



## Understanding the Benefits and Disadvantages of Medicare Advantage (MA) Plans



At the recent SOAR Executive Board meeting held June 10 & 11 in Washington, D.C., it was decided that we as an organization should look at ways to assist our members in understanding the benefits and disadvantages of Medicare Advantage (MA) plans. While we know that for some of our retirees, their retiree health care coverage is negotiated, many of our members must navigate the complicated jungle of plans available to them.

Some of the issues with MA plans were identified during a Senate hearing on May 17, 2023, titled “Examining Health Care Denials and Delays in Medicare Advantage.” The high-pressure sales pitch we all have heard, from phone calls made by sales representatives claiming to be from Medicare to TV commercials with celebrities offering benefits that are not actually available to many of us, were some of the topics covered in the hearing.

Many SOAR chapters invite representatives from insurance companies to speak at their meetings. Most often, the insurance company sends a salesperson who is trying to get more customers. A person from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) or the County Office for the Aging may present a clearer picture of the type of coverage that could potentially be best for our individual needs. We should not depend on Joe Namath or some other celebrity to tell us what type of MA plan is best for us. Sometimes, a supplement plan may be the best and, in the long run, the cheapest for our specific needs.

A recent article in the AARP magazine claims, “rules that will kick in September 30 are part of a regulation designed to crack down on what the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) calls ‘misleading marketing schemes by health insurance companies.’” Among other provisions, the new rule would prohibit overly general ads about the MA program that often confuse and mislead individuals eligible to apply for MA insurance plans.

Your SOAR Executive Board does not endorse any product or claim any plan superior to another. However, we will continue to provide information on these types of plans to the best of our ability so that our members can make an informed decision on what kind of plan best suits their individual needs.

*Bill Pienta*, SOAR President

**See related article on page 12.**

Source:

<https://www.aarp.org/health/medicare-insurance/info-2023/feds-crack-down-on-misleading-medicare-advantage-ads.html>

## Conceding Nothing on Our Retirement Security



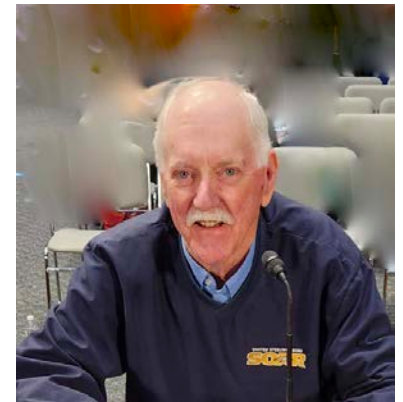
Debt ceiling negotiations concluded in June with President Biden and our allies in Congress conceding nothing with regard to Social Security and Medicare.

This comes after five months of activism by Steelworker members and retirees, as well a major push during our annual Rapid Response Conference to urge lawmakers to stand strong against the calls of some in Congress who have long sought to undercut the programs.

Additionally, on April 20, Dave McLimans, a former local union president (USW 1165 in Chester, Pennsylvania) and current SOAR District 10 Executive Board Member, testified in front of the U.S. Senate Aging Committee.

In his testimony, McLimans, a Vietnam Veteran, strongly opposed the efforts of some in Congress to cut vital programs like Social Security and Medicare, saying, “I didn’t serve my country, work and pay taxes for forty-four years just to let my voice fade away or see younger generations lose benefits I fought for my whole life.”

McLimans spoke in detail about our union’s longstanding commitment to defending every workers’ right to retire with dignity, ranging from our unrelenting defense of Social Security and Medicare to our successful efforts to pass the Butch Lewis Act, which rescued the pensions of nearly 3 million workers and families, including 120,000 active and retired USW members.



**Dave McLimans**

Concluding his testimony, McLimans reminded the committee that, “we are the richest democracy on earth, we can afford to allow workers to retire with dignity.”

USW International President, Tom Conway, issued a statement praising the agreement, and celebrating the hard work of USW members and retirees to ensure all Americans continue to enjoy the right to retire with dignity. In Conway’s words, Biden “reached across the aisle and found a path forward that allows our nation to meet its obligations without many of the cruel and unnecessary cuts.”

“USW members worked diligently over the past five months calling on our leaders to preserve key programs like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. We’re grateful that President Biden listened to working Americans and held firm on these issues.”

Thanks to all the SOAR chapters who signed onto the “No Cuts to Retirement Security” campaign!

*Julie Stein*, SOAR Director

### SOAR Chapter Connection

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### Articles and Photos Requested

The deadline to submit articles for the next publication of the SOAR Chapter Connection newsletter is Sept 25, 2023. Email articles and photos to [soar3@icloud.com](mailto:soar3@icloud.com) Photos should have a short caption included.

The next deadline for the SOAR in Action magazine will be October 5 and articles should be emailed to the SOAR Director Julie Stein at [jstein@usw.org](mailto:jstein@usw.org)



Stay cool every body and please don't fall. Drink lots of H2O.

Charlie

### The McNeil Report



Saturday morning, I got up early, quietly dressed, made my lunch, grabbed the dog, and slipped quietly into the garage. I hooked up the boat to the truck and proceeded to back out into a torrential downpour.

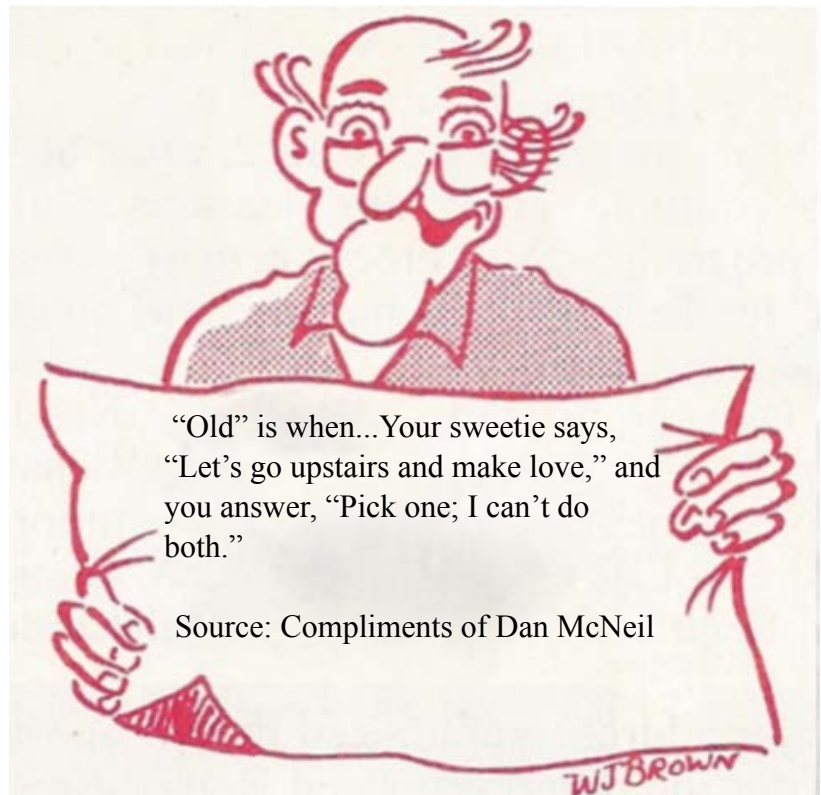
The wind was blowing 50 mph, so I pulled back into the garage, turned on the radio, and discovered the weather would be bad.

I returned to the house, quietly undressed, and slipped back into bed. I cuddled up to my wife's back with a different anticipation and whispered, "The weather out there is terrible."

My loving wife of 10 years replied, "Can you believe my stupid husband is out fishing in that?"

Source: Compliments of Dan McNeil

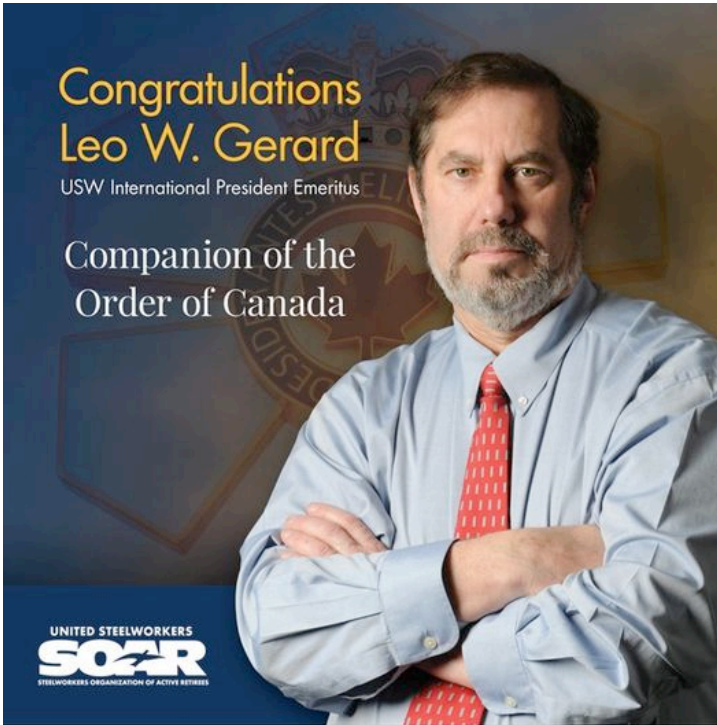
### Old Charlie Sez:



"Old" is when...Your sweetie says, "Let's go upstairs and make love," and you answer, "Pick one; I can't do both."

Source: Compliments of Dan McNeil

**Congratulations, Leo!**



SOAR congratulates our former USW International President, Leo Gerard, for his appointment to Canada’s highest civilian honour – Companion of the Order of Canada – on June 30.

Companion of the Order of Canada is the highest of the three levels of the Order of Canada. It is awarded for “outstanding achievement and merit of the highest degree, especially in service to Canada or to humanity at large.”

“Leo Gerard’s life mission has been to improve the working and living standards of workers in Canada, the United States and around the world,” said Marty Warren, USW National Director for Canada.

“His impact on the lives of so many is indisputable, and it is entirely fitting that his achievements are being recognized by his appointment as a Companion of the Order of Canada,” Warren said.

**In Memoriam**

Dan McNeil, the most senior Emeritus Member of the SOAR Executive Board is now resting peacefully after a lifetime of devotion to our union and to SOAR. He passed away on July 18 at the age of 98. Dan was the writer of the McNeil Report (see page 3 of this newsletter). What a wonderful sense of humor he shared with us for many years.

*Charlie Averill*



## Honor Social Security’s 88th Anniversary by Protecting, Expanding It

by **Robert Roach, Jr.**

As we celebrate Social Security’s 88th anniversary on August 14, Congress must show its support for older Americans by increasing benefits and also ensuring the system is strong for future generations.

As a bedrock of our retirement security, Social Security lifts more people out of poverty than any other program. Astonishingly, the House Republican Study Committee recently released a new budget that would drastically change Social Security for the worse. It would cut benefits, privatize the system, and raise the retirement age to 69 for millions of Americans who were born in 1971 or later.



Retirees need to be on high alert. Republican Members of Congress and some candidates for the Senate, House and White House have declared their intent to cut the Social Security benefits we’ve earned if they get the opportunity.

Fortunately, there are much better ways forward.

The Alliance for Retired Americans believes the practical and fair way to protect and expand Social Security is to lift the cap on Social Security payroll taxes above the current \$160,200 in annual earnings and require that high-income Americans pay their fair share of taxes into the system.

The Alliance strongly supports federal legislation that increases Social Security benefits, extends the solvency of the Social Security Trust Fund, and repeals the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO), both of which deprive educators and other public employees of the benefits they have earned and the secure retirement they deserve.

Several bills would strengthen Social Security in important ways. Now is the time for action.

**See next page for more information.**

*Robert Roach, Jr. is president of the Alliance for Retired Americans. He was previously General Secretary-Treasurer of the IAMAW. For more information, visit [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org).*



# FRIDAY ALERT

## Senate Budget Committee Holds Hearing on Strengthening Social Security; Rep. Larson Re-Introduces the Social Security 2100 Act

Social Security was in the news recently with Senate Budget Committee Chairman Sheldon Whitehouse (RI) holding a hearing entitled, "Protecting Social Security for All: Making the Wealthy Pay Their Fair Share," and Rep. John Larson (CT) re-introducing the Social Security 2100 Act as H.R. 4583.

The Senate hearing focused on S. 1174, [the Medicare and Social Security Fair Share Act](#), introduced by Sen. Whitehouse. The legislation extends Social Security's solvency indefinitely while extending Medicare's solvency by 20 years by requiring Social Security taxes to be paid on all wages, self-employment, and investment income above \$400,000. Currently Social Security taxes are only paid on the first \$160,200 in annual earnings. In addition, the Medicare tax rate would be increased for income above \$400,000. Rep. Brendan Boyle (PA) has introduced a House version of the bill, H.R. 4535.

Rep. Larson's [bill](#), H.R. 4583, was re-introduced on July 12. It has more than 175 House co-sponsors and would require Social Security taxes to be paid on wage income above \$400,000. It increases benefits by 2% across the board for all Social Security beneficiaries for the first time in 52 years, expands benefits to boost lower income seniors, and improves benefits for middle-income widows and widowers from two-income households. It also repeals the [Windfall Elimination Provision \(WEP\) and Government Pension Offset \(GPO\)](#) that currently penalize many public servants. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (CT) introduced the Senate version of the bill, S. 2280.

"The Alliance supports both of these bills. They demonstrate how we can strengthen Social Security and ensure that the vast majority of Americans do not continue paying a much larger percentage of their income into Social Security than billionaires," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "This is a welcome contrast to the proposals from other members of Congress who talk about raising the full retirement age for Social Security, privatizing it and creating special commissions to slash it."

Source: Alliance for Retired Americans Friday Alert, July 14, 2023

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### NOTE:

The next round of SOAR chapter dues refund checks will be mailed the third week of August. If you have any questions, please call the SOAR office at 1-866-208-4420.

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## Movement Advances To Establish Minimum Staffing in Nursing Homes



The Biden administration is preparing to address the nursing home staffing crisis by introducing a proposed rule that includes requiring more care workers per resident. Low staffing often means that workers are forced to manage care for dozens of patients at a time, frequently leading to a higher incidence of falls, rehospitalizations, and missed care. It has also led to higher resident mortality rates.

At the same time, many nursing home corporations [have cut costs](#) and reaped huge profits at the expense of workers and residents. This has been exacerbated by an influx of private equity into nursing homes.

The new Biden administration rule is expected to strengthen the nation's long-term care system, improve the lives of residents and prevent unnecessary worker injury and burnout. That should give working families peace of mind that their loved ones are receiving the level of care they deserve.

“The rule will change the minimum number of direct-care-staff per resident,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “That is at the crux of the problem in nursing homes, and residents should see vast improvements in their daily lives once the changes are implemented.”

If you are a nursing home worker, have lived in a nursing home, know a loved one who has, or want to improve the state of care in our country, please share your story [Here](#) or go to <https://act.aflcio.org/forms/better-care/?source=website>

Source: Alliance for Retired Americans Friday Alert, July 14, 2023

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**Here's a link to see photos taken at the 2023 Rapid Response, Legislative and Policy Conference:**

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/unitedsteelworkers/sets/72177720309006137/>

## Retirees Praise Biden Nomination of Martin O’Malley To Be Social Security Commissioner



Statement by **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance for Retired Americans, on President Biden’s nomination of former Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley to be SSA Commissioner:

“Members of the Alliance for Retired Americans are pleased that President Biden has nominated former Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley to be the next Social Security Administration (SSA) Commissioner.

“The SSA needs a strong Commissioner now more than ever. With 10,000 Americans turning 65 each day, the workload increases every day and the budget has been woefully inadequate to meet the needs of seniors, people with disabilities and all American families.

“Gov. O’Malley has a proven track record and the experience to navigate these challenges and ensure that Americans are able to get the benefits they have earned.

“American workers have earned their Social Security benefits, paying into the system with every paycheck. They deserve world class service from a fully staffed workforce equipped with the best tools and technology available. The Alliance for Retired Americans is confident that under Governor O’Malley’s leadership SSA will deliver.

“There is no time to waste. We urge the Senate to confirm Gov. O’Malley without delay.”

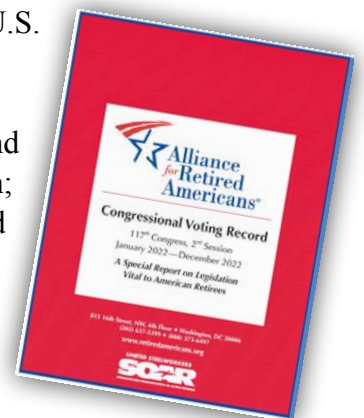
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### Alliance For Retired Americans Voting Record

Every year the Alliance publishes a Congressional Voting Record that scores every U.S. Senator and U.S. Representative on key retirement security issues.

The 2022 report considers 10 Senate and House floor votes, including votes on bills and amendments to provide additional funding for the Social Security Administration; lowering drug prices through the Inflation Reduction Act; protecting voting rights; and passing the Postal Service Reform Act, which was critical to retirees who often rely on the postal service for at-home delivery of medication and election ballots.

Download the national report or a state report by going to <https://retiredamericans.org/voting-record/>





## You Can Prevent or Detect Many Health Conditions With Regular Health Screenings



Here's a list of preventive and screening services Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance) covers:

- [Abdominal aortic aneurysm screenings](#)
- [Alcohol misuse screenings & counseling](#)
- [Blood-based biomarker tests](#)
- [Cardiovascular disease screenings](#)
- [Cardiovascular disease \(behavioral therapy\)](#)
- [Cervical & vaginal cancer screenings](#)
- [Colorectal cancer screenings](#)
  - [Multi-target stool DNA tests](#)
  - [Screening barium enemas](#)
  - [Screening colonoscopies](#)
  - [Screening fecal occult blood tests](#)
  - [Screening flexible sigmoidoscopies](#)
- [Depression screenings](#)
- [Diabetes screenings](#)
- [Diabetes self-management training](#)
- [Flu shots](#)
- [Glaucoma tests](#)
- [Hepatitis B shots](#)
- [Hepatitis B Virus \(HBV\) infection screenings](#)
- [Hepatitis C screening tests](#)
- [HIV screenings](#)
- [Lung cancer screenings](#)
- [Mammograms \(screening\)](#)
- [Medicare Diabetes Prevention Program](#)
- [Nutrition therapy services](#)
- [Obesity screenings & counseling](#)
- [One-time "Welcome to Medicare" preventive visit](#)

- [Pneumococcal shots](#)
- [Prostate cancer screenings](#)
- [Sexually transmitted infections screenings & counseling](#)
- Shots:
  - [COVID-19 vaccines](#)
  - [Flu shots](#)
  - [Hepatitis B shots](#)
  - [Pneumococcal shots](#)
- [Tobacco use cessation counseling](#)
- [Yearly "Wellness" visit](#)

Preventive services help you stay healthy, detect health problems early, determine the most effective treatments, and prevent certain diseases. Preventive services include exams, shots, lab tests, and screenings. They also include programs for health monitoring, and counseling and education to help you take care of your own health.

Source: Medicare.gov

Note: Shingles shots are now covered.

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### Note:

Your doctor or other health care provider may recommend you get services more often than Medicare covers. Or, they may recommend services that Medicare doesn't cover. If this happens, you may have to pay some or all of the costs. Ask questions so you understand why your doctor is recommending certain services and if, or how much, Medicare will pay for them.

**The SOAR Office Now Has T-shirts and Ball Caps Available for Purchase!**

**Just Arrived!**

**\$15**



**\$15 each + the cost of shipping. Contact the SOAR Office.**

**866-208-4420**

**Now Available!**



**SOAR ball caps for purchase!  
\$20 each + the cost of shipping.  
Contact the SOAR Office.  
866-208-4420**

**\$20**



## America's Future Is Not "Business as Usual"



President Joe Biden traveled to Philadelphia on Thursday, July 20 delivering a message at the Philly Shipyard that gave a shot in the arm to American shipbuilding, unions, clean energy supply chains and manufacturing jobs.

It's no secret that China has outpaced the United States in the manufacturing of ships for its communist armada.

But this lopsided advantage for China did not just happen overnight.

While China was taking advantage of every trade loophole and exploiting its workers into slave labor, America was content on manufacturing its products overseas, denying the United States its standing as the mightiest manufacturer in the world. It was the easiest way for major American corporations to make a quick buck, but the consequences of these actions have had a negative impact on our nation's manufacturing for years.

The United States may be far back at this point in this marathon race, but President Biden has not thrown in the towel. He is investing in America to close the gap.

In Philadelphia, Biden touted the beginning of construction of the Acadia, the first U.S.-flagged rock installation vessel that will be essential in building offshore wind farms. More than 1,000 workers across nine unions are constructing the Acadia using steel plates made by United Steelworkers in Indiana. The project is estimated to generate \$125 million of U.S. economic activity each year.

"It'll be the first vessel of its kind that's made in America, American-owned, American-operated," said Biden. "Steel for vessels is being made by United Steelworkers in Indiana, the engine will be made by the United States Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers in Pittsburgh. The crew's going to be American mariners from Seafarers International Union."

Since Biden took office, companies have announced more than 18 offshore wind shipbuilding projects and invested nearly \$3.5 billion across 12 manufacturing facilities and 13 ports to boost America's offshore wind supply chain.

Biden is not taking a "business as usual" approach when it comes to America's future. His economic agenda has attracted more than \$500 billion in private sector manufacturing and clean energy investments and more than 800,000 manufacturing jobs.

China might be ahead in the numbers game, but there are no workers in the world that can compete with skilled American laborers, especially the members of the United Steelworkers union.

*Jeff Bonior* is a staff writer at the Alliance for American Manufacturing

## The Choice Between Traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage? (Part 1)

By Diane Archer



Make no mistake. Traditional Medicare, which is government-administered, and Medicare Advantage, which is administered by corporate insurers, are fundamentally different. But it's easy to think otherwise, as they both offer Medicare benefits.

### Ask yourself these questions before you enroll in a Medicare Advantage plan:

#### Can you see the doctors you need to see wherever you happen to be in the U.S.?

Only traditional Medicare covers your care from virtually any doctor or hospital in the U.S. Medicare Advantage plans generally only cover care from a restricted network of doctors and hospitals, often only in your community. When they cover care from health-care providers outside of their network, you are often left paying 40% of the bill out of pocket.

#### Will you be covered for all the Medicare services your physicians say you need?

Only traditional Medicare covers these services. Medicare Advantage plans often second-guess your treating physicians, and [too often inappropriately delay and deny you needed care](#), even though they are supposed to cover the same medically necessary services as traditional Medicare.

#### Will you face administrative obstacles to care, such as referrals by primary-care providers and prior authorization requirements for specialty care?

Only traditional Medicare allows you to go straight to the physicians and hospitals you want to use without creating barriers. Medicare Advantage plans too often require you to get their permission to get the treatments you need, at times second-guessing your physicians. [They cover significantly fewer services than traditional Medicare](#).

#### Will your Medicare plan profit from delaying and denying care?

Only traditional Medicare gives your health-care providers an incentive to provide all the care you need. Medicare Advantage plans receive a fixed amount from the government to cover your care, regardless of how much they spend on it. The less money a Medicare Advantage plan spends on your care, the more money the Medicare Advantage plan has for its shareholders. They profit from delaying and denying care.

#### Can you limit your out-of-pocket health care costs?

Only traditional Medicare provides you with the option of buying supplemental insurance to fill gaps in coverage. But traditional Medicare does not have an out-of-pocket limit, so if you don't have Medicaid, which fills gaps in coverage, or supplemental insurance — which can easily cost \$2,500 a year — your out-of-pocket costs could be substantial. Medicare Advantage has an out-of-pocket limit. But that limit can be as high as \$8,300 a year for in-network care alone in 2023, depending upon the plan you choose.

**How will you get prescription drug benefits?**

You can buy a Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit if you're in traditional Medicare for about \$30 a month. If you're in Medicare Advantage, prescription drug benefits are generally included. Either way, Medicare only covers some of the costs of your drugs. You need to check to see whether the plan you choose will cover the drugs you need at a reasonable cost to you.

**Do you want "extra" benefits?**

This is a trick question. Traditional Medicare does not cover vision, hearing and dental care, or transportation services and gym memberships. Medicare Advantage often tacks on one or more of these benefits to its package to lure enrollees. If these are important to you, make sure they are meaningful benefits. Medicare Advantage plans often force you to use a small group of providers for these services as well as to pay substantial amounts out of pocket for them.

**Want to know which Medicare Advantage plan is best for you?**

Throw a dart and say a prayer. Many Medicare Advantage plans have long [histories of engaging in consumer fraud](#). A lot of them have been found to inappropriately delay and deny people needed care. Many do not have cancer centers of excellence in their networks and, if they do, the networks frequently change. The government is not able to assess meaningful quality differences among them; the [five-star rating system is largely meaningless](#).

**Can you save money by joining a Medicare Advantage plan?**

Yes. You can save on the cost of supplemental insurance and Part D prescription drug coverage. But if you develop a serious condition and need expensive care, you will likely pay a lot more for your care in a Medicare Advantage plan than you would in traditional Medicare.

**Can you enroll in a Medicare Advantage plan while you're healthy, then switch to traditional Medicare when you need costly care?**

Theoretically you can. But in practice, you take a big financial and health risk. Unless you live in Maine, Massachusetts, New York or Connecticut, companies offering Medicare supplemental insurance are not required to sell you coverage to fill gaps in traditional Medicare after you are first eligible for Medicare, except in limited situations. If you can't buy supplemental coverage, you are effectively locked into Medicare Advantage to protect yourself financially, because traditional Medicare has no out-of-pocket cap.

**Bottom line:** If you can afford supplemental coverage in traditional Medicare or have Medicaid, you and your family can sleep well, knowing you will be able to get the care you need, wherever you are in the U.S., whenever you need it, without worry about out-of-pocket costs. Don't count on that in Medicare Advantage.

*Diane Archer is founder of the Medicare Rights Center, a resource for boomers, older adults, and care providers. She also serves on the board of directors of the Center for Health & Democracy.*

**Part 2 will be in our next issue of the Connection.**

**Editor's Note:** We are posting this article in an attempt to help our members better understand MA plans and make informed decisions as to what type of plan is best for them. Your SOAR Executive Board does not endorse any product or claim any plan superior to another.

**A Workers' Moment**

**By Tom Conway**  
**USW International President**



Dave Smith launched a union drive many years ago that generated enthusiastic support among his co-workers, but the effort died after management hired union-busting consultants and went on the attack.

Bosses at the Minnesota electric cooperative forced his colleagues into “captive audience” meetings, where they

lied about unions, threatened the workers and sowed so much fear that the group ultimately voted down a chance at a better life.



**Dave Smith**

Now, thanks to legislation that Smith supported, Minnesota employers won't be able to subject workers to that kind of bullying any longer.

Democratic Gov. Tim Walz just signed a bill that not only bans the mandatory anti-union meetings employers regularly hold to try to suppress organizing drives but enables workers to sue bosses who try to get away with holding the meetings anyway.

Even better, that measure is one of a growing number of pro-worker laws enacted around the country in recent months as workers, fed up with corporate greed and exploitative bosses, fight back against a system rigged against them.

Minnesota lawmakers also passed legislation last month that establishes paid family and medical leave for workers, expands workers' compensation coverage and requires employers in numerous industries, including warehouses and health care facilities, to ramp up safety.

In addition, legislators pushed through a bill, which Walz promptly signed, creating a “Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board,” aimed at giving front-line caregivers a meaningful voice in resolving staffing shortages and other challenges facing long-term care facilities.

“It’s been such a long fight to get some of this,” noted Smith, a SOAR supporter and currently a member of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 2660 at U.S. Steel’s Keetac Mine who helped push for the legislation. “It’s great that we were able to stick it out and get it passed. Hopefully, we can accomplish even more next year.”

In the wake of the new forward-thinking laws, Department of Labor and Industry Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach called Minnesota “the best state for workers and their families.”

This kind of progress doesn't happen by chance.

Union members turned out in force last November to re-elect Walz, keep the pro-worker majority in the House and flip the Senate, previously controlled by Republicans.

Then workers followed up their victories at the ballot box by successfully advocating for legislation aimed at leveling the playing field in the workplace.

Smith, for example, provided lawmakers with testimony explaining how the electric cooperative usurped his labor rights years ago and how that kind of harassment leaves workers "organizing in secrecy for fear of losing their jobs."

"It always left a sour taste in my mouth," said Smith, who stayed at the utility a couple of years longer before landing a position at Keetac in Keewatin, Minn.



**USW members rallied against so-called RTW laws in Michigan.**

That USW-represented job "changed my life," he added. "We had trouble making ends meet before. Now, I've sent three kids to college."

As Minnesotans charted their path forward, union members in Michigan made similar strides by helping to re-elect Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and installing Democratic majorities in both the House and Senate for the first time in decades.

At the urging of those same workers, lawmakers quickly passed, and Whitmer signed, legislation repealing falsely named "right-to-work" (RTW) laws that Republicans rammed through a decade earlier to silence workers' voices and bankrupt unions.

"Right-to-work is union busting," noted Jay McMurran, a long time union activist and currently a member of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) from Michigan, noting these laws undermine worker solidarity and power by allowing non-members to receive union services for free.



**Jay McMurran**

Union members in Vermont helped to increase the number of pro-worker lawmakers in both chambers of the state legislature last fall. Now, they're awaiting the House's vote on a bill, already passed by the Senate, to ban captive audience meetings there as well.

And New York's Democratic-controlled legislature just passed its own bill, now on Gov. Kathy Hochul's desk, protecting workers from anti-union meetings in that state.

“I do think there’s a shift,” Richard Knowles, a former USW local president at Allied Chemical in New York and a current District 4 SOAR Coordinator, said of the wave of pro-worker laws.



**Richard Knowles**

Workers put at risk during the pandemic and forced to endure “nonstop” production environments, among many other abuses, are not only demanding change but electing officials willing to join the fight, Knowles explained. That includes many younger workers who are contributing to the soaring level of support for unions.

“They need to get more money,” Knowles, who helped to lead 24 union drives during his career, said of young workers. “They need to get better benefits. They need to get out of their parents’ house. They need to get a union.”

While workers accumulate wins in the states, the USW and other unions also continue fighting for national legislation that will extend the same protections to all Americans wherever they live.

Democrats in the U.S. House twice passed the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, which would ban captive audience meetings, allow workers and employers to override states’ RTW laws and impose steep financial penalties on employers who violate workers’ labor rights.

The legislation would make it easier for workers to organize at a time that more and more Americans are seeking to join unions. Petitions for union elections surged 53 percent during the 2022 fiscal year and continue to increase this year, according to the National Labor Relations Board.



**USW activists met with U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer in June to push for pro-worker legislation.**

The PRO Act previously died because of a lack of Republican support in the Senate. But pro-worker members of Congress reintroduced it again this year, and hundreds of USW activists, including McMurrin, pounded the halls of the Capitol to build support for the legislation during the union’s Rapid Response, Legislative & Policy Conference in Washington, D.C., held in June.

“We don’t give up,” McMurrin said.

