From The Director (New Kid on the Block)

Through our Steelworker Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), we’ve worked with countless allies to provide more security to current and future retirees. In recent months, we witnessed a dramatic fight in Congress over the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and we are about to see a real battle over the budget, that was recently proposed by the U.S. House.

The effort to repeal Obamacare has revealed a Republican Party at war with itself. Many Republicans successfully campaigned on the promise to repeal the ACA, but Americans, advocates, and even insurance companies have roundly rejected their efforts to replace the ACA with a plan that (according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office) would leave tens-of-millions of Americans without health coverage.

Concerned more with campaign contributions than helping people, the GOP has not seen these defeats as a rejection of their agenda. They claim Democrats should “play ball” by cosigning their toxic proposals, and – in addition to their efforts to destroy the Affordable Care Act – they are proposing a budget that would make devastating cuts to vital programs like Social Security and Medicaid.

We are ready to denounce proposals that put retirees in jeopardy. For years SOAR members, through involvement in Rapid Response - our union’s legislative education and action program, have played an integral role in our union’s work to protect current and future generations of retirees.

Whether you are a member of a SOAR chapter or an individual USW retiree, we need your help. If you are not engaged in Rapid Response, please reach out to the coordinator in your district to get plugged in! (See article page 6 for more information.) In addition, see the Rapid Response Feedback Report below. We’re all in this together!

Julie Stein, International SOAR Office

Efforts To End The Affordable Care Act Fail

In the early hours last Friday morning, the Senate held a dramatic vote on a last ditch effort to dismantle the Affordable Care Act. It failed by a vote of 49-51. All Democrats and Independents voted against the bill along with Republican Senators Collins (ME), McCain (AZ) and Mirkowski (AK).

We don’t expect this to be the end of the attempts to roll back Medicaid, Medicare and other health protections. It also won’t be the end of our efforts to improve health care in this country.

Congratulations and thank you to every SOAR member who called, shared information, talked with fellow members, showed up at offices, raised the issue when meeting with Senators and more. Your efforts helped make this outcome possible.
Billy’s Banter

Unfortunately, membership in unions is decreasing; primarily because there are fewer opportunities to belong to a union. This makes for fewer opportunities to grow our membership in SOAR. As a result, we must do things differently, if we want SOAR to grow or keep our membership steady. Involvement with and exposure to the active members in our Union, will help strengthen the bond between SOAR and the active membership. Having a representative of SOAR speak at the local union meeting is no longer enough. The SOAR Executive Board member or a SOAR District Coordinator should work with the District to find other locals that presently do not have SOAR chapters, but might be willing to listen to a SOAR presentation.

A ten-minute presentation, explaining what we do and how valuable we could be to a local, may entice the local or someone who will be retiring shortly to look at the value of a SOAR chapter. We already have the presentation that is available for District Conferences, which could be used as a template. Including what your District SOAR chapters do in assisting other locals, could be just what’s needed to push the local to work with the retirees and form a chapter.

Organizing retirees to form a SOAR chapter is similar to organizing workers to join a union; and with fewer opportunities for workers to join unions, we have a smaller group to work with. Building coalitions with other like-minded groups is certainly a tool to growing SOAR. But, if we want SOAR to grow internally, we need to constantly think about ways to expose ourselves to the USW locals, who do not have chapters, in an effort to create new chapters and grow our membership.

Bill Pienta, SOAR President

Just What Is A Podcast? by Charlie Averill

A podcast is a digital audio file made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device, typically available as a series, new installments of which can be received by subscribers automatically. If you’re not familiar with podcasts, you might just give them a try. You just might get hooked on them like I am.

Try these:
• One that gives me the latest news is “The Daily”. This is how the news should sound. Twenty minutes a day, five days a week, hosted by Michael Barbaro and powered by New York Times journalism.
• Another is “retirement talk” at www.retirementtalk.org ...These are put on by Del Lowery and are about six minutes long and deal with just about every aspect of retirement such as health, leisure, travel and so much more.
• One of my favorites is one you can find on Soundcloud. Just go to www.soundcloud.com and then at the top of the page, search for Charlie Averill.
We Need Some Common Sense Solutions

It has become very disturbing to listen to the reports on the Republican efforts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA) also known as Obamacare. The idea that millions of citizens would lose coverage and costs would be increased, while the wealthy would get tax cuts, is further disturbing.

There is no question that the ACA requires some corrections and fixes and it should have included a “Public Option” that would have prevented many of the market problems that have occurred. It appears that much of the problem with insurers leaving the ACA market is due to the uncertainty that has been created. For example, the ACA provided cost sharing reductions (CSRs) and subsidy reimbursement to insurance companies, which in 2016 amounted to 7 billion dollars. Insurance Companies have not received the assurance of a continuation of this arrangement.

The one fix that objectively and factually makes the most sense would be a “Single Payer” or a “Medicare for All” arrangement. We are the only advanced country that does not provide such an arrangement. And we pay two to three times more for healthcare than those other countries and have healthcare outcomes that are not as good, and we have millions without any coverage at all.

This might just be my way of thinking, but it seems our legislative system has become dysfunctional. One only needs to look at the escalating drug costs and the inability of Medicare to negotiate drug prices and the failure of Congress to do anything about it. In my opinion, the unlimited flow of money to politicians and the influence of lobbyists supported by this money, gerrymandering of congressional districts and the lack of a fairness doctrine in the corporate media, have contributed to this problem.

Think about it. If we didn’t already have the interstate highway system, Social Security, Medicare and so many other important legislative accomplishments, would we be able to get them passed through Congress today?

Bill Gibbons, PACE Representative

Social Security Trustees Report Confirms Social Security’s Strength

By Alex Lawson of just+care

Thanks to Social Security, when it comes to our retirement security, or a disability, or the loss of a loved one, we’re not on our own. We’re all in it together. Last week’s Social Security Trustees report confirms Social Security’s strength.

The Trustees’ report projects that Social Security will be able to pay 100 percent of benefits owed through 2034, and 77 percent of benefits owed after that. Today, the typical retiree receives $1,363 in monthly benefits, and the typical retiree couple receives $2,262. Disabled workers receive $1,171 on average and $1,802 if the disabled worker has a child or children. Wealthier recipients pay taxes on this income, accounting for 3 percent of the Social Security Trust Fund’s reserves.

If Congress lifted the cap on Social Security contributions so that wealthy Americans contributed the same share of their income to the program as everyone else, Social Security benefits could be larger. And, Social Security would have all the money it needs to pay full benefits for the next several decades.
Report from the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)

President Trump hosted a Made in America event week at the White House from July 17 through July 21.

Products, entirely Made in America, were showcased from all 50 states.

But at the Alliance for American Manufacturing every week is Made in America week. Trump is certainly not the leader of Made in America products. Many of the products he sources for his business ventures, as well as his daughter Ivanka’s line of clothing, are made overseas. The President’s clothing line, hotel furnishings and even steel for his massive buildings are often produced in China, Mexico and Bangladesh.

It’s a case of do as I say, not as I do.

It’s pure hypocrisy that the President of the United States promotes products Made in America, while at the same time he is purchasing manufactured products from countries that contribute immensely to our trade deficit.

No matter what your opinion is of President Trump, it is important to get behind Made in America. If every American committed to buying $64 worth of American-made goods each year 200,000 new jobs would be created.

American-made products are much better for the environment and are critical to our National Security. There is just one aluminum smelter remaining in the United States that can produce the purest quality aluminum for our fighter jets and navy fleet. American-made steel is losing the capacity to rebuild our Navy fleet of battleships and Army tanks.

Made in America matters. It’s also perhaps one of the few issues that Americans tend to agree on, with 95 percent of voters polled in 2014 having a favorable view of American-made products.

We’ve lost so much ground in American manufacturing over the past 30 years, it is not always possible to Buy American. But with a concerted effort, Americans can research and purchase what is Made in America. It will bring back thousands of manufacturing jobs and protect our National Security.

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

Remember When…There Were Love Songs? by Joel Bernstein of jus+care

Nobody writes the old style love songs anymore. That line itself could be the beginning of a love song, which nobody writes anymore. Where are the Gershwins, the Yip Harburgs, the Jerome Kern’s? And, most especially, where is Irving Berlin? Is it reasonable to miss them and the songs they created?

Take Irving Berlin. He was born in Russia, came to America as a child, lived in the tenements of New York, became a singing waiter in Chinatown, and rose to become dean of American songwriters. This Jewish boy’s “White Christmas” became a mega-hit. He wrote hundreds of songs, including “God Bless America,” and the very popular love song, “Always,” which he wrote in 1925 as a gift to his wife. “I’ll be loving you, always…..with a love that’s true always…..When the things you’ve planned, need a helping hand…..I will understand, always.”

It probably doesn’t get anymore sentimental than that. In fact, sentimentality, tenderness, mawkishness have come to define the old love songs, many of which people of a certain age still croon off-key in the shower when no one is around to hear them.
The McNeil Report

Ketchup

A woman was trying hard to get the ketchup out of the jar. During her struggle the phone rang so she asked her 4-year-old daughter to answer it. “Mommy can't come to the phone to talk to you right now she’s hitting the bottle.”

More Nudity

A little boy got lost at the YMCA and found himself in the women's locker room. When he was spotted, the room burst into shrieks, with ladies grabbing towels and running for cover.

The little boy watched in amazement and then asked, “What's the matter, haven't you ever seen a little boy before?”

Police

It was the end of the day when I parked my police van in front of the station. As I gathered my equipment, my K-9 partner, Jake, was barking, and I saw a little boy staring in at me.

“Is that a dog you got back there?” he asked. “It sure is,” I replied.

Puzzled, the boy looked at me and then towards the back of the van. Finally he said, “What'd he do?”

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Elaine Sez...

I just can't win! For twenty years Charlie has been complaining that he has to do all the yard work alone (I don't like working in the yard!). We have a large property, about two acres, and he mows, gardens, and such. So, after nagging me to help, I finally gave in and bought myself a new battery-powered weed whacker. I love it. And I like using it. The yard looks much better. However, now Charlie is complaining that he is working harder than ever since I started helping! You see, I find all kinds of jobs that need to be done outside and now I am nagging him to get them done. What goes around, comes around!

Old Charlie Sez...

If I had it to do over again, I never would have asked my wife to do yard work.
Let’s Celebrate Medicare’s Birthday of 52 Years By Protecting It

On July 30th the Medicare program celebrated its 52nd birthday as a cornerstone of retirement security in America.

When President Johnson signed Medicare and Medicaid into law in 1965, growing older often meant poverty and illness. Only half of our nation’s seniors had health insurance. While many retirees received health coverage through unions, the millions of seniors paying out of pocket faced premiums as much as three times what younger workers paid. Insurance was seen as a luxury that many seniors simply couldn’t afford.

For millions of uninsured seniors, an illness could mean being thrust into poverty or going without treatment altogether. Around one in three seniors lived out their older years in poverty, and many were forced to lean on friends and family to provide care and financial support during times of illness.

Today, Medicare and Medicaid find themselves under attack. Politicians in Washington like House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI), Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price and President Donald Trump are pushing to dismantle the Medicare program and roll back the clock. The support and passage of the American Health Care Act (Trumpcare) in the House, an opening attack, would decimate Medicaid and raid three years of solvency from the Medicare trust fund.

This summer, the Alliance for Retired Americans, along with affiliates, is celebrating Medicare’s 52nd birthday with grassroots events all across the country. Please join us in celebrating Medicare’s track record of success, and together we will work to make sure it’s around for 52 more.

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.

WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Secure retirements. Good jobs. Workers’ rights. Safe and healthy workplaces. Stronger communities. Protection from illegal and unfair trade. A safety net for when life throws us curveballs. These are the things that build a fair economy where everyone can benefit – not just the wealthiest few. This is what grows the middle class and creates a better nation.

For over two decades, USW members and retirees have been working for these goals through Rapid Response, our union’s legislative education and action program. It’s not only for us. It’s for our kids, our grandkids, and all those coming after us. We have a legacy to leave.

Whether you are a member of a SOAR chapter or an individual USW retiree, we need your help. If you’re not yet engaged in Rapid Response, please reach out to the coordinator from your district and get plugged in. There are easy activities that you can do on your own or with a group to make a real difference. We’re all in this together!

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.

“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth.”

- William Faulkner
Congressional Issues:

Upon returning from their ten-day July 4 holiday, and in some Districts testy meetings with constituents, the House and Senate members are facing about 17 issues for floor action before the annual August vacation. A few of the issues are on timelines and must be acted upon, moving some members to state that the August vacation should be canceled.

The main House issues include HR 867, a bill to terminate the Environmental Protection Agency; HR 175, the Obama Care Repeal Act; and HR 899, a bill to terminate the Department of Education.

The main Senate issues include S 106, the Obama Repeal Act and S 65, the Presidential Conflict of Interest Act.

Joint Resolution 19 was introduced to amend the Constitution by abolishing the electoral college and provide for the direct election of the President and Vice President.

Less than three weeks remain before the August recess; during which the republican goal of passing a healthcare reform bill, tax reform and the annual budget bills are uncertain, according to several republicans plus a bill to raise the budget ceiling.

The administration is looking for a victory on any of these issues but, according to media reports, the President has not used his clout sufficiently. Also, the President’s recent trip attending the G-20 meetings in Europe did not go well. By deliberately offending our long-time allies while praising Putin, the President has harmed our alliances. European leaders expressed concerns that a chasm has opened up between the United States and the rest of the world. French President Emanuel Macron said “our world has never been so divided.” Other statements by our allies were referred to as unsettling.

How is it that in such a short time allies are fearful of losing a global alliance and the ongoing goal of unity among the nations? Expressions are being offered about the possibility of another war and the fear of a nuclear threat by a President known for reacting on impulse or a gut reaction. However, for the moment, our concerns should be directed to the legislative issues noted above and continued involvement in every way possible to remove this President from office. A casual review of his appointments, the hiding of his tax records, his reactions to unfavorable opinion, his threat to a free press (fake news, the media is the enemy) and more, much more, indicates that he is not, as many professionals and statesmen/women have publicly expressed, worthy of the office he holds.

Ken Kovack, SOAR Legislative Director

“There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.”

-Elie Wiesel
Are You a Veteran?

The United Steelworkers Union family would like to recognize your service to our country, and commend you for your courage and commitment to defending the freedoms of every American.

We are starting Veterans of Steel to create a larger voice in issues prominent for those who served, as well as a way to develop networking opportunities, support, and protect jobs for those who have fought for our country’s freedom. We want a place in our union where vets can continue the camaraderie and solidarity found in the military.

To stay updated on upcoming news about Veterans of Steel, please visit www.usw.org/vetsofsteel, text VET to 47486 and follow @steelworkers on social media. We will be in touch to learn from you so that the program meets your needs and expectations. Thanks for all you do - for our country and our union.

In solidarity,

Leo W. Gerard, International President
Thomas M. Conway, International Vice President - Administration, Sgt. USAF 1970-1974

Healthcare Is A Right

I lay awake at night, knowing damn well we’ll have to fight
Because healthcare is our right.

They want to close the E.R. down
Drive the patients away cross town.

They say you’ll get better care
But you’ll be dead when you get there.

So don’t get old or don’t get sick
or McGuinty will beat you with a stick;
The sick will moan the old will cry
He wishes they would all just die.

Do I have to tell you why?
You loudly hear McGuinty say
The old and sick get in his way.

He’ll tell you that you’ve just got gas
As a kidney stone you pass;
Some say that he’s smoking grass
I say he can kiss my ass.

Rebel Rhymes by Bill Mahoney
Resident Poet, Local 1005

The “CONNECTION” – How It’s Created

The SOAR Chapter Connection newsletter is distributed bi-monthly and is used primarily for educational purposes, legislative updates and items of interests to retirees. The Chapter Connection is available online at www.usw.org/soar and is distributed to the SOAR Executive Board, District Coordinators and SOAR Chapter presidents.

The SOAR in Action magazine is distributed to all members on a quarterly basis via mail, bundled with the USW@Work magazine. SOAR in Action provides an in-depth look at the work our members are doing across North America; to advance the rights of workers and ensure a secure retirement for current and future generations of retirees.

Both of these publications are created under the direction of Julie Stein, SOAR International Office, headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. For the Connection in particular, article contributions are received from SOAR President Bill Pienta; Bill Gibbons, PACE Representative; the Alliance for Retired Americans and the Alliance for American Manufacturing. These contributor’s articles, and contributions from a variety of other sources, are often included in the SOAR in Action magazine.