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AARP West Virginia Legislative Issues Survey

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AARP West Virginia Legislative Issues Survey

Report Prepared by Rachelle Cummins

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AARP 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, www.aarp.org. AARP Foundation is our 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.

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Survey Highlights

The AARP West Virginia Legislative Issues Survey was conducted by mail between November and December 2004. A random sample of 2,000 AARP members in West Virginia was selected from AARP's membership database. Fifty-eight percent of the sampled West Virginia members returned surveys by the due date, providing 1,161 usable surveys for analysis. A sample of this size has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.9 percent.

- According to members, access to affordable prescription drugs (79%); availability, cost, and quality of health care (75%); and protecting pensions and retirement savings (75%) should be the top legislative priorities for AARP West Virginia.
- Roughly half of members say helping older persons remain in their own homes or communities as they age (54%); access to affordable utility services and rates (53%); protecting consumers against fraud (51%); and the availability, cost, and quality of long-term care (49%) should be top legislative priorities for AARP West Virginia.
- At least three in ten members say that preventing abusive lending practices (39%); increasing transportation options for the elderly (38%); expanding Medicaid (37%); enabling grandparents caring for grandchildren to obtain what they need for these children (37%); access to affordable housing (35%); reducing employment discrimination based on age and disability (30%); and assistance programs for low-income state residents (30%) should be top legislative priorities for AARP West Virginia.
- Many members support, either strongly (39%) or somewhat (22%), West Virginia changing its law to allow individuals who qualify to receive both Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time.
- More than six in ten believe it is very important (36%) or somewhat important (25%) for AARP West Virginia to work on changing the state law to allow individuals who qualify to receive both Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time.
- AARP members (38%) say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports changing the state law to allow individuals who qualify to receive both Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time while 23 percent say they would be less likely and 22 say it would not make a difference.

About This Survey

This mail survey explores the opinions of AARP members in West Virginia on economic security, health care, and independent living legislative issues and the current West Virginia law on Social Security and unemployment insurance. Several demographic questions measure who AARP members are in West Virginia. This report summarizes the findings of the survey. An annotated survey at the end of this report shows the responses to all questions.

AARP conducted the West Virginia Legislative Issues Survey between November and December 2004. Researchers at AARP randomly selected 2,000 AARP members in West Virginia making sure to select the appropriate proportion of members from each of three age groups: 50-59, 60-74, and 75+. Each selected member received a pre-notification postcard, the survey itself, a reminder postcard, and a second survey. One thousand one hundred and sixty-one members returned the survey, making the response rate 58 percent. The sampling error for this study is ± 2.9 percent. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples of this size, the results obtained in the sample would fall in a range of 2.9 percentage points of what would have been obtained if every AARP member, approximately 285,400 as of December 31, 2004, in West Virginia had been surveyed. The data is weighted to ensure that the proportion of members in each of the sample's age groups were similar to the proportion of all West Virginia members in each age group.

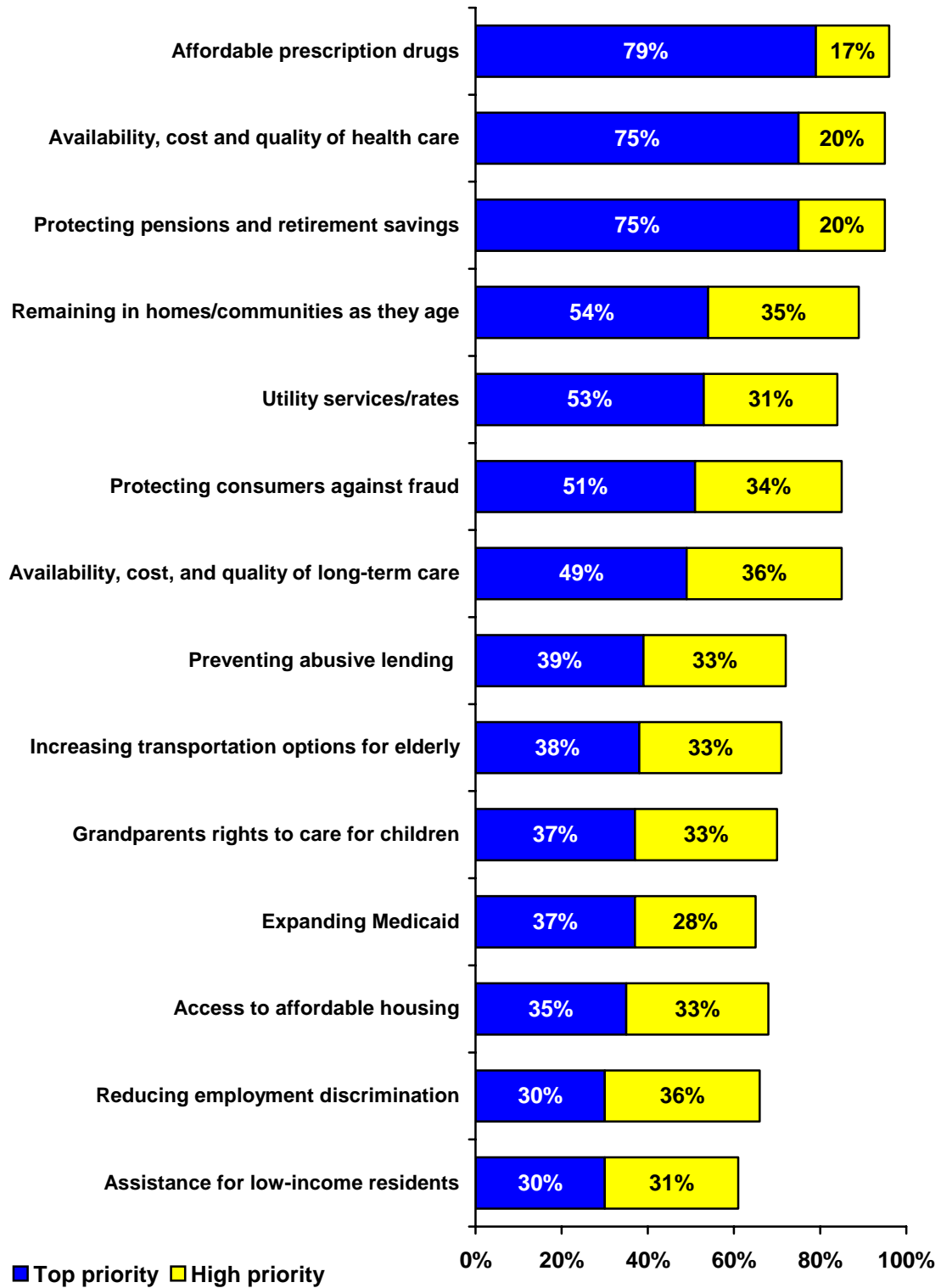
Findings

State Legislative Priorities

Access to affordable prescription drugs is the top legislative priority for West Virginia members.

Out of 14 legislative issues, West Virginia members believe that AARP's top legislative priorities should be access to affordable prescription drugs; availability, cost, and quality of health care; and protecting pension and retirement savings. At least six in ten members say each of the 14 issues covered in the survey should be top or high legislative priorities for AARP.

Top and High Priority Legislative Issues for West Virginia Members (n = 1,161)

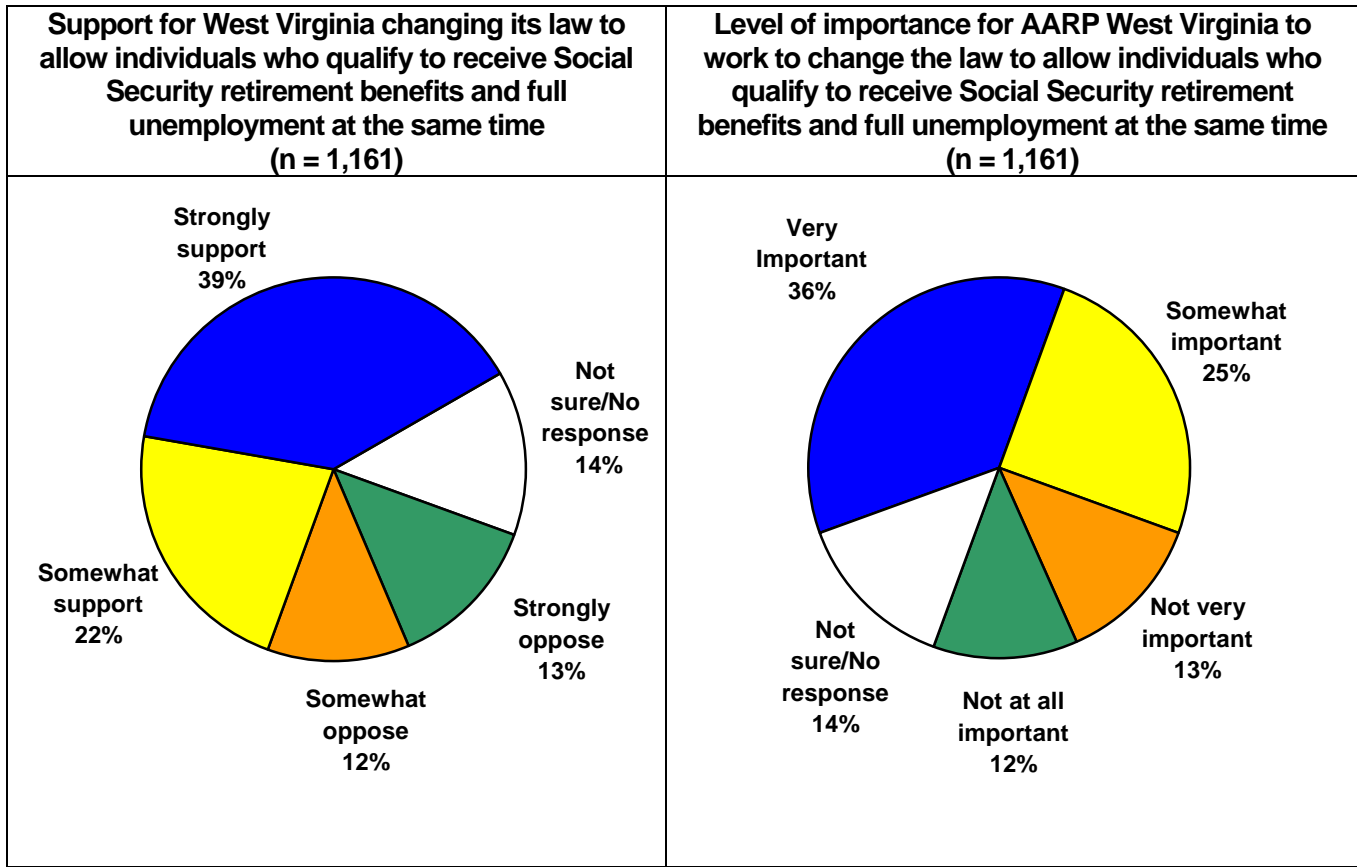


Social Security and Unemployment Insurance

AARP members support West Virginia changing its law to allow individuals who qualify to receive Social Security and full unemployment benefits at the same time.

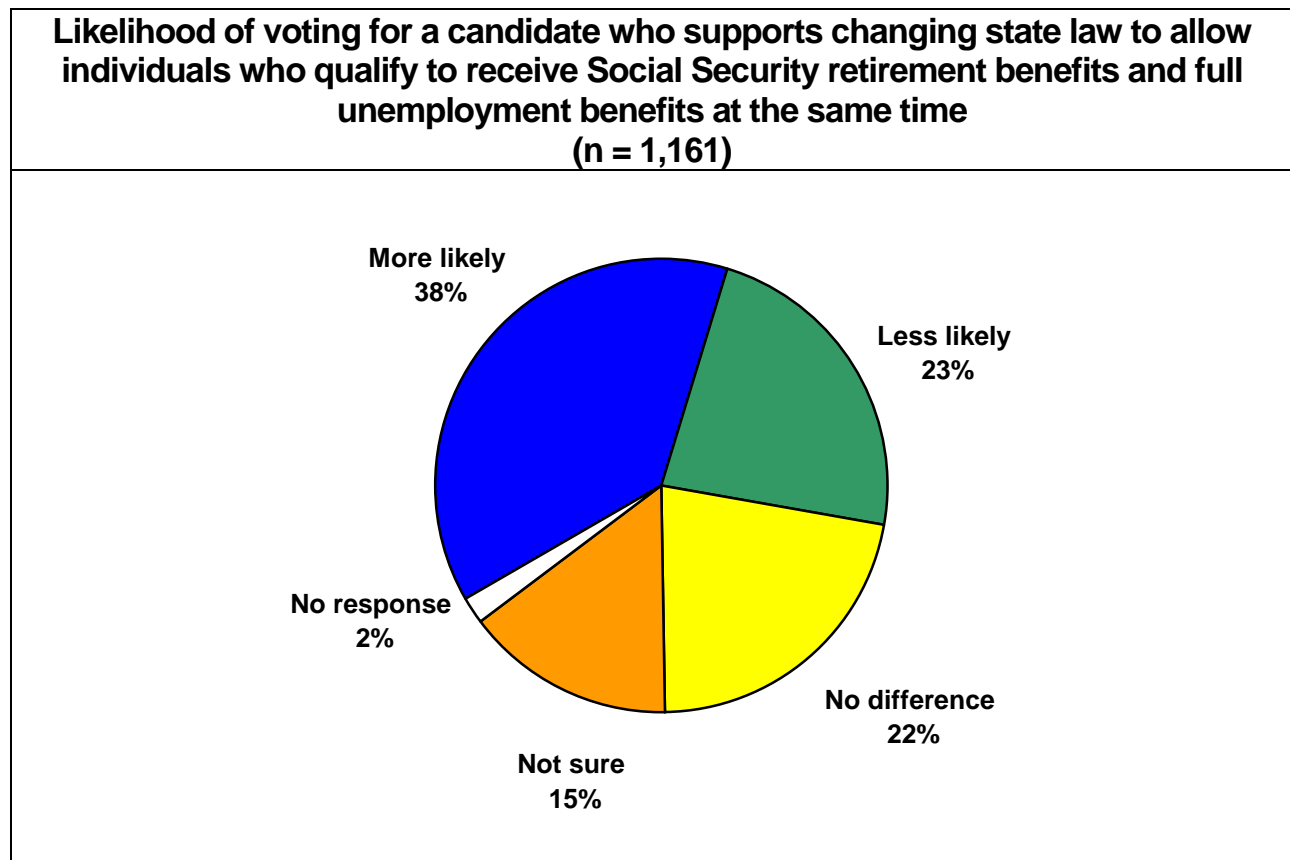
Unemployment insurance, a safety net program, is paid to workers who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Businesses are required to pay into the unemployment insurance fund on behalf of their workers. Federal law allows qualifying workers who have lost their jobs and who have begun collecting Social Security retirement benefits to collect both unemployment and Social Security benefits at the same time. However, West Virginia law currently eliminates all unemployment benefits if a person is also collecting Social Security retirement benefits.

More than six in ten (61%) AARP members support West Virginia changing its law to allow individuals who qualify to receive both Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time. A quarter opposes the change, while about one in seven are unsure. The same percentage (61%) thinks that it is important for AARP West Virginia to work to change this law. A quarter does not think it is important, and 12 percent are not sure.

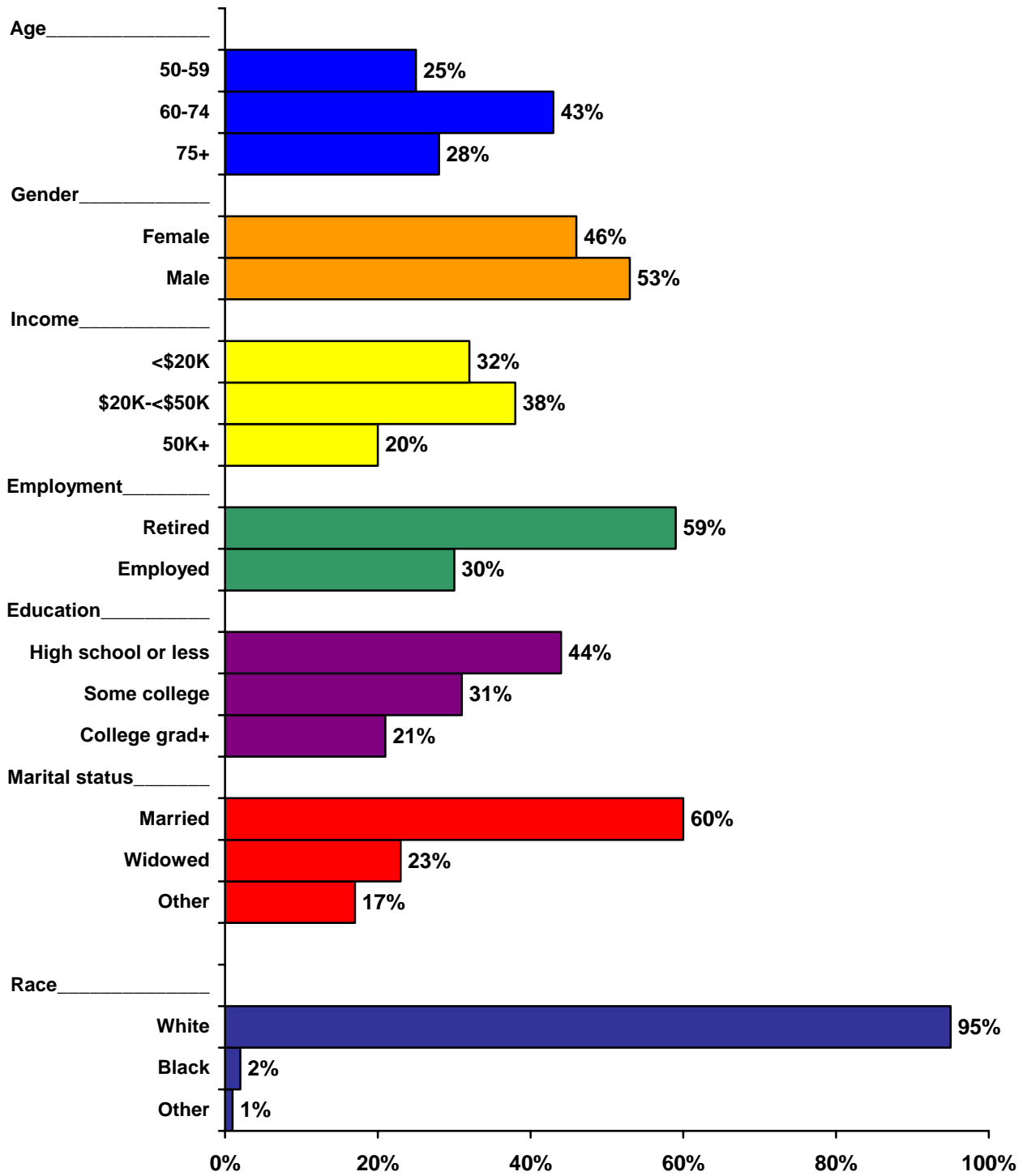


A plurality of West Virginia members would vote for a candidate who supports changing state law to allow individuals who qualify to receive Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time.

Nearly four in ten (38%) AARP members say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports changing state law to allow individuals who qualify to receive Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time. About one quarter of members (22%) says a candidate's support for changing the law would make no difference. Nearly a quarter (23%) would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports changing the state law.



Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 1,161)



Conclusions

Overall, members' opinions are consistent with AARP West Virginia's 2005 legislative priorities. Across 14 issues that affect older West Virginians including issues around economic security, health care, and independent living, no fewer than six in ten members say these issues should be top or high legislative priorities for AARP West Virginia. According to AARP members, the top three legislative priorities for AARP West Virginia should be access to affordable prescription drugs; the availability, cost, and quality of health care; and protecting pensions and retirement savings. Roughly half of members see helping older persons remain in their own homes or communities as they age; access to affordable utility services and rates; protecting consumers against fraud; and the availability, cost, and quality of long-term care as top legislative priorities for AARP West Virginia.

Member opinion also supports AARP West Virginia's legislative goal to eliminate the reduction of unemployment benefits for older workers who collect Social Security retirement benefits. Six in ten AARP members support West Virginia changing its law to allow individuals who qualify to receive both Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time. Similarly, six in ten members think that it is important for AARP West Virginia to work to change this law. A plurality of West Virginia members would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports changing the state law to allow individuals who qualify to receive both Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time.

Annotated Survey

2004 AARP West Virginia Legislative Issues Survey

Weighted n = 1,161 Members; Response Rate = 58%; Sampling Error = \pm 2.9%
(Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple response.)

State Legislative Issues

1. To be effective, AARP West Virginia wants to work on the most important issues facing West Virginia AARP members. Keeping in mind what's most important to you, how much of a priority should it be for AARP to work on the following legislative issues in West Virginia?

		Top Priority	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority	Not A Priority	Not Sure	No Response
a.	Protecting pensions and retirement savings	75%	20%	2%	1%	1%	*	1%
b.	Reducing employment discrimination based on age and disability	30%	36%	23%	6%	2%	2%	2%
c.	Protecting consumers against fraud	51%	34%	12%	2%	*	*	1%
d.	Preventing abusive lending practices by mortgage lenders, check-cashing outlets, and pay day lenders	39%	33%	17%	6%	2%	2%	2%
e.	Access to affordable utility services and rates	53%	31%	11%	2%	1%	1%	2%
f.	Assistance programs for low-income state residents such as food stamps and utility assistance	30%	31%	26%	8%	3%	1%	2%
g.	Expanding Medicaid, the government health insurance program for low-income people	37%	28%	24%	6%	3%	1%	2%
h.	Enabling grandparents who are caring for grandchildren to obtain necessary financial, medical, educational, and legal services for these children	37%	33%	20%	4%	3%	2%	1%

1. [CONTINUED] To be effective, AARP West Virginia wants to work on the most important issues facing West Virginia AARP members. Keeping in mind what's most important to you, how much of a priority should it be for AARP to work on the following legislative issues in West Virginia?

		Top Priority	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority	Not A Priority	Not Sure	No Response
i.	Availability, cost, and quality of health care	75%	20%	3%	*	*	*	1%
j.	Access to affordable prescription drugs	79%	17%	3%	*	*	*	1%
k.	Availability, cost, and quality of long-term care services	49%	36%	11%	1%	*	*	2%
l.	Helping older persons remain in their own homes or communities as they age	54%	35%	9%	1%	*	*	1%
m.	Increasing transportation options for the elderly and disabled	38%	33%	23%	3%	1%	*	1%
n.	Access to affordable housing	35%	33%	23%	5%	1%	1%	2%

2. What other legislative issues not mentioned above that are important to you should AARP West Virginia work on? Please specify below.

[Multiple responses allowed]

<u>%</u>	
3	Cost of auto/home insurance is too high
2	Social Security (stability, reform, eligibility, etc.)
2	Medical help for retirees/universal medical
2	Reduce tax on elderly/tax reform
24	Other
77	No Response

Social Security and Unemployment Insurance

3. **Unemployment insurance, a safety net program, is paid to workers who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Businesses are required to pay into the unemployment insurance fund on behalf of their workers. Federal law allows qualifying workers who have lost their jobs and who have begun collecting Social Security retirement benefits to collect both unemployment and Social Security benefits at the same time. However, West Virginia law currently eliminates all unemployment benefits if a person is also collecting Social Security retirement benefits.**

Would you support or oppose West Virginia changing its law to allow individuals who qualify to receive both Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time?

<u>%</u>	
39	Strongly support
22	Somewhat support
12	Somewhat oppose
13	Strongly oppose
13	Not sure
1	No Response

4. **How important do you think it is for AARP West Virginia to work to change state law to allow individuals who qualify to receive both Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time?**

<u>%</u>	
36	Very important
25	Somewhat important
13	Not very important
12	Not at all important
12	Not sure
2	No Response

5. **If a candidate for state office in West Virginia supported changing state law to allow individuals who qualify to receive both Social Security retirement benefits and full unemployment benefits at the same time, would you be more likely to vote for that candidate, less likely to vote for him or her, or would it not make any difference?**

<u>%</u>	
38	More likely
23	Less likely
22	Would not make a difference
15	Not sure
2	No Repsonse

About You

The following questions are for classification purposes.

D1. Are you male or female?

<u>%</u>	
53	Male
46	Female
1	No Response

D2. What is your age as of your last birthday? _____ years

<u>%</u>	
25	50-59
15	60-64
28	65-74
28	75+
5	No Response

D3. What is your current marital status?

<u>%</u>	
60	Now married
2	Living with a partner
23	Widowed
10	Divorced
1	Separated
4	Never married
1	No Response

D4. What is the highest level of education that you completed?

<u>%</u>	
12	Less than high school
32	High school graduate or equivalent
31	Some college or technical training beyond high school
9	College graduate (4 years)
12	Post-graduate or professional degree
5	No Response

D5. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

<u>%</u>	
21	Employed or self-employed <u>full-time</u>
9	Employed or self-employed <u>part-time</u>
59	Retired and not working [GO TO QUESTION D7]
6	Other such as homemaker
1	Unemployed and looking for work
5	No Response

D6. Have you ever retired from a previous career? (n=417 Non-retired respondents)

<u>%</u>	
24	Yes
75	No
2	No Response

D7. Thinking about your state elections for West Virginia Governor and Legislators in the last ten years, which of the following best describes your voting behavior?

<u>%</u>	
74	Always vote
16	Sometimes miss one
5	Rarely vote
4	Never vote
2	No Response

D8. What is your race?

<u>%</u>	
95	White or Caucasian
2	Black or African American
*	Asian
*	Native American or Alaskan Native
0	Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
*	Other
2	No Response

D9. What is your 5-digit zip code? Write in your zip code _____

D10. What was your annual household income before taxes in 2003?

<u>%</u>	
10	Less than \$10,000
22	\$10,000 to \$19,999
17	\$20,000 to \$29,999
12	\$30,000 to \$39,999
9	\$40,000 to \$49,999
12	\$50,000 to \$74,999
8	\$75,000 or more
11	No Response

Thank you for completing this survey. Please use the postage-paid envelope and return it to State Member Research, AARP, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049, by December 14, 2004.

AARP
Knowledge Management
For more information, contact Rachelle Cummins
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