Billy’s Banter

What Is An Inversion? And Why Would I Care?

American drug maker Pfizer (Viagra, Lipitor) recently announced it has merged with Irish drug maker Allergan (Botox, Restasis). Why should we care if two big companies want to get bigger? Let me give you a couple of reasons:

First: Loss of jobs. The companies predict annual savings of about $2 billion within three years as a result of combining and elimination jobs and services.

Second: The loss of tax revenue. By claiming the company is now foreign-owned, even if all the executives and operations remain in the U.S., Pfizer will reduce by nearly $1 billion their U.S. taxes.

I doubt that Pfizer needed to merge to survive as they had $49.6 billion in revenue in 2014. This was simply a move to make more money by using the present tax system to reduce their tax obligation to the U.S.

Third: This merger could cause drug prices to increase and encourage more consolidation in health care, providing fewer options for the consumer.

What can we do about this you ask? The answer is not as complicated as you think. In the U.S. there are two major political parties and they have addressed this issue. Both parties say the best way to address this issue is changing the tax code. The difference is in their solution. One Party says that if we reduce the corporate tax obligation, there would be no reason for companies to move from the U.S. The other Party says the tax loop hole should be closed and their U.S. tax obligation should not be reduced. If we follow one of the solutions, we will need to find another source for the lost revenue and I do not want that source to be hard working men and women or retirees.

Vote for the candidates that are looking out for us not a foreign company. I wonder if Pfizer will be willing to share any of their tax savings realized from this deal by reducing their prices? If the drug companies are trying to reduce cost, how about reducing some of those ridiculous commercials that appear on the TV in a never ending stream.

Bill Pienta, SOAR President

Part D Open Enrollment Soon To Close

If you have original Medicare and a Medicare Supplement that doesn’t have creditable prescription drug coverage, be aware that the open enrollment period is between October 15 and December 7 each year. Your coverage begins on January 1 of the following year, as long as the plan gets your request during Open Enrollment.

Over the past several months, something exciting has happened in the battle for retirement security: the conversation is no longer exclusively about attempts to cut our earned Social Security benefits. Retirees are on the offensive and the discussion has shifted to expanding those benefits.

There are several bills that have been introduced to do this. Most recently Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts introduced S. 2251, the Seniors and Veterans Emergency Benefits Act.

This legislation would provide a one-time payment in 2016 to Social Security beneficiaries, veterans and others of $581, which is 3.9 percent of the average Social Security retirement benefit.

Passage of this bill would help bring our economy into balance and make an important statement about fairness. That is because the average CEO pay increase was 3.9 percent last year, while retirees and people with disabilities will not be getting any cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in 2016.

It is entirely appropriate that these one-time payments to Social Security beneficiaries would be funded by eliminating the CEO performance pay tax break. The revenue gained from closing the tax loophole would then be dedicated to Social Security, strengthening the long-range projected solvency of the Social Security Trust Fund.

Passing this bill is one step we can take to improve our retirement security. Congress should also require the Social Security Administration to base future COLAs on the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E), which much more accurately reflects the cost of things retirees purchase, including health care and housing.

The issue is about more than seniors. On January 1, more than 9 million veterans who rely on Social Security benefits or pension and compensation benefits will not get a COLA, either. This legislation would help address the problem for both seniors and veterans.

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.

USW VP Tom Conway: U.S. Can’t Sustain A Still Dysfunctional Healthcare System

United Steel Workers Vice President Tom Conway says the movement to change America’s still dysfunctional health care system must keep organizing until a tipping point of change is reached. Speaking at a single payer health care conference in Chicago, Conway said the Affordable Care Act is a big problem for the Steelworkers and it’s a brutal place out there trying to bargain with employers on health care. He says health insurance for workers keeps getting more expensive while coverage narrows. He says doctors, workers and single payer universal care activists are actively building a movement to change our dysfunctional health care system. [Tom Conway]: “And we’ll just keep growin’ this and growin’ it until we hit the tipping point we need. But we can’t give up. This is exactly the right way to do it. Put everyone in a room together, give us all time to get comfortable with each other, move off and just keep organizin’ and keep drivin’. And we’re gonna change the way this works. ‘Cause this country can’t sustain this kind of a dysfunctional system.”

Source: Union Matters
The United States has concluded negotiations on the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal, and on November 5, 2015, President Obama released the text of the agreement. This started a 90-day period for public review before Congress can take an up or down vote. The agreement contains various provisions that could affect drug prices for all Americans, including seniors. These provisions would block patent reform and jeopardize the government’s ability to negotiate lower prices for drugs in public programs like Medicare.

**TPP Locks in Patent Protections for Drugs & May Block Future Reform**

The United States has been more liberal in granting patents and other forms of regulatory protections to pharmaceutical companies than other countries. The U.S. Trade Representative, at the urging of pharmaceutical companies, succeeded in pressuring other countries to provide the same protections, and set them in stone, as part of the TPP agreement. As a result, the TPP jeopardizes our country’s ability to change its own rules on patents in the future, which will increase the prices consumers pay.

**Exclusivity for biologics:** In the United States, the exclusivity period for biologics – drugs used to treat various types of cancer and other chronic conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis – is 12 years. However, many health advocates and President Obama have endorsed shortening the exclusivity period for biologics to seven years. The final TPP requires parties to provide eight years of “effective market protection.” This provision would prevent access to clinical data and registration of cheaper versions of medicines for eight years. While drug companies claim this protection is needed to promote innovation, it will extend drug monopolies at the expense of patient access and limit future reforms the U.S. government can make.

**Evergreening:** The TPP that would also require countries to grant “evergreen” patents or patent extensions for small changes in the formula, dosage or administration of the drugs, regardless of whether these minor alterations improve the efficacy of the drug, further locking in higher prices for longer periods of time.

**TPP Could Limit Cost Control Measures in Public Programs**

The federal government, as the administrator of Medicare, works to lower the cost of prescriptions drugs for patients and the government, through rebates, discounts and drug formularies. However, the TPP agreement includes language that puts the interests of drug and medical device companies above those of beneficiaries and taxpayers by providing an opportunity for drug and device manufacturers to seek higher reimbursement rates.
Specifically, it requires countries to make available a review process for health care reimbursement decisions and to follow TPP procedural rules and principles—but the process is not required to be open to the public or to consider alternate views. The vague language in this section provides no assurance that government agencies are protected from a legal challenge. Thus, under this transparency provision, global corporations could contest reimbursement policies through ISDS (see below).

Under this procedure, Medicare could be subject to a challenge by a foreign pharmaceutical company or a foreign subsidiary of a U.S. company. In contrast, citizens concerned about ensuring that Medicare gets the best value for its dollar are not guaranteed any formal role in such a challenge.

Also, this agreement could tie the hands of future Congresses to enact legislation to negotiate drug prices under Medicare or enact a Medicare drug rebate program, which would save Medicare $121 billion over 10 years.

**Corporate Rights in TPP Could Supersede U.S. Laws and Courts**

The TPP includes investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS). ISDS provides a mechanism for global corporations to sue countries over government measures that, in their view, “unfairly” impact the companies expected future profits. Under ISDS, cases are adjudicated by an international tribunal. The arbitrators in these tribunals do not have to comply with U.S. laws or take into consideration the impact on American citizens, yet their decisions are binding. ISDS gives corporations a new avenue to seek compensation, which often comes at the expense of the public good. Using this mechanism, pharmaceutical companies can reap windfall profits at U.S. taxpayer expense.

ISDS claims are growing in numbers. In 2012 alone, 58 cases were filed. Eli Lilly, a U.S. drug company, is currently using NAFTA’s ISDS provision to challenge Canada’s decision not to extend patents for Strattera and Zyprexa. Eli Lilly is seeking $500 million in compensation from Canada. The TPP would allow similar challenges against U.S. patent and reimbursement decisions by pharmaceutical companies by extending ISDS to Australia, Japan, and other countries.
From The Director’s Desk

Trans Pacific Partnership – TPP

Once again our nation has gone down the path of destruction with another ill-advised trade agreement. The Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) will deal a critical blow to workers and their standard of living in both our countries. It could very well be the final nail in the coffin of our manufacturing base that has been rapidly evaporating since NAFTA.

Not only does it destroy our manufacturing economy, it threatens our sovereignty. Corporate rights will supersede U.S. and Canadian Courts and provide a mechanism for global corporations to sue countries over government measures that, in their view, “unfairly” impacts the companies expected future profits.

In addition to its impact on manufacturing, this agreement contains numerous provisions that could affect prescription drug prices. These provisions would block patent reform and jeopardize our government’s ability to negotiate lower prices for drugs in public programs like Medicare.

TPP is a bad deal and needs to be stopped before it annihilates our economy and destroys our quality of life. It’s time for us to act. The clock is ticking. On November 5, 2015, President Obama released the text of this agreement. This started a 90-day period for public review before Congress can take an up or down vote to either pass the trade agreement as written or send it back to the policy makers to fix it.

Congress needs to hear from you. Call your Senators in Congress Representative’s today! Tell them to vote NO on TPP.

Contact your Senators by calling 877-607-0785 and your Representative by calling 866-202-5409

Do it today!

Jim Centner. SOAR Director

Six Reasons Why You And Your Loved Ones Should Create Advance Directives

Advance care planning is important for your peace of mind and for the people you love. You should begin care planning by creating an advance directive. An advance directive is a type of medical document that describes your treatment preferences in end-of-life situations. To contact your local Area Agency on Aging for free local resources to help older adults receive needed health care and related services or simply to understand available benefits, call the Eldercare Locator 800.677.1116.

1. They are free and easy to create
2. They help you think about the values and goals you have for your health and health care.
3. They help you prepare for unexpected medical situations.
4. They comfort your family and loved ones.
5. They allow you to create closer relationships with your doctors and other care providers.
6. They speak for you when you cannot speak for yourself.
The McNeil Report

A Heart Warming Scottish Story........Aahh! Makes your heart sing.

A thoughtful Scottish husband was putting his coat and hat on to make his way down to the local pub. He turned to his wee wife before leaving and said “Maggie, put on your hat and coat lassie”. She replied, “Awe Jock, that’s nice, are you taking me to the pub with you?”

“Nay”, Jock replied, “I’m turning the heat off while I’m out.”

From Charlie

• Don’t forget that this newsletter is also online at http://www.usw.org/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 January 21.

• We’ve been trying to utilize this newsletter for educational purposes and using the SOAR in Action magazine to print chapter articles and photos.

Elaine Sez...

Blessings to all our dear SOAR friends and may this holiday season be the best ever. Be safe, be thankful, be kind to each other, be generous, be patient, and be joyful.

Old Charlie Sez...

Merry Christmas from our SOAR Director, Jim Centner, our SOAR President, Bill Pienta and the entire SOAR Executive Board.

Let’s make 2016 the year we change the complexion of our country by voting for those who will have retirees in mind.

Photo taken 50 years ago
Emeritus Report

We have been enjoying some good sunny weather here in Toronto. We should appreciate it while it lasts. Only too soon we will be buried in cold snowy days.

To say I am disappointed in the results of our recent National elections would be putting it mildly. Once again the people of Canada decided to get rid of the Conservative Party and more specifically their leader, Steven Harper by voting strategically. How a true New Democrat (NDP) could vote for any other party is beyond me. Either you believe in what the Party stands for or you don’t. Why is it that when the Liberal Party are campaigning they do it on NDP platform and then when they get in power they do just the opposite? I guess the old saying that there is nothing funnier than people is the case here.

I hope that our American friends enjoyed a Happy Thanksgiving.

Dan McNeil, SOAR Emeritus

Democratic Debate Includes Prescription Drug Focus

The Democratic Presidential debate on Saturday night included questions about addressing the high cost of prescription drugs in the United States. Hillary Clinton said that she supports capping out-of-pocket prescription drug costs at $250 per month and that she wants Medicare to be able to negotiate lower prices for seniors. Americans pay the highest prescription drug prices in the industrialized world, and last year drug prices went up by 13 percent.

Sen. Bernie Sanders stated at the debate that he went over the Canadian border to show how much more affordable some cancer drugs are in other countries, compared to the U.S. Sanders also supports allowing Medicare to negotiate better prices on behalf of seniors.

“I did not hear similar talk about prescription drug costs being too high at any of the Republican debates,” said Alliance President Robert Roach, Jr. “It doesn’t seem to be an issue that is high on the GOP agenda.”

Source: Alliance for Retired Americans Friday Alert

How To Download The New Logos

1. Go to USW.org
2. Hover your curser over NEWS/PUBLICATIONS.
3. Click on USW Graphics Standards and style guide.
4. Read the USW Graphics Standards and style guide carefully.
5. Follow the directions to download the photo you want.
Report from the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)

Many of us as children sang the traditional English nursery rhyme “London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down. London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady.”

The modern melody was first recorded in the late nineteenth century but still holds true in many places today.

It is now 2015 and the lyrics would be more appropriate if sang, “American Bridges are Falling Down, Falling Down…

The crumbling United States infrastructure, including bridges, highways, roads, water main systems and mass transit, are in serious disrepair causing problems for drivers and movers of import/exports goods slowing the American economy.

Congress is currently in conference to reconcile a six-year deal between the House and Senate that would currently provide $325 million of funding for three of the six years. The Highway Transportation Bill would be the first multi-year extension since 2004.

Similar to the Senate Bill, the Houses of Representatives has adopted a compromise bill that can be reconciled in conference committees. But the underlying problem is how to pay for it.

There are 65,605 structurally deficient bridges in the United States. The Ambassador Bridge, which is a major trade crossing between Detroit and Windsor, Canada just opened one of several streets because of the debris falling from the bridge. It is estimated that the average American spends approximately an additional $516 per year for their cars because of potholes and severely damaged roads.

While Congress is proud of finally implementing a long-term transportation bill, the funding is woefully inadequate. Nobody likes to pay extra taxes but the Highway Gas tax has not risen since 1993. That is why we have infrastructure funding that provides only patches to potholes and creates catch-all structures for constant pieces falling from our decrepit bridges.

It is time for Congress to get serious about building new structures to return America to first-class infrastructure. America currently ranks eighteenth in adequate infrastructure in the world and we are paying the price. Slow moving trade goods, damage to autos and the dangers to all Americans is nothing to be proud of.

Too many failures in other parts of government, including unnecessary wars, have prevented us from taking care of Americans at home. Let’s do what’s right, in the spirit of President Eisenhower, and make America a world class transportation country again.

Take action by phoning 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

“To write is human, to receive a letter: Divine!”

— Susan Lendroth
Six Days a Week Postal Delivery - It’s Possible with Postal Banking

From 1911 until 1967, the United States Postal Service provided safe and convenient banking services for working-class Americans. Reinstituting postal banking now would allow the postal service to maintain local branches in many rural areas as well as a six-day home delivery service that would be vital for many seniors’ to receive their medication.

With your help we can urge Postmaster General Brennan to reinstitute postal banking.

Unfortunately, nearly 28 percent of American households are being underserved by traditional banking institutions, spending almost 10 percent of their income on fees and services at payday lenders, check cashing services, and various other predatory financial services. This is a $103 billion dollar industry making its profits by preying on the working and retired class.

“Postal banking will strengthen the United States Postal service so that it can provide services like six day medicine delivery to retirees who desperately need it,” said Alliance Secretary-Treasurer Joseph Peters, Jr. “This issue is important for all seniors – particularly those who live in rural areas.”

Source: Alliance for Retired Americans Friday Alert

Health benefits of a fist bump

Are you interested in reducing your chances of getting the flu this season? Well then, you might stop shaking hands with folks and start fist bumping them. That’s what the latest research out of Aberystwyth University in the United Kingdom shows.

Handshakes may be the most common and most traditional form of greeting. But handshakes can be responsible for the transfer of bacteria from one person to another. And, this research shows there are better ways to greet a person if your goal is to reduce the likelihood of spreading infectious diseases.

For sure, any human contact can transfer bacteria. Given the choice of greeting, however, go for the fist bump. It’s more hygienic. It reduces the likelihood of spreading disease by some 90 percent. And, if that’s just too cool a greeting for you, try a high five instead of a handshake; it halves your odds of spreading infectious disease.

Source: jus+care

Review of SOAR Chapter - Standard Bylaws Article 6

The SOAR Chapter bylaws indicate that nominations for elected officers shall be held in October 2016. Nominations shall again be made in November 2016 followed by the election. Each term of office shall be for a period of four (4) years commencing with the month of November 2016. 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 Coordinator.
Five tips for talking to the people you love about their health

Many of us want to help our parents or other people we love as they age. But, we have no idea how to help. For sure, engaging them in conversation is already a big help. If you want to talk to your loved ones about their health, here are five tips for beginning the conversation:

1. Don’t assume that because your loved ones haven’t shared their health concerns with you that they don’t have any. They may not want to waste your time or cause you any worry. And, if your loved one is uncomfortable, or possibly ashamed, sharing private information even with family members, a more successful approach may begin with gentle expressions of support rather than pressure to accept help.

2. Express your support to help them maintain a high quality of life and get everything they need from their doctors. You could ask them what they have heard about health buddies, or a health care proxy. Let them know that sharing their concerns with you or a health care buddy they trust can help ensure they get the care they need. If you sense reticence, consider asking an open-ended question, such as, ‘How can I help you make sure you are getting the care you need from your doctor?’, or “What would be the most important thing for me to know about your health?” This might be more helpful than, “Is there anything I should know about your health?” or “Is your doctor taking good care of you?”

3. If they are living at home independently, remember that they may be scared to voice their concerns for fear of losing that independence.

4. If they are worried about spending money on themselves, keep in mind that they might not be addressing a health condition because of the cost. But the cost of the service may be far less than the risks of not getting treatment. Let them know that there are often free and low-cost resources for people with low incomes.

5. Finally, explain to them that it’s generally helpful to have a buddy with you at the doctor’s office to hear what the doctor is recommending, take notes, and make sure all important issues are raised, like medication side effects.

Remember, everyone’s different. Some of us feel our age and some of us feel like we’re still in college. Some of us like to talk about our health and some of us keep our conditions to ourselves. Some of us assume that we should have health problems in older age and don’t take the time to go to the doctor and some seek treatment whenever they have a new symptom.

Seven Tips For Checking Your Blood Pressure At Home

1. Plan in advance. No smoking, caffeine or exertion 30 minutes before. Empty your bladder. Rest for 10 minutes.
2. Know the correct body position. Sit upright with your back supported and your feet on the floor. Rest your arm at the level of your heart.
3. Consistently measure either the right or left arm.
4. Repeat the cycle once.
5. If you get a high number, don’t panic. Expect some normal variations between days.
6. Check your blood pressure regularly, if your doctor has recommended home monitoring.