Happy New Year. I just want to take a moment to say thank you for all that you do for SOAR, the middle-class and working poor of our two countries. In both the U.S. and Canada our leadership and members have stepped up to meet the challenges that confront retirees and working families on a daily basis. Because of your dedication and commitment to social justice, we are a better union and have a stronger voice in our two country’s deliberations on important issues of the day.

The November elections in the U.S. will be dominating the pages of our publications for the majority of 2016. Our Canadian membership will be keenly aware of our fight and where it is practical, be actively involved in our campaign, especially in the border states where their help in the past has been immeasurable.

The challenges facing us in 2016 are daunting. Truly, the election in the U.S. will determine if we continue to be a country for all the people or just a chosen few. We are at a crossroad. Do we continue on the path of prosperity for all or do we go back to being a nation of have and have not’s? Do we step back and allow the rich to be the ruling class or do we fight for social justice and equal opportunity for all?

Although the task is formidable, I believe there is opportunity in the fight. We can get America back on track and be a country of and for the people, one that respects and fights for the middle class and working poor rather than the corporate elite. We can also use this fight to engage and energize our membership to be more active in our legislative and political agenda.

I also view this as an opportunity to grow SOAR’s membership. We need to reach out to all of our retirees and bring them into our retiree organization. This is an opportunity to find new activists and to continue the strong legacy of advocacy established by those who have come before us.

I look forward to the challenges as we begin this New Year and to working with all of you to victory in November!

Jim Centner, SOAR Director

USW Launches Organizing Campaign at University of Pittsburgh – District 10
Faculty, Graduate Employees Seek to Improve Working and Learning Conditions
The United Steelworkers (USW) on Tues., Jan. 26, 2016, sponsored a 10:30 a.m. news conference at the JobLinks office at 294 Semple St. for full and part-time faculty and graduate employees of the University of Pittsburgh to discuss their ongoing campaign to improve working conditions for instructors and learning conditions for students by organizing and bargaining collectively for union representation.
The McNeil Report
"Ode to getting old"

Just a line to say I'm living, that I'm not among the dead, though I'm getting more forgetful and something's slipping in my head; I got used to arthritis, to my dentures I'm resigned. I can manage my bifocals, but oh, how much I miss my mind. For sometimes I cannot remember when I stand atop the stairs, if I must go down for something or if I've just come up from there. And before the fridge, so often my mind is filled with nagging doubt. Have I just put food away, or have I come to take some out? I called a friend not long ago, when they answered I just moaned. I hung up quickly without speaking, for I'd forgotten who I'd phoned. And when the darkness falls upon me, I stand alone and scratch my head. I don't know if I'm retiring, or just getting out of bed? Once I stood in my own bathroom, wondering if I'd used the pot. I flushed it just in case I had and sat down just in case I'd not. So, now if it's my turn to write you, there's no need for getting sore. It may be that I think I've written and don't need to write no more. Now I stand beside the mail box with a face so very red. Instead of mailing you the letter I have opened it instead.

From Charlie

- District and Chapter articles and photos should be emailed to the SOAR office at the address at the left. The deadline to submit articles and photos for the SOAR in Action magazine is May 17.
- The 2016 Rapid Response and Legislative Conference will be held from April 25-27, 2016, in Washington, D.C., at the Omni Shoreham Hotel.

Elaine Sez...

If I hear the words Trump, Sarah, caucus, MSNBC, Cruz, etc., one more time, I'm cutting the plug off the TV!

I only want to hear the words dinner out, movie, and wine! Will all you ladies be glad when this election is over?

Old Charlie Sez...

Oh no!! Not basketball already! In January?? Basketball, basketball, basketball... If I have to sit through one more basketball game, I'm gonna...I'm gonna.....read a book, I guess.
**Billy’s Banter**

**Is There Really a Difference in Political Parties?**

As I have done for many years, I recently watched the State of the Union Address given by the POTUS. Over the years there were some speeches that I have enjoyed more than others. There were always issues that I supported and some that I did not. This opinion is shared by the politicians who attend the Address and is usually expressed by their applause in favor of issues or their silence when they oppose or do not support the issue. This year’s Address was no exception. What was different was the solidarity of one party who was almost unanimous in their action or inaction on certain issues. This shows me that these politicians, in many cases, are responding as a political party and not as someone who is representing the people who sent them to Washington.

I was extremely disturbed to see the topics one political party chooses to sit on their hands in silent protest. How can anyone not be glad that unemployment has been cut in half and 15 million jobs have been created? I wish the majority of those jobs had been in manufacturing, but they are better than no jobs at all; but one group was united in their silence. There was tremendous support from one group on the issue of the TPP and we all know what damage TPP will do to American jobs.

Working towards a good education for our children generated no applause from one party. Making it easier for Americans to vote was greeted with the same silence. Cutting pollution levels and even finding a cure for cancer were met with silence. No one who works or worked for a living should support someone who is against increased employment, educating our children and improving the environment. We should not support anyone who is not supportive of these issues.

While there will always be issues where we will not be in agreement, we must look to the issues that impact our standard of living and our children’s future and then vote accordingly. We need to make sure our Representatives support our issues and watching how they respond at the SOTU Address is a good way to measure!

*Bill Pienta, SOAR President*

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**Boston School Bus Union Leaders Return To Work – District 4**

For 26 months beginning October 2013, when they were falsely accused of staging an illegal walkout, four fired leaders of the Boston School Bus Drivers Union waged an uphill battle against the notorious Veolia/Transdev Corp. to get their jobs back. It took the full mobilization of the militant rank and file, combined with a rock-solid support coalition that united longtime labor leaders with veteran African-American community activists Chuck Turner and Mel King, to win their reinstatement on Dec. 23.

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**Chipotle's Business Is So Bad That People Are Losing Their Jobs In Other Industries – District 4**

The impact of Chipotle's E. coli outbreaks has extended beyond the restaurant chain's plunging sales. Chipotle's same-store sales fell by 30 percent in December in the wake of the outbreaks tied to its restaurants in nine states. Now a paper mill that supplies burrito bowl take-out containers to Chipotle has cut jobs. Maine paper manufacturer Huhtamaki laid off 25 to 30 employees after Christmas, the Bangor Daily News reported.
The Effects Of Bad Trade Agreements

Recently, District 7 SOAR Board Member, Scott Marshall and I attended a membership meeting of Local 7773 in Franklin Park, Illinois to arrange for the formation of a SOAR chapter. The main order of business was the closing of Castle Metals in Franklin Park and the effects on our members. I found the discussion and the effects on our members an ongoing reminder of the effects of bad trade policy on our members. Many of our affected members spent much of their adult lives working for this company and are now middle age thrown into unemployment and financial uncertainty when they would have otherwise been contemplating enjoying the fruits of their labor and securing their retirement.

I then reflected on the numerous plant closings that have occurred in this area and the thousands of workers who lost good paying, middle class jobs with good benefits. I thought of driving down 65th street west of Midway Airport in Chicago and seeing vacant land where paper factories and can companies were located and the thousands of good jobs lost.

I recall when I was a kid, on a clear day I could see the reflection in the sky from the blast furnaces in East Chicago and Gary, Indiana where tens of thousands of Steelworkers made a living wage with good benefits. Thousands of these good jobs are gone.

These jobs have been lost mainly due to bad trade policies and outsourcing to low wage countries and yep, I know technology and automation has had an impact as well. Walk through any store. Can you find much made in the USA? It is estimated that we have lost over 5 million jobs due to trade agreements in recent years. And now our country is considering another one - the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). I don’t know about you, but I have already written my congressman and senators and encouraged them to vote against the TPP, which by the way, I heard will be up for an up or down vote in early February.

P.S. We should be outraged. Recently congress voted to ban the labeling of meat products with the country of origin - trade driven change. This would only be the beginning of provisions in the TPP that undercut our sovereignty and remember the Vietnam war and the domino effect that we were told was the reason for our involvement? Now the TPP will create a trade agreement with Vietnam and our workers will have to compete with 50 cent per hour jobs.

Bill Gibbons, PACE Representative

Talks Suspended Between Alcoa And United Steelworkers – District 7

In Warrick County, Indiana, talks between Alcoa and the United Steelworkers union are now suspended. The representative from Alcoa arrived a few days ago to meet with workers about the pending closure of the Warrick Operations aluminum smelter. The closure affects 600 Tri-State workers and their families. According to the union, the two sides are exceedingly far apart concerning seniority rights, retirement options and quit packages which are designed to lessen the impact this closing will have on the families and the local economy.

West Virginia Senate Passes Right-To-Work – District 8

The West Virginia Senate passed a measure recently to outlaw mandatory union dues and fees as a condition of employment. The Senate approved the bill with a 17 to 16 vote before sending it to the House of Delegates. The measure was introduced Jan. 13 on the first day of the 60-day legislative session. The policy has been a Republican priority since the party secured the legislature in November 2014. It is more commonly known as right-to-work which is the nuttiest name for a law that doesn’t give anyone the right to work.....crazy.
Address Income Inequality and the Needs of Seniors Simultaneously

Rising income inequality in our country has been in the news for years now. Efforts to raise wages across the board, including the minimum wage, have increased the nation’s awareness, yet wages continue to stagnate.

But there’s one aspect of the income inequality problem that has not received as much attention: its effect on Social Security.

A recent *Atlantic* magazine column by Dr. Teresa Ghilarducci, a professor of economic policy analysis at the New School for Social Research in New York, may be a major step in changing that.

Dr. Ghilarducci writes that the formula for funding Social Security was calibrated back when our country had much more income equality. However, since 1979, the wages of the top 1 percent of workers have grown 138 percent, while the wages for the bottom 90 percent grew only 15 percent.

This statistic has significant implications for Social Security. It is wrong that billionaires are not paying the same share into Social Security as those on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder. Someone who makes $118,500 this year is going to pay the same amount in Social Security taxes as someone who makes millions more than that – and much more, as a percentage of their salary.

To address this unfairness, the Alliance supports making millionaires and billionaires pay their fair share. Doing so would extend the life of the Social Security trust fund for decades into the future.

The Alliance also supports implementing a new formula, the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E), for determining future Social Security cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs). It is a fix that will address the possibility of a percent COLA happening once more in 2017 – as it did in 2016 - and repeatedly in later years.

The CPI-E would better reflect the needs of older Americans by basing the COLA calculation on what seniors actually spend their money on. That list includes items such as health care and housing. It is a far more accurate measure than the current index, the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), which takes into greater account factors such as fuel prices, apparel, and education that disproportionately affect younger Americans.

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.

Renewed calls for Public Inquiry on the Anniversary of Babine Sawmill Explosion – District 3

The following is a joint statement from the United Steelworkers, the BC Federation of Labour, the First Nations Summit, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the BC Assembly of First Nations, marking the fourth anniversary of the Babine sawmill explosion: “It has been four long years since the tragic explosion at the Babine Forest Products Ltd. sawmill in Burns Lake, BC on January 20, 2012, that killed Carl Charlie and Robert Luggi, and seriously injured twenty others.
Report From The Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)

Wishing all my SOAR Sisters and Brothers a great 2016!

Trade, Currency and Manufacturing

While President Obama had accomplished plenty with little help from Congress, he has completely dropped the ball on two of the most essential parts of our economy. He has failed with both chambers of congress to address the specific policing of our trade laws and, also, creating a policy to address currency manipulation. These two issues are necessary if any free trade agreement is going to be successful at leveling the playing field between trade partners.

Our trade deficit with China in 2001 was $83 billion. In 2012, it reached $315 billion and in 2014 a whopping $343 billion. In 2015 the deficit continued to grow.

We have recovered 900,000 jobs since the Great Recession of 2009 but, remember, we lost 3.2 million workers in the past seven years. There is documentation from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), Brookings Institution, renowned universities of research and noted economists C. Fred Bergsten and Ronald Reagan advisor Arthur Laffer on how currency manipulation has cost millions of American jobs. Yet, it has fallen on deaf ears.

Presidential candidate Donald Trump has gotten it right on one issue - China's efforts to dump overcapacity products like steel have devastated U.S. manufacturing and its job market. China just keeps manufacturing and “dumps” its inferior products like steel for a price that is less than it would cost American steel companies to make. In 2015, 12,000 American steelworkers lost their good-paying, benefit friendly steel mill jobs.

It's time for President Obama to step up if he wants to grow our economy during his final year in office. He must stop the illegal import of the overcapacity products manufactured in China and other countries. Proper trade enforcement and monitoring with a keen eye on currency manipulation will result in a big boost for American manufacturers and workers.

Call your representatives in congress and let them know the United States must stop the illegal dumping of products into the U.S. and name China a currency manipulator. You can reach your Senators or House members at their district offices or by calling the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your representative by name.

Blue Wilson, of Wyandotte, Michigan, is an AAM site coordinator

Hexion Closure Will Affect Up To 100 Workers – District 13
Company expanding business in Asia, workers given option to transfer to other sites
Hexion Inc. announced it would likely close its Norco operation by June, a move that could affect an estimated 100 employees. Company spokesman John Kompa said Hexion announced “a potential strategic change within its epoxy manufacturing grid to restructure operations at its Norco, Louisiana, site.” The changes are “in response to large capacity additions in Asia combined with softening global demand for epichlorohydrin (ECH).” Hexion intends to purchase less costing ECH from Asia, which has an over capacity of the resin.

Essar pensioners worried about court ruling – District 6
Reports in the media "shook up" salaried retirees after a Toronto court recently allowed Essar Steel Algoma Inc., to suspend special $3.38-million monthly payments to its pension funds, says the president of the local Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees, Chapter 17. "Does that mean our pensions are not going to be paid," members are asking? "No," answers SOAR president Don Barill, who represents about 1,300 members, most of whom retired from Algoma Steel Inc., before it was bought by India's Essar Group.
Four Ways I Know Of That SOAR Chapters Get Started

I’m not proud to admit that I haven’t had much luck in convincing local unions or retirees to start a SOAR chapter at their local. I’ve spoken to local union executive boards and local union presidents, and I’ve attended meetings and lunches put on for retirees in an attempt to start a chapter with no luck. However, I have spoken to a Coordinator who was able to get a chapter started in this way.

I do know of three other ways that did get the job done. First, I know of a retiree who when he retired, asked his local union if there wasn’t something set up in our union to keep retirees involved with helping the union. The local didn’t know anything about our SOAR organization. This retiree took it upon himself to contact the former district educational director from years before. He was told to set up a meeting with as many retirees as he could. He then came and spoke to them about SOAR. They all chipped in twelve bucks and were off and running with their new chapter.

Another way I’ve seen is when a district director made the commitment to build SOAR in his district by letting it be known to his staff that he wanted at least one chapter started in each of his five sub-districts. He let the Staff know that this is what he expected to happen, provided the resources necessary and low and behold several chapters were started.

Finally, I’ve seen a local union president who wanted a SOAR chapter for his local union delegate one of his officers to “get it done”. That officer got a motion passed at the monthly meeting to pay the first five years dues for all of their retirees (unconditionally), mailed out a letter inviting all the retirees to a meeting, invited a SOAR Coordinator to that meeting where officers were chosen, and it all fell into place. So simple it can be when a local union supports their retirees.

Charlie Averill, SOAR Secretary-Treasurer

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Kennecott Worker Sustains ‘Traumatic Injuries’ In Industrial Accident – District 12
An industrial accident on Kennecott Utah Copper's Magna site left a man with traumatic leg injuries a few days ago. Public safety dispatchers confirmed that a 911 call came in from the mining operation. A medical helicopter was sent to the scene. Kennecott spokesman Kyle Bennett said the accident involved a contracted switchman whose legs became pinned under a rail car outside the company's refinery complex, 11500 W. 2100 South. How the man became trapped was not immediately clear.

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NC GOP Accused Of Intentionally Suppressing Black Votes To Preserve Their Majority – District 9
On Monday, residents of North Carolina are taking the state to court, arguing that North Carolina legislators designed a new voter ID law to stifle growing minority turnout that threatened the Republican majority in Raleigh. The state is claiming that the law was passed to prevent voter fraud, though there is no evidence of widespread fraud at the ballot box.

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Why Am I Middle Class? By Brian Felder, USW Local 1299

The short answer is that I choose to be. Going further into it, I am “middle-class” because I am comfortable with my life. I don’t want to go to school and strive to be a CEO of a Fortune 500 Company. I’m happy to be able to provide for my family. I don’t want to work crazy hours both at work and home to stay ahead of the competition. I like where I am in life. Mostly, I’m middle class because there are more important things than money and status.
Medicare Part D drug plans: Three tips

Medicare offers prescription drug coverage through traditional Medicare or through a Medicare Advantage plan, and about 80 percent of people with Medicare—40 million—take advantage of it. Here are three things to know about Medicare Part D drug plans and some information on costs.

**Enrollment:** If you have traditional Medicare and you don’t have drug coverage through your job, you might also want to have prescription drug coverage through a private insurer under Medicare Part D. If so, you should sign up at the same time you sign up for traditional Medicare so that you have full coverage. You might also need a Part D plan if you are enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan. If your income is low, you are eligible for help paying the cost of this coverage. Call 1-800-Medicare (1-800-633-4227) to enroll.

**Coverage:** The Medicare drug benefit covers a part of your total drug costs. Each drug plan covers different drugs, under different conditions, and charges you different amounts for those drugs. Because there is little standardization regarding what these plans cover, whether you need special authorization, and how much you pay and some terms can change at any time, it can be hard to figure out which plan to choose. Keep in mind that each fall you will need to study your options if you want to keep your costs down, since most drug plans change their premium, deductibles, copays and benefits from one year to the next.

- Most drug plans will make you pay more for your drugs after you and your plan have spent $3310 on covered drugs. At that point, you are in the coverage gap, sometimes called the “donut hole.”
- Unless you are enrolled in the “Extra Help” program, which protects you from the coverage gap, you will be eligible for the Coverage Gap Discount Program.” Under that program, you’ll pay 45 percent of the drug plan’s costs for covered brand-name drugs.
- No matter which plan you choose, after you’ve paid $4850 of your own money for covered drugs, Medicare will pick up 95 percent of the cost of your drugs, or you will pay a small copay.

**Access:** Each drug plan has its own rules on where you can fill your prescriptions. More and more have pharmacy networks and your costs will differ based on which pharmacy you use. Check to make sure the plan’s requirements meet your needs, both in your community and while you’re traveling.

Here are some helpful facts from the Kaiser Family Foundation about the 2006 Medicare drug benefit:

- The average drug plan monthly premium is $41.46. Some are as high as $60.
- Two out of three plans have a deductible, an amount you must pay before the plan starts covering your drugs. The deductible can be as high as $360.
- Many drug plans now charge coinsurance, a percentage of the cost, for brand-name and specialty drugs.
- They also tend to charge you different amounts depending on the pharmacy network you use.

**Michigan Suspends Workers, Restores Flint Mayoral Powers In Water Crisis** – District 2

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder last week suspended two state workers in connection with water testing failures in the Flint contamination crisis and the state restored some powers to Mayor Karen Weaver. Snyder, who NBC news reported has hired a crisis PR firm, suspended two Michigan Department of Environmental Quality workers in an increasing national furor over elevated lead readings in tap water and the blood of some children. Snyder apologized this week to Flint residents for the state's failures.

**NLRB To Issue Complaint in District 1**

Region 9 of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in Cincinnati has notified the USW that absent a settlement, the board will issue a complaint against A.P. Green, a subsidiary of HarbisonWalker International, for regressive bargaining and illegally locking out the members of Local 2324-5 at the company's Oak Hill, Ohio refractory plant.