



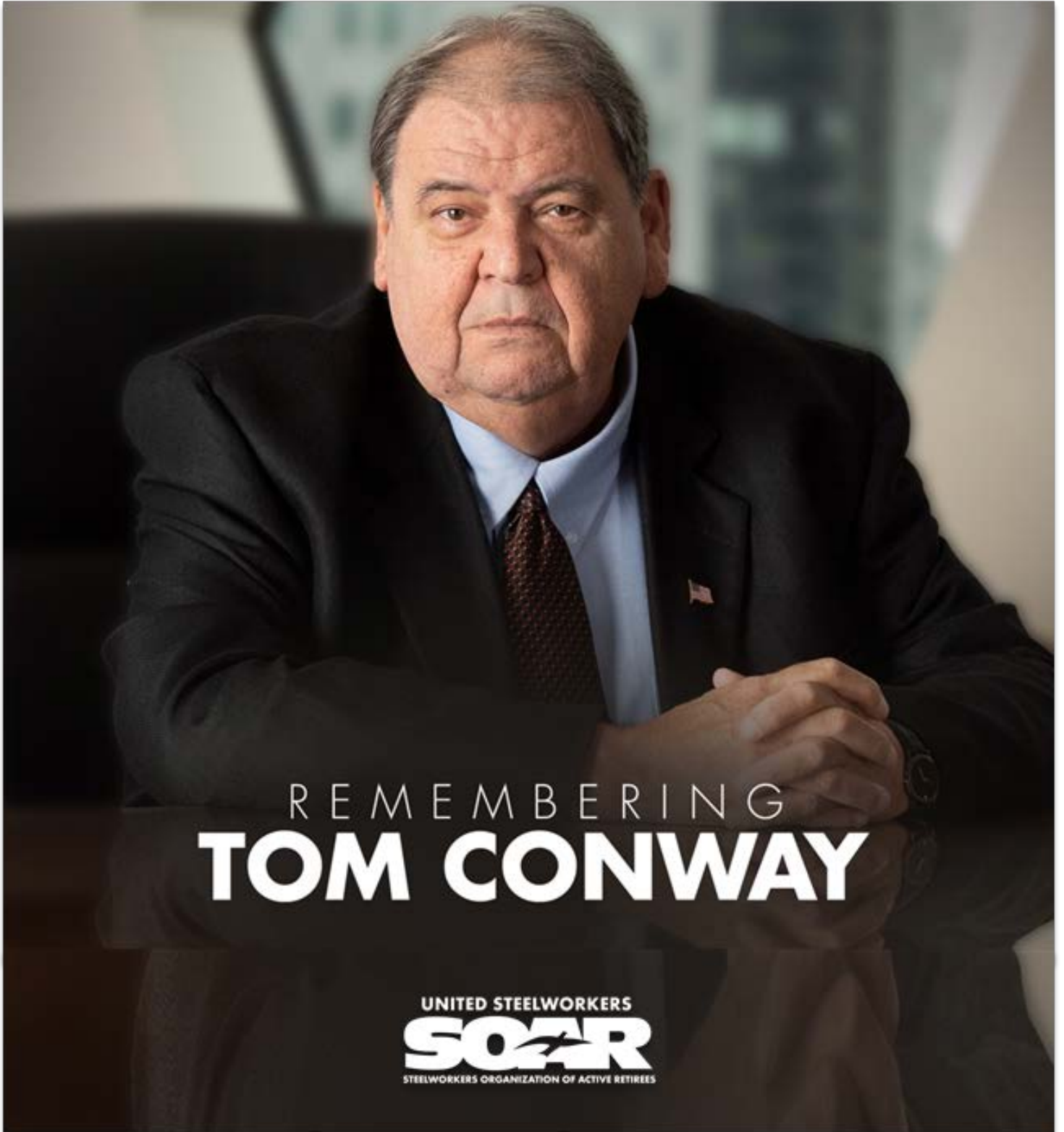
SOAR CHAPTER

SEPT/OCT 2023

UNITED STEELWORKERS  
**SOAR**  
STEELWORKERS ORGANIZATION OF ACTIVE RETIREES

# CONNECTION

WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER



REMEMBERING  
**TOM CONWAY**

UNITED STEELWORKERS  
**SOAR**  
STEELWORKERS ORGANIZATION OF ACTIVE RETIREES

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## USW Mourns Passing of International President Tom Conway

September 25, 2023

(PITTSBURGH) – It is with heavy hearts that the United Steelworkers (USW) union announces the passing of International President Tom Conway at age 71.

Elected as the union’s president in 2019, Conway was known for his quick wit, formidable bargaining skills and unwavering devotion to workers and their families.

“From his earliest time making steel to his steady hand leading us through the darkest days of the pandemic, Tom followed two simple guiding principles: the dignity of work and the power of working people,” said David R. McCall, the USW’s International Vice President of Administration. “Tom was never afraid of a fight, and thanks to his ingenuity and determination, generations of workers can enjoy better jobs and brighter futures.”

Conway relished going toe to toe with top leaders of some of the biggest corporations where USW members work, and over the course of his career, he became one of the union’s most accomplished contract negotiators in steel, aluminum, oil and other major industries, often directing bargaining during crises.

As president, he also spearheaded innovative initiatives to organize more workers into the labor movement, extending the benefits of union representation to workers in a variety of fields from manufacturing to higher education. Under Conway’s leadership, USW members gained some of the movement’s most significant organizing victories.

“Solidarity wasn’t just a word to Tom; it was a way of life,” said USW International Secretary-Treasurer John Shinn. “He understood that by working together, we will balance the scales against greedy corporations and the billionaire class.”

During his time in office, Conway relentlessly advocated for fair trade, demanding that the government enforce U.S. trade laws to prevent importation of illegally subsidized and dumped products that damage domestic industries and destroy good-paying jobs.

At the same time, Conway worked not just to save jobs but to create them, finding new ways to engage both companies and elected officials to expand manufacturing, secure domestic supply chains and invest in healthy, flourishing communities.

Conway first became an activist in USW Local 6787 in 1978 when he went to work at the Burns Harbor Works of Bethlehem Steel. While working as a millwright in the coke plant, Conway served as a grievor for plant-wide maintenance and was a member of the safety and contracting-out committees. He joined the union’s International staff in 1987 and was elected as USW International Vice President in 2005.

“We will all miss Tom’s passion, his integrity, his gift for strategy and not least of all, his sense of humor,” said McCall. “His time as USW president was too short, but it’s clear he will leave an indelible impact on our union and beyond.”

**Statement from President Joe Biden on the Passing of Thomas Conway**



President Joe Biden honors the life and legacy of Tom Conway, who passed away Monday, September 25, saying:

“With Tom Conway’s passing, American workers have lost an extraordinary champion, and I’ve lost a great friend.

When I was running for President in 2020, Tom rode the train with me from Ohio to Pittsburgh, a city built by American steelworkers like those he spent his life fighting for. We talked on that train ride, as we did more times than I can count over the years, about what we could do together to make a real

difference in the lives of steelworkers and union workers all over the country.

Tom was someone I confided in. He had my absolute trust. I knew that if I was doing a good job, he’d tell me – and if I needed to do better, he’d tell me that, too. And no one knew more about the challenges that workers face. He knew the politics. He knew the ins and outs of policy. And he never lost sight of his values – dignity, respect, fairness, equality.

As president of the United Steelworkers, Tom got up every day and fought to protect workers’ wages, pensions, and safety, and to make sure working people got a fair shot at a middle-class life. Because he grew up in a union household, he knew exactly what unions mean to workers and everyone who depends on them. And he put every ounce of his energy and intellect toward making sure American workers got the best possible deal, every time.

No one out-worked him. No one out-bargained him. And while he was deeply kind and generous, he also never backed down from a fight.

Tom heard me say a thousand times – the middle class built America, and unions built the middle class. Well, Tom Conway helped build unions all across the country. He made our nation fairer. He made our nation stronger. And I will miss him dearly.

Jill and I send our deepest condolences to the Conway family, including his longtime partner Carol, three sons, and six grandchildren, as well as all the Steelworkers whose hearts are heavy today.

May God bless you, Tommy.”



### Next Level of Activism



The Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) was officially established on May 23, 1985, when, by unanimous vote, the delegates approved an amendment to the USW Constitution, making SOAR an affiliate organization of the USW. More than that, the resolution created another level of activism for the union.

SOAR is as essential to our union as other programs, like Women of Steel, NextGen, Veterans of Steel or Rapid Response. However, the most significant difference is that SOAR is primarily made up of retired, former union members who want to remain involved and active in their organization.

In recent months, the activism of members of SOAR has been recognized in a way that identifies the real purpose of SOAR, which is simply creating another level of activism within the USW.

Recently, two individuals were recognized for their continued involvement:

Albert Becco, one of the longest-serving chapter presidents at 90 years of age, received an award for his lifetime involvement in the labor movement, his community and his support and work towards electing labor-friendly candidates.



**Al and Norma Becco**



**Priscilla Marco and Al Polk, District 4 SOAR Exec. Board**

Priscilla Marco, who is new to SOAR and was instrumental in forming her local union's SOAR chapter and is serving as the chapter's first-ever president, received an award at the USW District 4 Conference recognizing her as an outstanding SOAR activist for her commitment to the labor movement, her involvement in the community and also her support and work towards electing labor-friendly candidates.

SOAR provides an opportunity for retirees like Priscilla and Al to stay active and involved and to be able to make a difference. They are just two examples of the many dedicated activists of SOAR who firmly believe that it is a logical progression to move to SOAR as their "next level of activism."

*Bill Pienta*, SOAR President



## Two Senators Unite To Strengthen Retirement Security



In September, U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Bill Cassidy (R-LA) announced the first bipartisan, bicameral push in nearly 40 years to improve the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.

SSI provides modest cash payments (approximately \$585 per month for individuals) to ensure recipients are able to afford basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing.

Under current eligibility guidelines, individual recipients cannot exceed \$2,000 in assets (\$3,000 for married couples), which creates uncertainty and risk for the five million Americans who depend upon the program.

“SSI’s arbitrary and outdated rules make no sense. The government shouldn’t punish seniors and Ohioans with disabilities who do the right thing and save money,” said Sen. Brown. “It’s long past time we end these out-of-date government restrictions and allow Americans on SSI to save for emergencies and their futures without putting the benefits they rely on to live at risk.”

Despite participation in the program, approximately 40% of SSI recipients maintain employment, particularly because of inflation, our changing economy, and increased life expectancy for many (but certainly not all) Americans.

“Someone who is disabled should not have to choose between a better job and losing their safety net,” said Sen. Cassidy. “This is an easy fix that encourages work, allows people to save, and lifts people out of poverty.” The proposed *SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act* would, for the first time since 1984, raise those caps to \$10,000 and \$20,000, respectively, and index them to inflation.

Strengthening retirement security has long been a top priority of Steelworkers, as evidenced by our 2020 and 2022 Your Union, Your Voice (YUYV) membership survey results. For an in-depth look at our YUYV membership survey, visit [www.uswvoices.org](http://www.uswvoices.org)



*Julie Stein*, SOAR Director

## David McCall Succeeds Tom Conway as USW International President



(PITTSBURGH) – On September 26, 2023, the United Steelworkers (USW) International Executive Board appointed David McCall as the union’s new international president to fill the remainder of Tom Conway’s term. Conway recently passed away after four years as the USW’s leader.

“We are all mourning a great loss,” McCall said, “but even in our sadness, our union is strong, thanks in large part to Tom’s leadership and vision. Now, we’ll move forward the only way we can: together. Together, we’ll honor Tom’s legacy, as together, we fight for justice and fairness for working families.”

**SOAR Chapter Dues Refund Option via Electronic Deposit Now Available**

SOAR dues refunds can now be electronically deposited into your SOAR Chapter’s bank account, rather than by receiving a paper check in the mail. In order to set up your chapter to receive electronic deposits, please mail the following items to the SOAR Office:

1. A voided check from your SOAR chapter’s checking account.
2. The most recent copy of a bank statement that will confirm the complete title/name of the chapter’s bank account and the current mailing address listed on the account.
3. A note indicating that you want your chapter to be set up for automatic deposit of SOAR dues refunds.



Send the above items to:  
 SOAR, Attn. Julie Stein, SOAR Director  
 60 Blvd of the Allies  
 Pittsburgh, PA 15222... Or, you can email the items to [jstein@usw.org](mailto:jstein@usw.org)

As a reminder, SOAR dues refunds are sent in April, August and November of each year. Once on direct deposit, a confirmation receipt for the amount of funds transferred to the SOAR chapter’s bank account will be mailed to the officer designated to receive financial mailings. Also included in the mailing will be a SOAR Chapter Refund Summary that lists the members who paid SOAR dues during the cycle. Feel free to contact the SOAR Office at 866-208-4420 if you have questions.

**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, just shy of his 99th birthday. Dan was the writer of the McNeil Report (see page 7 of this newsletter). What a wonderful sense of humor he shared with us for many years. Dan was the last remaining founding member of SOAR’s International Executive Board, representing District 6 in the year 1985.



### SOAR Chapter Connection

A bi-monthly publication of SOAR

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### Articles and Photos Requested

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)

The deadline to submit articles for the next publication of the SOAR Chapter Connection newsletter is November 17, 2023. Email articles and photos to [soar3@icloud.com](mailto:soar3@icloud.com)

Photos should have a short caption included.



I don't approve of political jokes. I've seen too many of them get elected.

Charlie

### The McNeil Report



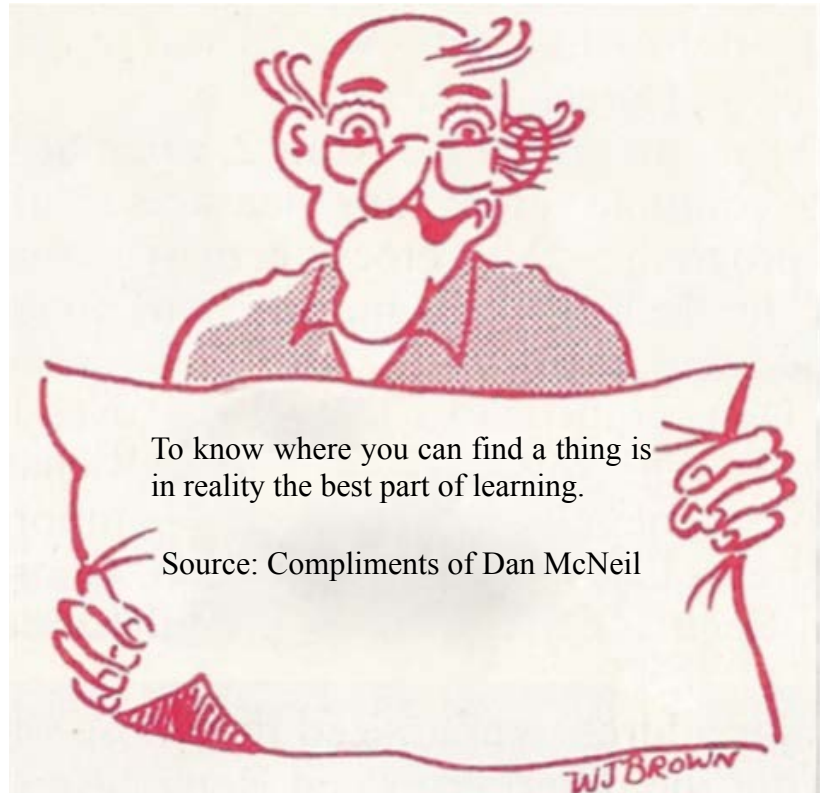
A group of Canadians were traveling by bus through Holland. As they stopped at a cheese farm, a young guide led them through the process of cheese making, explaining that goat's milk was used. She showed the group a lively hillside where many goats were grazing. These she explained, were the older goats put out to pasture when they no longer could produce.

She then asked, "What do you do in Canada with your old goats that aren't producing?"

A spry old gentleman answered... "They send us on bus tours."

Source: Compliments of Dan McNeil

### Old Charlie Sez:



To know where you can find a thing is in reality the best part of learning.

Source: Compliments of Dan McNeil

## The Choice Between Traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage: (Part 2)

by Diane Archer

If all things were equal, the choice between traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage is easier than you think, as I wrote in a previous article. (See July/August Connection for Part 1.) But, there's more to it than I could include in that piece.

Here's part two, explaining why about half of all people with Medicare are now enrolled in the privatized Medicare option: Medicare Advantage.



### Traditional Medicare's upfront costs are high

Traditional Medicare does not have an out-of-pocket cap. Unless people have supplemental coverage to pick up their out-of-pocket costs, their upfront costs in traditional Medicare are high. They easily could spend \$3,000 on supplemental coverage and Part D prescription drug coverage. And, that's on top of their Medicare Part B premium.

Millions of people cannot afford supplemental coverage; the typical person with Medicare has an [annual income of less than \\$30,000](#). So, people with lower incomes are more likely to enroll in Medicare Advantage, which has an out-of-pocket limit and few, if any, upfront costs. Not surprisingly, [wealthier individuals are more likely to enroll in traditional Medicare](#).

**In truth:** You'll spend less out of pocket in traditional Medicare with supplemental coverage than in Medicare Advantage when you need costly care and have direct access to the care you want. Cost will not be an obstacle to care as it can be in Medicare Advantage.

### To save money, employers and unions steer retirees into Medicare Advantage

[Increasingly, companies and unions](#) offering retiree benefits contract with Medicare Advantage plans to cover their retirees' care. The Medicare Advantage plans are willing and able to offer companies and unions special benefits to enroll their retirees, better than what they offer people in the individual market, because the Medicare Advantage plans [profit more](#) through these contracts than in the individual market. And companies and unions save money on the cost of supplemental coverage.

**In truth:** Millions of people with retiree benefits lose their easy access to care, choice of doctors and hospitals, and coverage anywhere in the U.S. without their consent.

### Medicare Advantage marketing misleads people about their benefits

Medicare Advantage plans use taxpayer dollars to promote their benefits and to claim they are better than traditional Medicare. [A lot](#) of the marketing is [misleading](#) about the benefits people will get in Medicare Advantage. The government does not use taxpayer dollars to promote traditional Medicare, let alone to explain why it is better than Medicare Advantage.

**In truth:** No one should trust the [Medicare Advantage TV ads](#) or mailers.



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## Sales agents steer millions of people into Medicare Advantage

Sales agent [commissions](#) for enrolling people in Medicare Advantage are significantly higher than commissions for enrolling people in traditional Medicare. As a result, sales agents have a [financial incentive](#) to steer people into Medicare Advantage.

**In truth:** No one should trust sales agents; they should use independent, unbiased advisers, such as [State Health Insurance Assistance Programs](#).

## People aren't told that a Medicare Advantage plan might not meet their needs

The government suggests that people can pick the Medicare Advantage plan that's [right for them](#). But, the government does not make data available about key differences among Medicare Advantage plans on [Medicare Compare](#) or anywhere else. For example, people don't know about rates of denial, disenrollment or mortality in different Medicare Advantage plans. Moreover, people do not know what their future needs will be and how the Medicare Advantage plan they choose will meet them.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' "[Medicare & You](#)" handbook does not warn people that some Medicare Advantage plans engage in [widespread and persistent inappropriate delays and denials of care](#), let alone which ones. Medicare's [five-star rating system](#) of Medicare Advantage plans is largely a farce.

**In truth:** People, who elect Medicare Advantage must gamble on whether they will get the care they need.

## Medicare Advantage plans generally cover fewer services than traditional Medicare

While in theory, Medicare Advantage plans should cover people for the same medically reasonable and necessary services traditional Medicare covers, [in practice they do not](#).

People generally don't know about high rates of inappropriate delays and denials of benefits in some Medicare Advantage plans, let alone which plans have the highest such rates. They also do not know which Medicare Advantage plans have high voluntary disenrollment rates, particularly for [people with costly conditions](#) or [high mortality rates](#).

**In truth:** Medicare Advantage plans profit from delaying and denying care, and the government does not have the tools or resources to hold them accountable when they are bad actors.

## Additional benefits in Medicare Advantage might not be valuable

Medicare Advantage plans market their [dental](#) and vision benefits, gym memberships and other freebies not available in traditional Medicare. There's [almost no data](#) on the value of these benefits or to show who is able to use these benefits and whether out-of-pocket costs or limited access make them less beneficial than they appear.

**In truth:** Enrollees often can't take advantage of these additional benefits; they can come with high out-of-pocket costs and limited provider networks.

## Medicare Advantage costs can be an obstacle to care

There's little information about typical out-of-pocket costs in Medicare Advantage plans, let alone typical out-of-pocket costs for people with different health conditions, such as diabetes or cancer. The Medicare Advantage plans do not make this information available. The government's "[Medicare & You](#)" handbook does not include information on out-of-pocket limits in Medicare Advantage, which can be as high as \$8,300 for in-network care alone this year, and significantly more for out-of-network care.

**In truth:** Medicare Advantage plans impose [financial barriers to care](#) that lead some people – particularly those with low incomes and people of color — to skip or delay care when they get sick.

**Medicare Advantage prior authorization rules and networks can be an obstacle to care**

People do not know what care they will need down the road and whether their Medicare Advantage plan has specialists and specialty hospitals in its network to meet those needs. People often face obstacles such as prior authorization from their MA plans when they need critical care.

**In truth:** Medicare Advantage plans impose administrative barriers to care that keep some people from getting the care they need.

**Traditional Medicare is not always an option once people enroll in Medicare Advantage**

People are told that they can switch Medicare Advantage plans and switch to traditional Medicare each year during the Annual Open Enrollment Period. But most people don’t know that, except in Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York, [they have no right to buy supplemental coverage](#) that fills gaps in traditional Medicare after they first enroll in Medicare, with limited exceptions. They also don’t know that companies selling supplemental coverage generally can charge them much higher rates based on their health status if they switch out of Medicare Advantage.

**In truth:** People are often locked into Medicare Advantage once they enroll.

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

Sources:

Part 1: <https://wendellpotter.substack.com/p/the-choice-between-traditional-medicare>

Part 2: <https://justcareusa.org/?s=the+choice+between+traditional+medicare+and+medicare+advantage>

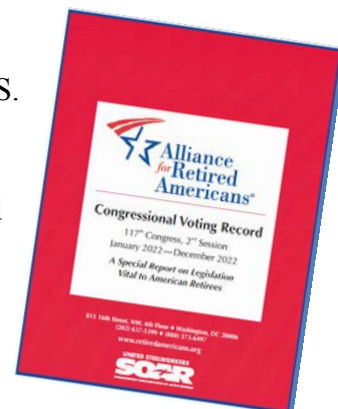
**Editor’s Note:** We are posting this article in an attempt to help our members better understand MA plans and make informed decisions as to what type of plan is best for them. Your SOAR Executive Board does not endorse any product or claim any plan superior to another.

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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/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2022-Congressional-Voting-Record.pdf>



## White House Announces First 10 Drugs Up for Medicare Price Negotiation

On August 29, the Biden-Harris administration [unveiled a list](#) of the 10 prescription drugs that Medicare will negotiate lower prices for with drug corporations.

The list has several drugs that many seniors use, including Eliquis and Xarelto, which are used to treat blood clots, and Jardiance, Jenuvia, Farxiga, and Fiasp (along with Fiasp FlexTouch; Fiasp PenFill; NovoLog; NovoLog FlexPen; NovoLog PenFill), which are used to treat diabetes. [Eliquis is the most](#) widely used drug on the list, with 3.5 million people with Medicare Part D currently taking it. 282,000 of those users are in Florida and about 277,000 in California. Jardiance and Xarelto [also have a large number of older users](#), with 1.6 million and 1.3 million people with Part D taking them respectively.

Together, the 10 drugs selected accounted for \$50.5 billion, or 20%, of Medicare Part D spending from June 1, 2022, to May 31, according to the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](#).

Medicare Has Announced 10 Drugs for Negotiation:	
1	Eliquis
2	Jardiance
3	Xarelto
4	Januvia
5	Farxiga
6	Entresto
7	Enbrel
8	Imbruvica
9	Stelara
10	Fiasp; Fiasp FlexTouch; Fiasp PenFill; NovoLog; NovoLog FlexPen; NovoLog PenFill

“For the first time, the price Medicare pays for ten of the most expensive prescription drugs will be determined at a negotiating table, not in a corporate boardroom,” said Alliance President Robert Roach, Jr. “This would not have happened without the leadership of President Biden and our grassroots members’ tireless activism.”

The negotiated prices for these drugs will not take effect until 2026, but pharmaceutical corporations are trying to roll them back in court. So far, eight lawsuits have been filed by drugmakers, including the makers of some of the drugs on the newly released list: Eliquis (Bristol Myers Squibb), Januvia (Merck), and Jardiance (Boehringer Ingelheim).

## Play It Safe! Order Your COVID Tests

Starting September 25, every household can order another free round of COVID tests – shipped straight to your door. Head to [COVIDTests.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/covidtests.htm) to order yours.

Be aware that you can receive a COVID booster and a flu shot at the same time, per the CDC Centers for Disease Control.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/covidadministration.htm>

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## Register Today for the Alliance's Retirement Security Symposium on October 17

by Robert Roach, Jr.



SOAR retirees are invited to join us at the Alliance at our annual Retiree Security Symposium, *Preparing for Retirement, Individual and Collective Efforts*, an Alliance for Retired Americans seminar on Tuesday, October 17, 2023 at 9:00 AM at AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington, DC.

Liz Shuler, President of the AFL-CIO; Fred Redmond, Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO and Executive Vice President of the Alliance; and Rep. John Larson (CT), House Committee on Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee Ranking Member, will make presentations.

Representatives from retiree organizations the National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS), the National United Committee to Protect Pensions (NUCPP) and the Pension Rights Center will give reports. In addition, AFT, AFGE, AFSCME, and IAMAW will discuss individual and collective efforts for a secure retirement.

Participants will discuss how the Butch Lewis Act legislation is working and efforts to build on it. Multi- and single-employer private sector pension plans and public pension plans at the federal, state, and local levels will also be covered.

We will discuss current threats to Social Security and efforts to expand it, as well as how to navigate defined benefit pension plans and defined contribution plans to improve retirement security. In addition, government agencies including the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) and the Department of Labor will be making presentations related to unclaimed and/or abandoned defined benefit and defined contribution plan funds in excess of \$1 trillion.

Space is limited, so please RSVP at [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org) or call Joni Jones at 202-637-5377 by October 10, 2023 and indicate if you will attend in person or virtually.

***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).***

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### Retirement, There's Nothing Like It!

Every day of my working life I had retirement on my mind and always tried to do what I could to make sure that that day would come...Then, I met a member of SOAR who told us he had been retired for 24 years. Wow, I thought, how great it would be to be able to have been retired and receiving a pension check for that many years.

Then, all of a sudden I discovered that I've been retired for 25 years and I'm just as awed. I love being retired, and being able to help our union in whatever ways I can. I recommend you all do the same... *Charlie*

# Medicare.gov



It's easier to stay up to date with your immunizations now that **people with Medicare Part D pay nothing out of pocket for even more vaccines.** This means more people with Medicare can get protection against disease and severe illness.

**Medicare Part D now covers these vaccines and more at no cost to you:**

- Shingles
- RSV
- Tetanus/diphtheria (Td)
- Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (whooping cough) (Tdap)
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B, if you're at low risk for the virus

Also, Medicare still covers flu shots, COVID-19 vaccines, and pneumococcal shots.

[SEE WHAT'S COVERED](#)



Stay up to date with vaccines. Talk with your doctor about which vaccines are right for you!

Sincerely,

The Medicare Team

## Stop Companies Like Shein, Temu and Amazon from Dodging U.S. Trade Enforcement



Chinese clothing brands like SHEIN and Temu stand accused of a host of bad practices, like using forced labor to make their products, causing damage to the environment, stealing designs, and even selling clothing containing lead.

Nevertheless, these brands are now taking over retail — **and current U.S. trade law is effectively underwriting their success.**

The "de minimis" trade loophole allows any imported package valued under \$800 to enter the U.S. duty-free. Because these brands ship sales directly to customers, they are able to exploit the de minimis law, dodging both tariffs and U.S. Customs efforts to inspect goods suspected of being made with forced labor. It's not just SHEIN and Temu, either. Big corporations like Amazon also stand accused of using de minimis to avoid paying tariffs.

Not only is that unfair to companies who pay their fair share, it also means that our own trade policy is undermining American manufacturers and workers. Enough is enough!

New bipartisan legislation called the Import Security and Fairness Act aims to close the de minimis loophole. Currently, packages entering the United States that are valued under the de minimis threshold are effectively permitted to bypass applicable U.S. trade enforcement and other duties that would otherwise be assessed by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Set at \$800, the U.S. de minimis threshold is the highest in the world and far exceeds our major trading partners. This disparity is unfair to U.S. companies and their workers, and the high threshold invites fraud, evasion, and further deterioration of our industrial base.

We urge our SOAR brothers and sisters to tell your members of Congress to support the *Import Security and Fairness Act*.

You can contact your members of Congress at their district offices or by calling the Capitol in Washington, D.C. at (202) 224-3121 and asking to be connected to your U.S. Senators or your U.S. House of Representative's D.C. office.

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

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## Social Security COLA Increase for 2024 Could Be Higher Than Expected

The Senior Citizens League said on September 13 that the Social Security cost of living adjustment, or COLA, will likely be 3.2% for 2024. That would add about \$57 to monthly benefits, raising them to \$1,790 for the average recipient, according to the group's estimates.

The cost of living adjustment is calculated based on an average of the inflation readings for the months of July, August and September. Specifically, it's based on the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The CPI-W rose 3.6% in July and 3.4% in August. The Social Security Administration is expected to announce the COLA for 2024 in mid-October.



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

**Now Available!**

**\$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**



## Fighting for All Who Served

Printed in Memory of Tom Conway

USW International President



Sgt. Jackie E. Garland, twice wounded during combat in Vietnam, returned home only to face even more battles that battered his spirit as well as his body.

The ex-Marine and his wife, Helen, struggled for decades to support their six children while fighting for service disability benefits that always remained a few steps out of reach.



Garland—wracked by pain from the shrapnel he took in his back and the hepatitis he contracted during surgery to repair the damage to his spine—died feeling abandoned by his country.

Spurred by that tragedy, George Walsh, Garland’s son-in-law, now finds himself on the front lines of efforts to improve support for veterans and arrest the epidemics of [suicide](#), [homelessness](#) and [alienation](#) afflicting those who served.

Walsh, a trustee of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 10-00086, is helping to lead the [union’s push](#) for the federal Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach (CVSO) Act. The bill would expand the ranks of county veteran service officers across the nation and provide other resources needed to connect veterans with care.

“This is a no-brainer. We send people to war. We ask them to fight for their country. We need to start taking care of them,” explained Walsh, himself a veteran of the Navy submarine service who later served in the Reserve as a Seabee. “We need to start putting our money where our mouths are and helping these veterans and their families.”

“This is really a good piece of legislation. We should have had this years ago,” added Walsh, a USW safety representative at the Merck plant in Lansdale, Pa., noting many veterans feel adrift and lose hope. “My father-in-law was that way.”

County veteran service officers are trained advocates, accredited by the federal government, who help former service members, their loved ones and caregivers [“navigate the complex intergovernmental chain](#) of veterans services and resources.”

They make veterans aware of the medical benefits as well as the education, job search, housing assistance and other services available to them. They also assist veterans in applying for these opportunities and go to bat for them if government agencies balk at approving claims or applications.



These grassroots officials leverage billions in support every year. But there's a dire shortage of them across the country.

The CVSO Act would provide [\\$50 million a year](#) for counties to hire more veteran service officers and fund outreach campaigns aimed at connecting ex-service members with assistance.

High levels of suicide and homelessness speak to veterans' struggles on the home front. Yet the resources to confront these challenges often go unused because veterans either [don't know what's available to them](#) or struggle to access it.

Walsh's in-laws felt overwhelmed trying to penetrate the bureaucracy on their own while coping with life's daily challenges.



**Sgt. Jackie E. Garland**

“If it wasn't for my mother-in-law, I don't know how they would have done it,” said Walsh, noting that Helen Garland, a Navy nurse who met her husband during his recovery at Camp Pendleton in Southern California, largely held the family together on her own.

He said his father-in-law, once a “Marine's Marine” who wanted a military career, endured pain every day and became so disillusioned with the government's treatment of him that he refused to let taps be played at his funeral.

Walsh knows what an enormous difference a county veteran service officer would have made because, at the end of his father-in-law's life, he found one.

He recalled watching a nonprofit television channel one night when he saw an interview with [Elias Tallas](#), a veteran service officer from Berks County who served with the Army in Vietnam. He tracked down a phone number for Tallas, met him a couple of days later and handed over the “meticulous notes” his mother-in-law kept about Jackie Garland's quest for benefits.

Tallas agreed to wade into the case. And although his assistance came too late to help Jackie Garland, he succeeded in securing benefits for Helen Garland that enabled her to live decently for the rest of her life.

Walsh wants all former service members to have the expertise, support and compassion that Tallas provided. Motivated by respect for his in-laws and a sense of duty to fellow veterans, he's meeting with members of Congress to explain the need for the CVSO Act.

He starts those meetings by showing his father-in-law's photo. “I'd like to introduce you to Sgt. Jackie E. Garland,” he says, then tells his story.

While the Garlands fought on their own, other veterans lean on one another—sharing leads, tips and information—as they try to navigate the system. Just last week, for example, Frank Brondum and a friend exchanged information about the various education opportunities available to them.

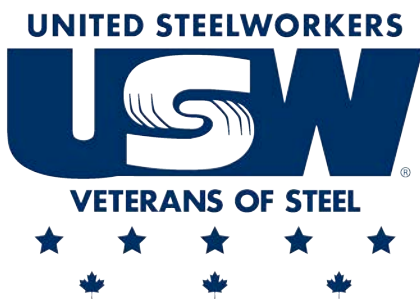
It's outrageous, he said, for the nation to leave veterans in the dark. "I'm 42 years old, I served for 13 years, and I'm still learning about the benefits I'm qualified for," said Brondum, a member of USW Local 13-1 who works at the Shell refinery in Deer Park, Texas.

Brondum, who served in the Army, said more than two dozen former service members at the refinery alone would benefit from a single point of contact for veterans' programs.

However, it's as important to publicize the work of the county veteran service officers as it is the benefits and services themselves, Brondum said, noting he only found out about his county's representative a few days ago.

Once they're back home, Walsh said, veterans deserve a system of care that serves them as reliably as they did the nation.

"When he was asked to serve, he served," Walsh observed of his father-in-law. "There was no hesitation on his part."



**See related Veterans of Steel links below:**

H.R. 984: [Conway urges Congress to back "Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act" | United Steelworkers \(usw.org\)](#)

[Veterans of Steel | United Steelworkers \(usw.org\)](#)

**2024 Medicare & You eHandbook Is Here**

Check out the new 2024 Medicare & You [ehandbook!](#) The ehandbook is easy to search or download, so you can quickly find what you're looking for.

Starting soon, shop and compare 2024 health and drug plans in your area. You can make changes during Medicare's Open Enrollment Period, which runs from October 15 - December 7.

**Here are just some of the changes:**

- Saving money on your prescription drugs
- Lower costs for insulin and vaccines
- Changes to telehealth coverage
- Managing and treating chronic pain
- Better mental health care
- More times to sign up for Medicare
- Covid-19 care



<https://www.medicare.gov/publications/10050-Medicare-and-You.pdf>



**Memorial Day** and **Veterans Day** each honor the military, though the two holidays are not the same.

Memorial Day, which is celebrated annually on the last Monday in May, honors the brave men and women who lost their lives while serving in the American military. Many communities host memorial ceremonies honoring their fallen soldiers on Memorial Day, ensuring such soldiers’ bravery and sacrifices are never forgotten.

While many people now view Memorial Day weekend as the unofficial start of summer, the weekend should not be celebrated without also pausing to reflect on and recognize the military personnel who lost their lives in defense of freedom and the American way of life.

Veterans Day is celebrated annually on November 11 and recognizes all men and women who have served in the military. Veterans Day coincides with **Remembrance Day**, which is celebrated by the Commonwealth of Nations — an association of 56 member states, with connections to the British Empire. Countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom observe Remembrance Day.

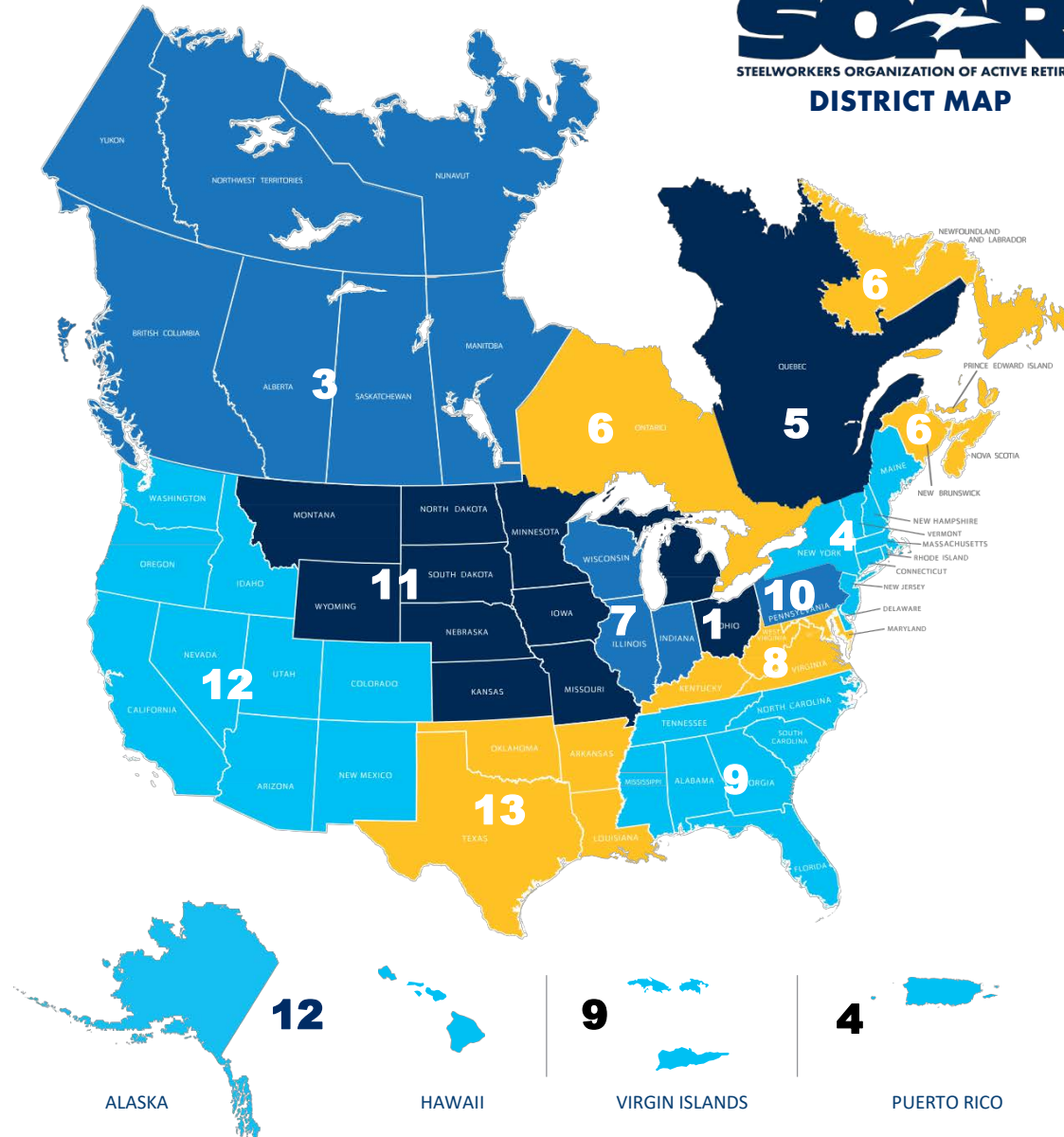
Though Veterans Day and Remembrance Day are each celebrated on November 11, the latter recognizes armed forces members who died in the line of duty, making it more similar to Memorial Day than Veterans Day. It’s not uncommon for people to recognize fallen soldiers on Veterans Day, but many use the holiday to express their appreciation to existing veterans.

**On a personal note:** For many of our veterans, after their military service...not a day goes by that they don’t have recollections of some part of their time in the service... *Charlie*



SEPTEMBER 2023

UNITED STEELWORKERS  
**SOAR**  
STEELWORKERS ORGANIZATION OF ACTIVE RETIREES  
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