Connection

From the Directors Desk

The Big Lie

There are two kinds of people who want to cut Social Security—liars, and people who believe the lies. They’ve heard the conservative talking points: “Social Security is going broke.” “Social Security won’t be there for me when I retire.” “The only way to save Social Security is to cut benefits.”

Unfortunately, these Wall Street funded lies have gotten plenty of traction in recent years. So much so that a recent survey shows that 43 percent of young people believe that Social Security won’t be there for them when they retire—no matter how much that same survey shows that these same young people want it to be there.

It’s time to set the record straight. When you’re speaking with your Chris Christie-loving cousin at the family BBQ, you have the facts on your side:

Social Security has a $2.8 trillion surplus and can pay out every benefit owed to every eligible person for nearly two decades. After that, even if we do nothing, it will pay out approximately 80% of benefits owed for the next 75 years.

Social Security has not contributed one penny to the deficit because it is independently funded by the FICA payroll tax.

Proposed “tweaks” to Social Security would hurt seniors, disabled veterans and people with disabilities.

All we need is to ask millionaires and billionaires to start paying into Social Security at the same rate as the rest of us and we not only extend the life of the Social Security trust fund, but we can expand benefits to the majority of Americans.

With the facts on our side, we have begun to see a dramatic shift in the national conversation around Social Security. It wasn’t that long ago that we were still fighting a “chained CPI” benefit cut being proposed by President Obama, all Republicans and some Democrats in Congress. Today, 44 out of 46 Senate Democrats and 116 out of 188 House Democrats have gone on record supporting expansion. And 79 percent of likely voters – Democrats, Republicans and Independents – support expansion!

The shift that we are seeing is a direct result of your hard work. Together with our allies, we have rallied and educated the American people around protecting and expanding our earned benefits. But, while we have made significant strides, we are not at the finish line yet. Stay on message and keep up the good work!

Jim Centner, SOAR Director
The McNeil Report

I feel like my body has gotten totally out of shape so I got my doctors permission to join a fitness club and start exercising.

I decided to take an aerobics class for seniors. I bent, twisted, gyrated, jumped up and down, and perspired for a hour but by the time I got my leotards on, the class was over.

From Charlie

- Don’t forget that this newsletter is online at http://www.usw.org/act/activism/soar/resources/soar-chapter-connection. Please share it with your chapter members.

- 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 October 12.

- We’ve been trying to utilize this newsletter for educational purposes and using the SOAR in Action magazine to print chapter articles and photos. This way, our members can view their events in color. If the articles in this newsletter were 250 words or less, we could put more information in it. I know that’s hard to do sometimes, but the longer the article is, the less likely it will be read. Most newspapers limit their “voice of the people” articles at no more than 250 words. Not always easy to do, I admit - but it can be done. Please try.

Elaine Sez...

“One day, you will wake up and there won’t be any more time to do the things you’ve always wanted. Do them now.”

Old Charlie Sez...

Being active in SOAR doesn’t make you any younger, of course, but it sure does make you feel younger.
Report From the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)

We at the Alliance for American Manufacturing are sad to report that Rachel Bennett Steury has resigned from AAM in search of greener pastures in Southern California. We all express our deep gratitude for her tireless advocacy on behalf of our SOAR brothers and sisters. She has kept retired and working USW members informed of AAM’s work on the most important issues concerning the well-being of our members. We wish Rachel all the best.

We will continue to update SOAR readers with help from our field representatives and our headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Currently at AAM, we are carefully watching the funding for the Highway Trust Fund. The Trust Fund money is set to expire on July 31, 2015. Some congressional members are trying to create a long-term funding bill but it is unlikely this will be realized prior to the August recess.

The main goal, at this point, is to provide financing for yet another short “patch” of money to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent until sometime in December, when congress will make overtures about a four-to-six year, long-term investment. Without another limited funding agreement, state highway projects could come to a halt during the vital summer and autumn months. Jobs could be lost and our crumbling infrastructure will continue to worsen.

So, please take action and phone your representatives in Washington, D.C. Call the Capitol switchboard operator at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your member of congress or U.S. Senator’s office. They can also be reached at their District offices.

Jeff Bonior, AAM staff writer, Alliance for American Manufacturing, (202) 695-8219

(Note) Rachel Steury sure did do a great job for SOAR and our Connection newsletter. Her articles were always on time and to the point. I’m confidant that Jeff will also do a great job for us. Adios to you, Rachel. We’ll miss you............Charlie Averill

Financial Scams: Beware Of Strangers Offering Help - From just+care

Financial scams abound. Scammers prey on people in all kinds of ways — first building trust, then offering “help” and then asking for money. Here are three things you should never do.

1. Don’t give strangers your social security number, credit card information or bank account information under any circumstances.

2. Don’t wire money to anyone without first checking with someone you trust. A scammer might call or e-mail, impersonate a family member or friend, and claim she needs an immediate wire transfer of money.

3. Don’t give strangers access to your computer. A scammer might call or e-mail you, claim he is from a computer company, and offer to clean up your computer files or remove a computer virus. The scammer is trying to gain remote access to the personal information stored on your computer files, which he can do if you give him your computer passwords.

These are classic scams. If you’re wondering whether an email you receive is for real or the person on the other end of the phone is telling you the truth, go to www.snopes.com. Type in the nature of the email or phone call you received and see if it pops up. Snopes should tell you if it is a common scam. WISER, the Women’s Institute for a Secure Retirement, offers a checklist of common scams.

And remember: if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
In Case You Missed It: the Alliance’s National Legislative Conference Was a Huge Success!

by Barbara J. Easterling

From July 7-10, over 400 seniors descended on Washington, DC for the Alliance for Retired Americans’ 2015 National Legislative Conference. Activists attended trainings and action sessions to sharpen their advocacy skills. Attendees also had the chance to meet with their U.S. Representatives and Senators during Lobby Day, voicing their concerns on retiree issues from protecting Social Security Disability Insurance to opposing the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal. In total, our activists visited more than 150 Congressional offices and in many cases were able to speak directly to their Members of Congress.

Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO, kicked off the conference with a fiery speech. He was followed by a number of elected officials including House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, Senators Bernie Sanders, Debbie Stabenow, and Elizabeth Warren as well as Representatives Ruben Gallego and Keith Ellison later in the week. Attendees also heard about issues ranging from postal banking to the AFL-CIO’s Union Veterans Council initiatives. Special guest Max Fine, who was a member of President Kennedy’s original White House Task Force on Medicare in the 1960’s, also addressed the activists.

This conference fell during the same month as Medicare’s 50th anniversary. While the Alliance sees this occasion as an opportunity to help strengthen the program for generations to come, many in Congress are looking to cut benefits or increase cost-sharing for seniors. 2015 is also the year that marks the 80th anniversary of Social Security. In light of this event, the Alliance teamed up with allies to collect 226,000 signatures on a petition urging the President to support an expansion of earned Social Security benefits. The signatures were presented to White House Conference on Aging Executive Director Nora Super, who also spoke at the conference.

If you weren’t able to come, visit www.retiredamericans.org for photos, materials, and more!

Barbara J. Easterling is president of the Alliance for Retired Americans. She was previously the secretary-treasurer of the Communications Workers of America.

Barbara Easterling, President Alliance for Retired Americans

Community Aging In Place - Advancing Better Living For Elders (CAPABLE)

As the population ages, many experiments are underway to understand how best to keep people living in their homes as long as possible, sometimes called community aging in place. Not only is nursing home care extremely costly, but most older adults prefer to live at home. And, some experts believe that a few low-cost interventions can keep people in their homes months or even years longer. CAPABLE (Community Aging in Place—Advancing Better Living for Elders) is testing that proposition, helping low-income older adults with chronic conditions increase their mobility and functionality at home.

Older adults in the study group received 10 one-hour to one-hour-and-a-half visits over five months. A handyman might lower shelves and install handrails. The nurse might help a person organize her medications to ensure medication compliance. The study found that 79 percent of the 100 people receiving the CAPABLE intervention improved their self-care in five months and experienced fewer symptoms of depression. The average participant reduced her disabilities by half and was far better able to take care of herself.

Source: Excerpts from an article by Diane Archer of Jus+care
In Its 50th Year, Medicare Remains Vital, A National Treasure: It’s Time To Expand It

Thanks in no small part to the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the 2015 Medicare Trustees Report delivers good news in the week leading up to Medicare’s 50th birthday. Medicare’s trustees find that the Medicare Hospital Insurance (Part A) Trust Fund remains solvent through 2030, with the ACA adding 13 years to its projected solvency. Shouldn’t we expand it as a health insurance choice for everyone?

At 50, Medicare is in good shape. The HI Trust Fund has sufficient funds to pay Medicare Part A claims in full for the next 15 years. The Supplemental Medical Insurance (Part B and Part D) Trust Fund is also financially sound, relying on premiums and general tax revenue to pay medical and drug claims.

Medicare continues to do a better job at reining in health care costs than commercial insurance. Spending has grown very slowly, 1.3 percent on average over the last five years. The Medicare trustees credit provisions in the ACA for this slow growth. Looking ahead to 2025, the trustees estimate Medicare per capita spending growth at 4.2 percent, lower than the growth in overall health expenditures, which they estimate at 5.1 percent.

Unlike commercial insurance premiums, Part B premiums should remain stable for the overwhelming majority of people with Medicare. That said, final premium amounts for 2016 will be set later in the year.

As expected, Medicare is delivering more than the commercial health plans, containing costs, offering people greater choice of doctors and hospitals, and driving health care system improvements. It’s time for Congress to expand Medicare so that it’s an option for people in the state health insurance exchanges. More than seven out of ten likely voters support this policy option.

A Medicare option would not only give exchange members the same choice of public and private plan options as people with Medicare, it would offer more choice of doctors and hospitals, drive down costs and lower national health care spending. In 2013, the Congressional Budget Office projected 7-8 percent lower premium costs and $158 billion in savings from a public health insurance plan over 10 years.

Medicare Proposes To Pay For Advance Care Planning

In a newly released proposed rule, Medicare is proposing to pay for individuals to talk to their doctors and care teams about their health care wishes as part of their advance care planning. Medicare already pays for advance care planning under people’s Welcome to Medicare visit. But, the agency wants to give people additional opportunities and greater flexibility to have a conversation about end-of-life decisions with their doctors.

For their peace of mind and for the comfort of their family, an increasing number of people are planning ahead for their care and creating advance directives even before they enroll in Medicare. Some are ready to discuss end-of-life planning with their doctors when they first enroll in Medicare, and others would prefer to wait. People also might want to start the conversation at the onset of a serious illness or as an illness progresses.

And, there is a bi-partisan Senate bill, the Care Planning Act of 2015, from June 11, 2015, that would authorize Medicare to pay physicians to counsel patients on end-of-life decisions.

Source: Above two articles written by Diane Archer from the Jus+care website
2015 Social Security and Medicare Trustees Reports

The Social Security and Medicare trustees have confirmed that Social Security and Medicare are not in crisis, and, in fact, continue to be in strong fiscal health.

Throughout its history Social Security has never missed a payment, and that will continue to be the case through 2034 – one year more than last year’s projection. The Medicare Trust Fund is also strong, with sufficient funds to cover its obligations until 2030, unchanged from last year.

Yet extremist politicians and Wall Street CEOs continue to try and manufacture crises and falsely claim that these systems are in danger. This is a cynical attempt to try and build support for unwanted, unneeded and risky changes to our earned benefits. In fact, time and again the American people have said that they support the Social Security and Medicare systems and that it is time to expand them.

The projected deficit in the Social Security Disability Insurance Fund is serious but can be easily remedied with a technical fix. A reallocation between the trust funds has been done many times before under both Republican and Democratic leadership and would not impact the long-term solvency of Social Security. The refusal of Republican leadership to allow a simple fix – and instead put modest benefits for disabled Americans at risk – is simply shameful.

Our country does face a retirement crisis – but that is not due to Social Security or Medicare. Sixty-two percent of households aged 55-64 have saved less than one times their annual salary, not nearly enough to sustain a family. For this reason expanding Social Security, which can be accomplished by making sure the top five percent of wage earners pay the same percentage in taxes on earnings as everyone else, is a top priority of the Alliance for Retired Americans.

Rich Fiesta, Executive Director of the Alliance for Retired Americans

SOAR Members Are Active - Bill Gibbons, PACE Representative

I recently attended the Alliance for Retired Americans legislative conference in Washington DC, along with a number of SOAR representatives. It was very impressive to see retirees standing up to fight for not only the rights and benefits for seniors but the future rights and benefits of our children and grandchildren.

It reminds us just how active our SOAR members are and acts as an incentive for retirees to join and become active in SOAR.

These retirees went to the Capital and met their congressional legislators in an effort to protect and improve Social Security and Medicare, not only for current retirees, but future retirees. In addition, they pointed out the major negative impact that the TPP trade agreement will have on workers and the economy of our country and asked their senators and congresspersons to oppose this pending legislation.

We are at a critical political period. Our Congress has become dysfunctional while our country faces major issues. And keep in mind that some of the republican politicians want to cut and or do away with Social Security and Medicare.

Let’s follow the example being set by so many SOAR members. Get active, be involved and encourage those you know who are not SOAR members to join SOAR and encourage all to know the issues and vote.
Emeritus Report

Wow! Summer has finally got here. That was a cold hard winter. SOAR members were certainly kept busy with elections at all levels of Government. Cut backs to Government services and may other problems that required our getting involved.

SOAR chapters across Canada usually take July and August off. That is what Chapter 1, the Chapter that I belong to, chose to do so I often wonder if we shouldn’t take the cold snowy months of January and February off instead.

Our Chapter 1’s June meeting was full of surprises. First of all, my wife Ruth, who has been very involved with our chapter and has been the Treasurer and involved with other SOAR business has finally decided to step down. The Chapter 1 President Don Clarke had already arranged for a member to take over the Treasurer’s job. At this time Don payed tribute to Ruth for her long and faithful service to the Executive and the Chapters members. He then presented Ruth with a beautiful plaque that expressed the gratitude of the Chapter. Ruth had done a great job all these past years. To my complete surprise Don also gave me a plaque thanking me on behalf of the Chapter for services done. This is very much appreciated by me. They also had a huge cake for Ruth and all of us to enjoy at the end of the meeting.

Well, this is all for now. To all our friends on both sides of the border, we wish you a safe and healthy summer.

Dan McNeil, SOAR Emeritus

Ideas To Get Your Chapter Members Involved

Never forget that the very first purpose of SOAR (as printed on the back of your membership card) is “to better the communities in which you live.” Now, I know that just about everything we do as chapters could come under this heading. But, as you know, every organization has members that just don’t care for business meetings or may be unable to stand for long periods of time at a rally or demonstration.

However, there are members of your chapter, I’m sure, who would love to serve a meal at a rescue mission, go on a bus trip, help with a BBQ money raiser, come to a “trivia night,” participate in a clothing or food drive, visit veterans, deliver meals on wheels, ring the Salvation Army Bell, visit or mail letters to our members who are homebound…..you get the picture. The list is endless. After all, caring for one another is what life is all about.

Charlie Averill, SOAR Secretary/Treasurer

“Courage, my friends; ’Tis not too late to build a better world.”

-Tommy Douglas
District 3 News

Union Wants Inquiry As Babine Inquest Begins

As the coroner’s inquest into the second 2012 Babine Forest Products mill explosion — that claimed the life of two workers — began Monday, the union representing the workers and their families has renewed the call for a public inquiry into who’s to blame.

In January and April 2012, two sawmill explosions in northern B.C. (Burns Lake and Prince George) killed a total of four workers and injured dozens of others, which a WorkSafe BC report claimed was due to an over-accumulation of wood dust.

In early 2014, Premier Christy Clark held a press conference where she said no full public inquiry would happen into the explosions, as lawyer Len Doust, retained as an independent advisor into the Babine Explosion Investigation, advised against it.

But a United Steelworker’s petition calling for a public inquiry into the explosions has garnered nearly 11,000 signatures so far, according to the union’s assistant director, Scott Lunny.

District 5

Union members protest layoffs near gates of IOC

The United Steelworkers Union (USW) is seeking arbitration on the case, and, in the meantime, Head said she’ll apply for jobs at places like Muskrat Falls until it’s sorted out.

USW president Ron Thomas said it’s been long enough and it’s time for them to go back to work because the layoffs don’t make sense.

“There are people in there doing the jobs on a regular basis, they’re paying them more money – there’s no business sense to it,” he said.

District 6

TORONTO – Employees of the Crown Metal Packaging factory in Toronto have ratified a new collective agreement, ending a 22-month strike.

Members of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 9176 voted today to accept a six-year collective agreement with Crown.

The return to work process will begin August 10.

“My friends, Love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair.”

-Jack Layton