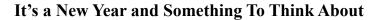


CONNECTION

WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER







I hope everyone enjoyed a healthy and happy holiday season and is well-rested and ready to begin another year of activism and involvement in your community and your Union through SOAR.

During the cold weather days we have been experiencing here recently in Western New York, I have spent a lot more time indoors thinking, and I would like to share some of those thoughts with you.

•A recent report revealed how successful members of Congress were, for those of them who were willing to report it, regarding their success or failure in picking

winning stocks. The report also reflected how fortunate they were in the timing of selling stocks before the stock took a significant drop. The report seems to reflect that many members of Congress were much more active in buying or selling stock successfully than they were concerned about passing legislation that would help working people.

- Recently, an investment firm sold 264 houses in the Las Vegas area to another company in one day. This sale was part of a larger sale of 1,900 single-family homes in the Sun Belt area. Investment groups have been buying up homes nationwide for a few years now. A recent study showed this could lead to higher rental prices and fewer available homes.
- Exxon Mobile has reported a decline in revenue for the last half of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. Public records indicate this is true. For those last six months of 2023, Exxon only made around \$98,000,000 per day! I wonder why gas prices have not come down.
- General Motors took a strike from the UAW, claiming the demands were too much. Within days of reaching an agreement with the UAW, GM reported to its shareholders that the company would begin to buy back \$10,000,000,000, a BILLION worth of stock and would increase its stock dividend by 33%.

SOAR will be involved in this year's electoral process and will attempt to make sure only candidates who support our issues are supported by us. I wish you all a happy and healthy New Year!

Bill Pienta, SOAR President

Sources:

https://unusualwhales.com

https://investor.exxonmobil.com/earnings/financial-results

https://fortune.com/2023/11/29/gm-stock-buyback-10-billion-electric-cars/

2024 Election Presents Important Decision for SOAR Members, All Retirees



Last year, unions, including the USW, made significant progress toward electing proworker, pro-retiree allies in key gubernatorial, legislative and judicial offices nationwide.

While we can't possibly list every victory from the last year, I feel it is necessary to highlight a few of the biggest:

- *Union-backed candidates were victorious in four special elections in Pennsylvania, which helped secure a new pro-union, pro-retiree majority in the state's House of Representatives.
- Michigan's newly-elected, pro-union governor and legislature the state's first in nearly 40 years acted to restore workers' collective bargaining rights by repealing the state's so-called right-to-work law and putting an end to the unfair pension tax.
- Wisconsin voters turned out in droves to secure a 4-3 pro-union state Supreme Court majority.
- Minnesota's pro-worker, pro-retiree legislature and governor, Tim Walz, passed a state budget (*HF3028/SF3035*) that was hailed as the "most significant worker protection bill in state history."
- In Ohio, voters defeated Issue 1, which would have raised the threshold for voters to amend the constitution to a supermajority of 60 percent and enacted stricter requirements for getting amendments on the ballot.
- Labor-backed candidates maintained control of Virginia's State Senate while reclaiming a pro-worker majority in the general assembly for the first time since 2021.
- Our close friend, Governor Andy Beshear of Kentucky, won reelection; and,
- In Pennsylvania and Indiana, we proudly backed close allies who were victorious in their campaigns for local and state offices.

This year presents union members and retirees with another historic opportunity to build upon these victories.

In addition to the critically important presidential election, voters will weigh the decision of who controls Congress, with all 435 U.S. House of Representatives up for election, along with 34 U.S. Senate seats.

Control over 86 legislative chambers will also be decided by voters in 44 states, 11 of whom will choose their next governor.

Eighty-two state supreme court and 216 intermediate appellate court seats will also appear on voters' ballots this November.

While much attention will be given to the presidential campaign, we must keep in mind that state and federal lawmakers also make decisions which impact our ability to access health care, afford the medications we are prescribed, the availability of various health care services in our communities, and so much more.

Julie Stein, SOAR Director

SOAR Chapter Connection

A bi-monthly publication of SOAR

Julie Stein, Content Editor Copy Editors: Lori Bookwood, Cheryl Omlor, and Eric Russell

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Address editorial material to:

SOAR 60 Blvd of the Allies Pittsburgh, PA 15222



Articles and Photos Requested

The next deadline for the SOAR in Action magazine will be March 26, 2024 and articles should be emailed to the SOAR Director Julie Stein at istein@usw.org

The deadline to submit material for the next issue of this newsletter is March 25, 2024. email your article to soar3@icloud.com.

"You know you're getting old when at the breakfast table you hear snap, crackle, pop and you're not eating cereal and when you sink your teeth into a steak- and they stay there."

The McNeil Report



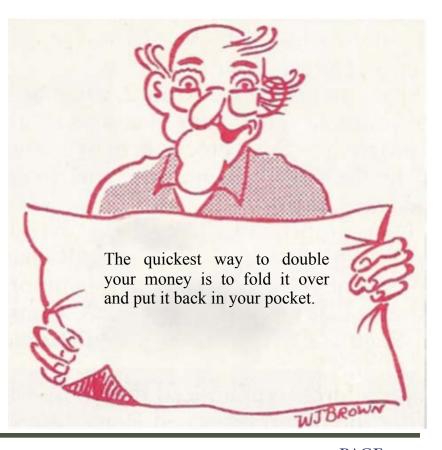
While eating at a restaurant several years ago, I heard a young girl behind us say to her boyfriend, "When we get married, I want to share all your worries and troubles to lighten your burden."

Her boyfriend responded, "it's very kind of you sweetheart, but I don't have any worries or troubles."

The girl responded with, "Well, that's because we aren't married yet."

Compliments of the late Dan McNeil

Old Charlie Sez:



Now Available!



Electronic Deposit Available for SOAR Chapter Dues Refunds

Please be advised that SOAR dues refunds can now be electronically deposited into your SOAR chapter's bank account rather than by receiving a paper check.

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 to confirm the complete title/name of the chapter's bank account and the current mailing address listed on the account.
- 3. A note requesting 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 scan the items to <u>istein@usw.org</u>

As a reminder, SOAR dues refunds are sent three times per year, in April, August and November. Once on direct deposit, a confirmation receipt for the sum 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" report listing the members who paid SOAR dues during the cycle.

Feel free to contact the SOAR office if you have questions. Toll-free: 866-208-4420

It's That Time of Year

Each new year triggers the next round of annual financial reports covering the previous year's financial activity for all SOAR chapters. As you may know, the SOAR office needs this information so that our USW auditor can prepare the FEDERAL FORM 990 that SOAR Int'l is required to file with the IRS, which captures all

SOAR funds, including treasury funds of SOAR chapters.

In January, the SOAR office sent the annual mailing to all the SOAR officers designated to receive financial mailings and SOAR chapter presidents. This information is due by March 15, and we appreciate your chapter's prompt attention to this matter and cooperation in a swift reply.





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













The Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party sent a letter on January 17 to the Department of Homeland Security Secretary and Attorney General urging the Biden administration to strengthen enforcement of the landmark law that bans goods made in the Chinese region of Xinjiang from entering the United States.

Chairman Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) and Ranking Member Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Ill.) wrote that "several factors seriously undermine the effective enforcement" of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) and called upon the Biden administration to "aggressively step up enforcement of potential UFLPA violations by

goods shipped from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and indirectly through third countries."

The UFLPA, which passed Congress nearly unanimously, is designed to stop imports made with forced labor in Xinjiang from reaching the United States. Because forced labor is so prevalent in the region, Congress opted to pass a blanket ban of all products made in whole or with parts from Xinjiang.

Kim Glas, president and CEO of the National Council of Textile Organizations, noted that the "government's failure to fully enforce the UFLPA and the de minimis loophole is devastating US textile and apparel manufacturers."

The de minimis loophole allows products costing less than \$800 to be sent directly to American consumers without a duty fee. Major fast fashion players like Temu and Shein as well as most Amazon products coming from overseas are sent directly to American buyers without US Customs inspection and additional import fees.

"Chinese cotton from Xinjiang is flooding the global marketplace, making its way to our doorsteps and into our closets," said Glas. "As a result, we need a comprehensive and aggressive solution from the administration to confront these practices head on."

There is a lot that can be done to tackle the de minimis problem. The Treasury Department is allowed to alter de minimis eligibility if deemed necessary to "prevent unlawful importations." Gallagher and Krishnamoorthi have asked the Department of Homeland Security to examine the "potential effect on UFLPA enforcement efforts of altering de minimis eligibility for textile and apparel and other high-risk items, including determining whether exceptions to de minimis treatment are warranted for certain high-risk items to prevent unlawful importations."

Congress does not have to wait for the administration to address de minimis, either. There are multiple pieces of legislation that aim to close the de minimis loophole, including the Import Security and Fairness Act, which the Alliance for American Manufacturing supports.

Please TAKE ACTION and contact your members of Congress and urge them to support the Import Security and Fairness Act. You can contact your members of Congress at their district offices or by calling the US Capitol at (202) 224-3121.

Jeff Bonion is a staff writer at the Alliance for American Manufacturing



What Is Social Security?

The fight to protect retirement security is not foreign to Steelworkers. We fight for it at the bargaining table, in our statehouses, and in the halls of congress. We know how important it is for all workers to be able to retire with dignity and respect. Today a large piece of many retired Americans' financial stability comes in the form of Social Security payments. In fact, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 49% of Americans aged 55 to 66 have no personal savings at all. And, while many of today's workers will one day find themselves in some way reliant upon this vital retirement program, most don't have the time to sift through all the political rhetoric to truly understand what Social Security is, how it works, and why it is so important. Social Security was created when President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act as part of the New Deal.

In 1935, America was facing one of the worst economic catastrophes in its history, and Social Security was created to promote the economic security of our nation's people. It was designed to pay retired workers aged 65 and older a continuing income after retirement. Since its creation the program has also been expanded to include:

- 1939 Survivors Insurance: For families of deceased workers.
- 1956 Disability Insurance: For disabled workers and their families.
- 1965 Medicare: Provides health insurance coverage to people 65 and older.
- 1972 Supplemental Security Income: A needs based program that provides payments to people who are 65 or older with limited income or resources or are blind or disabled. Children with disabilities can also qualify.

Social Security replaces a percentage of a worker's pre-retirement income based on your lifetime earnings. The amount of your average wages that Social Security retirement benefits replaces depends on your earnings and when you choose to start benefits. Social Security is largely a "pay as you go" program, meaning today's benefits are funded primarily by the payroll taxes collected from today's workers. In 2022, 65.8 million people received Social Security benefits and an estimated 180 million people had earnings covered by Social Security and paid payroll taxes. In 2023, the average monthly retirement benefit is \$1,827 for an individual. That's \$21,924 to live in America for millions of former workers. While this program isn't perfect, today the poverty rate for U.S. seniors is just under 9%. Without Social Security, the poverty rate for our seniors would jump to almost 41%.

Any cuts to this program would be devastating to millions of our nation's most vulnerable.

Retirement Security is the number one issue that our members care about, according to our 2022 <u>Your Union</u>, <u>Your Voice Survey</u>. (Be watching for the 2024 survey that will roll out soon.)

Since our founding, the USW has fought to protect our pensions and retirement savings through contract negotiations and legislation. So, while some in Congress like to imply that workers' reliance on Social Security in retirement is due to their own poor planning and saving, Steelworkers know better. Workers are not the problem!

Source: https://www.usw.org/act/campaigns/protecting-retirement-security/resources/what-is-social-security

CAUTION

BILLS

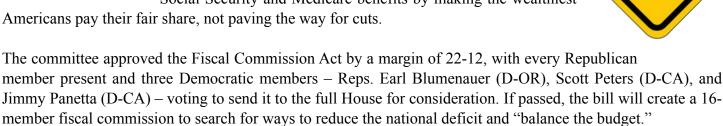
House Budget Committee Advances "Fiscal Commission" Legislation

by Robert Roach, Jr.



In January, the House Budget Committee approved three pieces of legislation that pave the way for cuts to Social Security and Medicare: the Fiscal Commission Act (H.R. 5779), the Fiscal State of the Nation Act (H.R. 6952), and the Debt-to-GDP Transparency and Stabilization Act (H.R. 6957).

This is outrageous. Congress should be working to expand Social Security and Medicare benefits by making the wealthiest



In his opening statement, House Budget Committee Ranking Member Brendan Boyle (D-PA) emphasized the danger that a fiscal commission poses to Social Security and Medicare, saying, "There are absolutely those who are getting ready to use a commission as a backdoor way to force through unpopular cuts that I completely oppose and will completely oppose." He urged members to take action to increase revenues instead of pursuing cuts.

Reps. Boyle and Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) offered amendments that would have taken Social Security and Medicare benefit cuts off the table as a potential fiscal commission recommendation option, while Reps. Brian Higgins (D-NY) and Bobby Scott (D-VA) submitted amendments that stressed increasing revenue and closing tax loopholes as potential recommendations. However, committee members blocked all four amendments.

The fiscal commission legislation is based on the false premise that Social Security is adding to the national deficit. If its proponents were serious, they could have ensured that measures to increase revenue – not just cuts – would be considered. This legislation is harmful for Americans of all ages and the Alliance is going to make that clear to every member of Congress.

See the Alliance's position paper beginning on page 13 of this newsletter.

Robert Roach, Jr. is president of the Alliance for Retired Americans. He was previously General Secretary— Treasurer of the IAMAW. For more information, visit <u>www.retiredamericans.org</u>.

All WWII Veterans Are Now Eligible for VA Health Care

In January, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that all World War II Veterans are now eligible for no-cost VA inpatient and outpatient health care.

Under this expansion, all WWII veterans who served between Dec. 7, 1941, and Dec. 31, 1946, are now eligible for VA health care, regardless of their length of service or financial status. These Veterans will not have to pay inpatient or outpatient copays, enrollment fees, or monthly premiums.

VA is reaching out by phone and mail to encourage WWII Veterans who are not currently enrolled in VA care to apply today. Veterans who enroll may also keep their private providers, Medicare, and most other insurance to meet their health care needs.

"These members of Greatest Generation answered the call to serve when our nation — and the world — needed them most. Now, it's our job to serve them in every way that we can," said VA Undersecretary for Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal. "We are proud to provide world-class, low- or no-cost health care to these heroes at VA, and we encourage all of them to enroll today."

All WWII veterans are encouraged to enroll in VA health care — the best, most-affordable health care in America for veterans. Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled veterans, and VA hospitals have dramatically outperformed non-VA hospitals in overall quality ratings and patient satisfaction ratings.

Veterans who were not approved for VA health care in the past due to income limits should apply again; income levels no longer apply due to this expansion. VA cannot automatically enroll these Veterans in health care; WWII veterans must apply for VA health care if they are not currently enrolled.

To apply for VA health care, visit VA's health care enrollment website, call 1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411), or visit your nearest VA medical center or clinic.

While World War II Veterans will no longer have to pay inpatient or outpatient copays, they may still have to pay modest medication or urgent care or long-term care copayments in some cases, depending on their eligibility and service connection.

This expansion is made possible through the Joseph Maxwell Cleland and Robert Joseph Dole Memorial Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2022 (Cleland-Dole Act), signed in December 2022.

Update to the release: Nursing home care is free (no copays) for nearly all World War II Veterans who are eligible for nursing home services at VA, including 1) anyone in need of such care for a service-connected disability, (2) anyone in need of such care who also has a service-connected disability rated at 70 percent or more. However, contrary to the language of the release, not all World War II Veterans are eligible for nursing home care under this new law.

Additionally, as stated in the release, all World War II Veterans are eligible for VA health care and will not have to pay inpatient or outpatient copays. However, these Veterans may still have to pay modest copayments for medication or urgent care or long-term care in some cases, depending on their eligibility and service connection.



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We at VA apologize for this mistake and any confusion that it may have caused. We are continuing to reach out directly to these Veterans to inform them of the expansion of care available to them, and we urge any WWII Veteran to enroll in VA health care today.

Source: https://americanmilitarynews.com/2024/01/all-wwii-veterans-are-now-eligible-for-va-health-care/



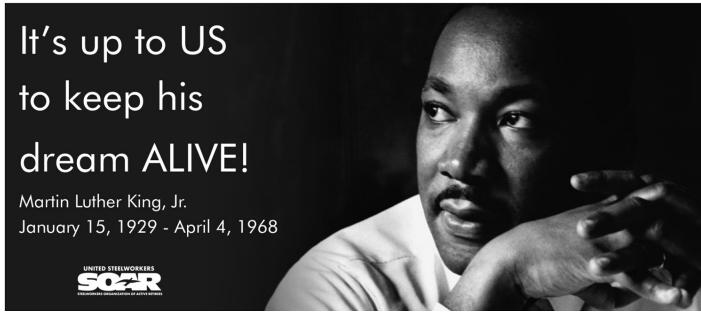
Note: When the Cleland-Dole Act was signed into law in December 2022, there were 167,000 WWII veterans still living and eligible for these benefits.

When Is the Next Election for SOAR Chapter Officers?

SOAR Chapter - Standard By-Laws Article 6 Section 2 reads as follows:

Nomination of officers shall be held at a membership meeting during the month of October 1992 and nomination and election of officers will be held in November of 1992 and every four years thereafter. Each term of office shall be for a period of four (4) years commencing with the month of November 1992. No member shall hold more than one (1) office in a Chapter; however, Chapter officers shall be eligible to serve on the SOAR Executive Board or as a District SOAR Coordinator.

<u>Answer</u>: For those chapters following SOAR's standard bylaws, in accordance with the above four-year schedule, the nomination of SOAR chapter officers shall be held in October 2024, and nomination and election of chapter officers will be held in November 2024.





JAN/FEB 2024









220 People Finished Paying Social Security Taxes on New Year's Day



Elon Musk stopped paying into Social Security just four minutes into the year.

Just a few hours into 2024, more than 220 Americans, including SpaceX/Tesla/X's **Elon Musk** and Apple's **Tim Cook**, paid all their Social Security taxes for the year. This comes in sharp contrast to the over 160 million American workers who will continue to pay Social Security taxes on the income they earn all year.

This wide disparity is due to the cap on maximum earnings subject to Social Security tax — \$160,200 in 2023 and now \$168,600 in 2024.

If the top ten CEO's paid Social Security tax on all their income — including stock options — the system would have received \$3.4 billion.

"If the wealthiest Americans paid their fair share, we could strengthen the Social Security program and even expand benefits," said **Joseph Peters**, **Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "It is time for Congress to adopt this common sense solution

and deliver greater retirement security for all."

Pharmaceutical Corporations Expected to Raise Prices on Over 500 Drugs This Month

Some of the largest American pharmaceutical companies, including Pfizer, Sanofi, and Takeda Pharmaceutical, plan to raise prices on over 500 drugs starting this month according to data analyzed by healthcare research firm 3 Axis Advisors. The price hikes will affect over 140 brands of drugs.

Pfizer, including the Hospira arm of the company, is responsible for the most price increases this month, with plans to hike prices on 146 drugs in total – more than a quarter of all price increases. Another major company, Takeda Pharmaceutical, has 53 price increases planned, ranking it second to Pfizer in number of price hikes.

The price increases coincide with President **Biden's** policies aimed at reigning in pharmaceutical price gouging, including allowing Medicare to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies to lower prices beginning in 2026. The publication of discounted prices for 10 high-priced drugs will come in September 2024. The administration has also combatted major price hikes by requiring that drug companies pay rebates to Medicaid when prices rise faster than the inflation rate.

"The pharmaceutical industry's greed has no bounds and seniors need protection," said **Robert Roach**, **Jr.**, President of the Alliance.







Debt Commission Legislation Fast Tracks Cuts to Social Security and Medicare

On January 18, 2024 the House Budget Committee passed H.R. 5779, the Fiscal Commission Act, introduced by Rep. Bill Huizenga (R-MI), on a 22-12 vote and House Republican leaders say they are looking to get it to the House floor quickly.

Sens. Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Mitt Romney (R-UT) have also introduced companion legislation in the Senate, S. 3262, the Fiscal Stability Act.

The legislation establishes a 16-member "Fiscal Commission" appointed by congressional leaders. Twelve members of the commission would be members of Congress and the other four would be "outside experts." It would make recommendations on how to balance the federal budget to address the growth of direct spending and to improve the solvency of Federal trust funds, including Social Security and Medicare, for at least 75 years. There is no requirement that the Commission's deliberations would be open to the public.

The Commission's recommendations would then be delivered to Congress immediately following the November 2024 elections, with the requirements that each chamber conduct an immediate up or down vote on the recommendations without any opportunities for changes or amendments. The bills only discuss cuts without mentioning consideration of revenue increases.

Alliance for Retired Americans Position

The Alliance for Retired Americans strongly opposes H.R. 5779 and S. 3262, and any other legislation to create committees or commissions to do the work of Americans' elected representatives without input from the American people.

Retirees have earned their Social Security and Medicare benefits over a lifetime of work. The benefits ensure older Americans receive the health care they need, and provide income for more than 66 million Americans. These benefits are critical and they should not be cut.

The Alliance urges Congress to strengthen the solvency of our nation's retirement programs and expand Social Security and Medicare benefits by making the wealthiest pay their fair share into these programs.



SOAR CHAPTER JAN/FEB 2024



POSITION PAPER: **Debt Commission**

P.2

Social Security Does Not Contribute to the Deficit

The premise of the commission is flawed. Social Security does not contribute to the federal debt or the deficit. By law, the Social Security Administration cannot borrow funds. The program has its own dedicated revenue source — specifically, payroll contributions from workers, as well as interest on special interest bonds and revenue from higher earners who pay taxes on their Social Security earnings.

The Commissions Are Anti-Democratic

The bills call for a closed door, fast-track process that dramatically limits public input, excludes the traditional committee process from acting on the legislation, and does not allow amendments or full debate. Additionally, most Americans' elected representatives in Congress will not be able to even debate the proposals, much less amend any commission recommendations.

Outcome is Pre-determined

The mandate given the commissions is narrow and designed to produce recommendations for cuts to Social Security and Medicare. Any discussion of changes to these programs must include ways to increase revenue instead of exclusively focusing on benefit cuts.



www.RetiredAmericans.org 🤺 www.facebook.com/retiredamericans | @ActiveRetirees | 1-888-373-6497

Get Four Free At-Home COVID-19 Tests



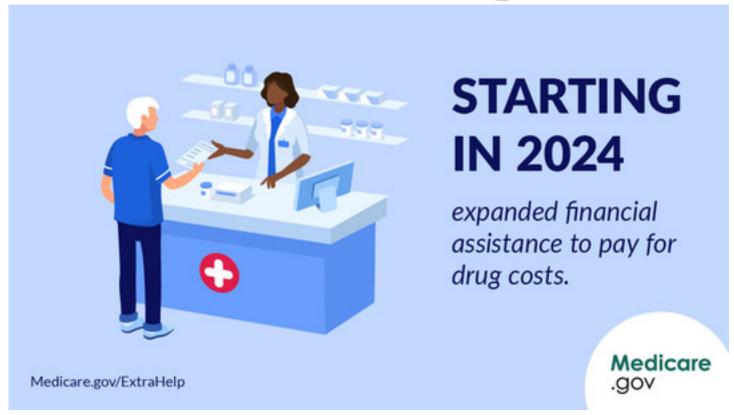
Preventative health makes sense. Especially when it's free and easy. Every home in the U.S. became eligible to order an additional 4 free at-home tests beginning November 20, 2023. If you did not order tests last fall, place two orders for a total of 8 tests. And the cost to you is nothing.

Zero. Nada. Zip. Just click the link below. And, your friends and family can get free tests, too. Just send them the link. Sign up right now while the link is here in front of you. You won't pay for the tests or shipping. Visit <u>COVIDTests.gov</u> or call 1-800-232-0233 (TTY 1-888-720-7489).

Source: HHS Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response



Medicare.gov



Due to a **new law**, starting January 1st, more people will qualify for additional savings on their Medicare Prescription drug savings on their Medicare prescription drug costs. People eligible for **Extra Help** will pay \$0 for their Part D plan premium, have a \$0 deductible, and pay no more than \$4.50 for each generic drug!

In general, individuals with an income less than \$23,000 per year and couples earning less than \$31,000 may qualify for Medicare's Extra Help program. Even if you don't think you're eligible or you were denied before, it could pay to apply.

Find out if you're likely to qualify by completing the short questionnaire on SSA.gov, at the bottom of the page.

Remember, even if you don't qualify for Extra Help now, you can reapply for Extra Help any time your income and resources change.

Sincerely,

The Medicare Team



Union Membership Grew by 139,000 in 2023 in a Win for Workers, Retirees

In January, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics <u>released</u> its annual report on union density. Union membership in the private sector increased by 191,000 members, with a majority of new members under the age of 45.



"Workers are fed up with low wages, few benefits, and a lack of dignity and respect on the job, which is precisely why more are interested in joining a union now than ever before," said AFL-CIO President **Liz Shuler.** "Not only are more Americans in a union, but 900,000 union members won double-digit wage increases through new contracts last year."

"This report is great news for retirees and active workers alike," added **Joseph Peters**, **Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "When active workers have union jobs that come with higher wages, superior health care benefits and pensions, their retirements are also much more secure."

Source: Alliance For Retired Americans Friday Alert - January 26, 2024