to them as “Dred’s son.” I took the signed forms in and the lady took them. Then she asked me, “Dabney, do you own \$3,000 worth of property?” I told her I might have \$3,000 in the bank, but she said it had to be \$3,000 in land. That was the law. That’s how it was.

As I was walking down the courthouse steps that day I saw a white World War II veteran, like me, going to register. He just signed up. I said to myself, *How can I make a change?* And here I was back in Selma, in 1965, trying to change this system, praying on the steps of the courthouse in Selma, Alabama.

As we stood and prayed, a sheriff came by. The sheriff had a big gun. He said, “If you want to pray, go to church.” I told him, “We feel sorry for you. All you have on your side is your gun. We have truth on our side, we have God on our side, and the truth and God will last forever; your gun will disintegrate.”

In that atmosphere, I volunteered to be a bodyguard for Martin Luther King during the march. The first time the marchers tried to cross the bridge they were turned back. The federal court finally gave us permission. That was a glorious march. Three thousand to 3,500 marched over the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

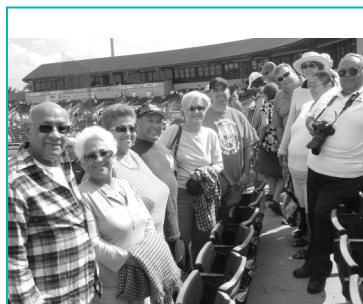
White people in autos drove by and called us names. It was an example of man’s inhumanity to man. There was a big picture of Martin Luther King on a billboard with the word “Communist,” saying he was trying to overthrow the government. But all people wanted was to vote.

We made that 54-mile march. It was so impressive that the president and Congress passed the Voting Rights Act saying that all people in the United States should have the right to vote.

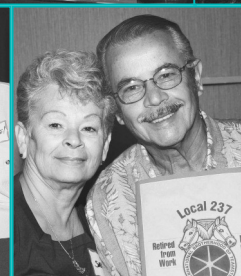
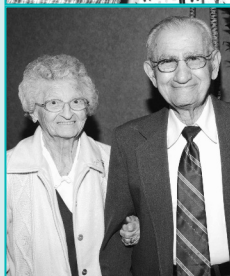
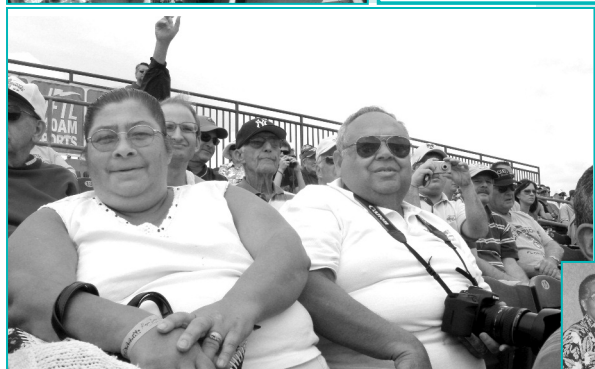
And now, guess what: The mayor of Selma, this morning, is a black man—George Patrick Evans. And when I went back to Selma in 1971 when my father died, I went to the voter registration office to see what it was like. The person sitting behind the desk was black. The white woman was gone. And the sheriff with the gun was gone.

And, President Obama asked us [the Tuskegee Airmen] to have breakfast with him on the morning of his inauguration. We had two appointments before the inauguration. One was reading the U.S. Constitution at the Newseum, behind the Smithsonian. We sat in a congregation of people who read parts of the Constitution: the son of Thurgood Marshall, the first black Supreme Court justice; the son of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.; Congressman Conyers. And someone from 237—Dabney Montgomery! I was given Amendment 24, sections 1 and 2, about the poll tax. What a setting that was: a thousand people, and here I am, not only seeing the first African American president elected, but seeing him inaugurated.

That’s what happens when you believe, when you fight for it, when you die for it.



## Florida Retirees at Work & Play



Conference photos by Duane Long

## NEW YORK CITY LABOR CHORUS

### 18TH ANNIVERSARY GALA BENEFIT CONCERT

**Saturday, June 13**  
7:30 p.m.  
**Ethical Culture Society**  
2 West 64th Street  
(off Central Park West)

Tickets: \$25  
Seniors, students, unemployed: \$15  
For information call 212-929-3232  
or go to [www.nyclc.org](http://www.nyclc.org)

Local 237's Retiree Division held its annual Florida retiree benefits conference in West Palm Beach March 27. The day before, retirees, union leaders and friends went to a spring training game between the New York Mets and the St. Louis Cardinals and picnicked in the ballpark (photos above, left).

At the conference (above photos), the retirees received updates on union affairs and their benefits from union officials and health insurance representatives.

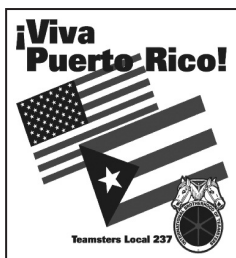
## Retiree Personal Notes

Greetings to retired HPO **Ulric Plaskett, Sr.**, of Birmingham, Alabama, who celebrated his 83rd birthday May 4 . . . Happy 86th birthday to retired housing assistant **Dabney Montgomery**. His birthday was April 16 . . . Condolences to **Edith Montero** on the passing of her mother, Isabel, at age 97, in Santo Domingo last month . . . Condolences also to Bronx retiree **Juan Padilla** on the passing of his wife, Miriam.

## PUERTO RICAN DAY PARADE

### March with Local 237

5th Ave. from 44th St. to 88th St.



**Sunday**  
**June 14**  
11 a.m.

Salsa • Latino food • t-shirts

For Local 237's meeting place, call the Retiree Division, 212-807-0555

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*Happy Mothers Day*