From the Director (Retired)

Passing the Torch

By the time you receive this newsletter I will be officially retired and an active dues paying member of this wonderful organization. An organization that I have had the opportunity to help shepherd for over the last 16 years. I leave knowing the elected leadership is committed to growing a politically active retiree organization dedicated to protecting and enhancing the quality of life of retirees and workers in both of our countries.

I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with Julie Stein, who USW International President Leo W. Gerard has appointed to assume my duties upon my retirement. Julie brings a wealth of experience into her new job. She has been an instrumental part of our union Political Department for the last five years. Prior to moving to Pittsburgh, Julie spent a great deal of her time in Wisconsin working election cycles, where she knocked on hundreds of doors and participated in phone banks to educate our members on the issues that affect working families and retirees as well as encouraging support of labor-friendly candidates. In addition, Julie has great communication skills and brings a disciplined approach to the administrative side of the job.

I’m not going to walk away from the work and activism that this organization does so well. I am going to take a little time off, recharge my batteries and then get reengaged in the fight as a SOAR volunteer and activist. But, I can walk away from the day-to-day administrative duties of this job knowing that the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees is in good hands and prepared to face the challenges the future brings head on!

Congratulations Julie, I wish you great success in your new job!

Jim Centner, SOAR Director

“As it has over the decades, the union movement stands for the fundamental moral values that make America strong: quality education for our children, affordable health care for every person—not just some—an end to poverty, secure pensions and wages that enable families to sustain the middle-class life that has fueled this nation’s prosperity and strength. Union members and other working family activists don’t just vote our moral values—we live them. We fight for them, day in, day out. Our commitment to economic and social justice propels us and everything we do.”

—John Sweeney, November 2004
Billy’s Banter

Stand Up Fight Back

Returning from the SOAR Conference energized and ready to go to work, we are hit with a vote in the US Congress that will reduce health benefits to seniors and a budget that makes it very clear where their priorities are. For an Administration to put millions at risk of losing or having their health care benefits reduced; limiting funds to programs like Meals on Wheels; to reduce SSDI benefits; to reduce funding into Medicare (which will cause financial issues in the future and open the door to change or eliminate Medicare) and to reduce funding to Medicaid, should be enough to get every SOAR member energized. The fastest growing groups of Medicaid recipients are seniors who enter nursing homes and have no means to pay other than Medicaid.

All of this is proposed to provide, in part, money for a tax break for the wealthy. This administration believes it is a fair trade off to reduce our benefits so taxes like the estate tax can be repealed. Presently, if you die the first almost $11 million dollars are tax free to a married couple who would inherit the estate. Then you would start paying tax on the amount over $11 million. The present administration feels this is not fair and has proposed total repeal of the tax and we should have our benefits reduced so there is money to make up for the loss of revenue.

If that isn’t enough to get you energized and willing to get active and do something, then I can’t think of anything that will.

We must take action and get involved. Demonstrate, protest, attend town hall meetings, call or write your representative. All SOAR Chapters should promote some action to let our representatives know we will not sit back and allow our seniors be taken advantage of in order to provide more for the wealthy. Stand Up Fight Back is not only the cry of the active members of the USW, it is the call to action for all SOAR members.

Bill Pienta, SOAR President

Is The Weather To Blame For Pain?

It’s long-believed that the weather can trigger adverse symptoms associated with back pain or osteoarthritis. Despite this popular belief, a newly published study from The George Institute for Global Health in New South Wales, Australia, disagrees.

Studying more than 1,300 people with either low back pain or knee osteoarthritis, researchers compared weather parameters when patients initially reported pain with weather conditions one week and one month before the onset of pain. Weather parameters included humidity, air pressure, wind direction, precipitation and temperatures that averaged between 41.7 degrees and 91 degrees Fahrenheit. Surprisingly, the results of the study showed no association between the weather and knee osteoarthritis or lower back pain.

The next time you struggle with low back or knee pain, call your doctor instead of blaming the weather.

“Child labor and poverty are inevitably bound together and if you continue to use the labor of children as the treatment for the social disease of poverty, you will have both poverty and child labor to the end of time.”

-Grace Abbott
Report from the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)

President Donald Trump, no doubt, truly believes he can cure what ails America.

He just has one little albatross hanging around his neck and it’s called Buy American.

The “Art of the Deal” businessman no longer has the freedom to deal with whom he wants, when he wants. He is playing with a different set of rules today, rules that he himself demanded to “Make America Great Again.”

On the campaign trail Trump promised to “Hire American, Buy American.” But after nearly six months in office, the president is finding out there is a price to pay for his so-called patriotism. After all, Trump certainly didn’t abide by his Buy-American policies when it came to his steel buildings and textile products.

Many of his “first 100-days in office” promises have gone by the wayside, but the president deserves some leeway when it comes to dealing with some of the concrete, building block issues of the day.

At this moment, his trade team is diligently tackling the steel import crisis on Capitol Hill, where he has the most capable surrogates working on his behalf. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross is a former steel executive, International Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer is a seasoned trade negotiator; going back to his days in the Reagan Administration, when he began fighting unfair trade deals with Chinese steel entities and Peter Navarro, who is an American economist serving as the Director of White House National Trade Council. Navarro is a staunch critic of China and proponent of reducing U.S. Trade deficits.

AAM has faith in these Trump appointees and their ability to bring the U.S. Steel industry back to a level playing field with its foreign counterparts. Discouraging steel overcapacity and utilizing tariffs and other incentives, American steel is still capable of making a significant comeback.

No, American steel probably won’t return to the days when three- and four-generations of family members could find high-wage, benefit friendly jobs in our mills. But, if not for national security reasons alone, many of America’s major steel mills which are currently shut down or idled, can return to capacity and restore the thousands of jobs that have been lost.

All SOAR members are encouraged to contact their representatives in Congress and let them know Americans “Stand Up for Steel.”

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

The Meat Of The Matter

A new study in the journal *Gut* suggests high consumption of red meat is associated with an increased risk in men for diverticulitis, a painful condition that occurs within the body’s digestive system.

Analyzing data from more than 46,000 men ages 40 to 75, researchers examined the risk of the disease and eating different types of meat, including processed and unprocessed red meat, fish and poultry, compared to men who ate the least amount of red meat, those who consumed the most had an increased associated risk of developing diverticulitis by 58 percent.

To lessen your possible risk, try substituting a portion of red meat with fish or chicken.

According to the results of the study, those who ate fish or poultry instead of one daily portion of red meat saw a lower associated risk for diverticulitis by 20 percent.
The McNeil Report

While he was visiting, my father asked for the password to our Wi-Fi.
“It’s taped under the modem,” I told him.


Seeing her friend Sally wearing a new locket, Meg asks if there is a memento of some sort inside.
“Yes,” says Sally, “a lock of my husband’s hair.”
“But Larry’s still alive.”
“I know, but his hair is gone.”

While visiting a retirement community, my wife and I decided to do some shopping and soon became separated.
"Excuse me," I said, approaching a clerk. "I’m looking for my wife. She has white hair and is wearing white shoes."
Gesturing around the store, the clerk responded, "Take your pick."

Senior citizens have taken to texting with gusto. They even have their own vocabulary:
BFF: Best Friend Fainted
BYOT: Bring Your Own Teeth
CBM: Covered by Medicare
FWB: Friend with Beta-blockers
LMDO: Laughing My Dentures Out
GGPBL: Gotta Go, Pacemaker Battery Low!

• District and Chapter articles and photos should be emailed to Julie Stein’s attention at the address at the left.

Elaine Sez...

Old Charlie Sez...

Those of you who have Congressional Representatives who have town hall meetings to listen to their constituents, be thankful. My congresswoman chooses not to listen to hers.
Thank You

While there have been a lot of serious developments that can adversely affect retirees and the working class that I could write about, I would like to extend my appreciation and thanks to two SOAR activists and leaders of SOAR that I have had the privilege and opportunity to work with in pursuing the mission and activities of SOAR.

Charlie Averill, who was the Secretary-Treasurer of SOAR, decided not to run for re-election during our recent SOAR conference. He has since been appointed an Emeritus member by International President Leo W. Gerard. Charlie has devoted many years to SOAR in the performance of his duties as Secretary-Treasurer. Those of us who have had the opportunity to work with him have firsthand knowledge of his dedication and leadership. His work on the “SOAR Chapter-Connection” is just one example. I am pleased that he is still working on it.

Jim Centner, SOAR Director, is retiring June 1. I have found Jim’s dedication, leadership and work for SOAR untiring, supportive and an inspiration in pursuing the mission and purpose of SOAR. Jim was always there when needed. Jim provided the information and resources needed to pursue the mission of SOAR. He coordinated and organized so many of our meetings in an informative and productive manner.

Jim and Charlie are examples and inspirations for all of us to pursue the purpose, mission and necessity of SOAR. I thank them both for all that they have done and wish them, Carol and Elaine the best.

Bill Gibbons, PACE Representative

To the Editor of the USW@WORK for the Speaking Out section:

Although not considered my “boss”, in the usual sense, I’ve never-the-less always tried to consider SOAR Director, Jim Centner, as my boss.

Since Jim became our SOAR Director and while I’ve been the Secretary Treasurer, I must say that he has been the best boss I’ve ever had.

Now, I’ve had a lot of asshole bosses during my working years in the U.S. Navy and then working for the Northern Indiana Public Service Company, so I think I’m qualified to know an asshole boss when I see one.

Jim has always shown himself to be fair, reliable, understanding, trustworthy, reasonable and generous. He has made my work with SOAR extremely satisfying and it’s been a real joy to work with and for him - and for this, I will be forever grateful.

The friendship of Jim and his wife, Carol, has been a real plus for my wife, Elaine, and I and I hope they’re able to enjoy his announced retirement as much as we have enjoyed ours.

Charlie Averill, Emeritus member

Note: Although I submitted this to the USW@WORK editor, they said the magazine already went to the printer, so to be sure it doesn’t get lost in the shuffle, here it is.
President Trump’s fiscal 2018 budget is a non-starter. He has betrayed America’s seniors. In fact, $2 trillion in deficit reduction turns out to be just a math error.

The budget cuts $72 billion over ten years from disability programs, including Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Trump promised repeatedly to protect – not cut – Social Security. Yet his first budget does just that, harming millions of disabled Americans.

The Trump budget also slashes $1.4 trillion from Medicaid over 10 years. According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), total Medicaid spending was $368 billion in 2016. Almost two-thirds of that was for seniors and people with disabilities, who rely on Medicaid for health care and long-term care. This cut is drastic and dangerous by any measurement.

This budget also decimates the Community Development Block Grant, which provides funding through states and communities for Meals on Wheels.

Trump’s proposal would cut the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by more than 25%, taking away benefits from those who need basic nutrition.

This budget provides massive tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans and corporations on the backs of retirees, children, people with disabilities and current and future federal workers, whose earned pension benefits are cut. The Trump budget is a reckless mixture of twisted values and brazen dishonesty.

With 10,000 Americans turning 65 every day, this is not the policy we need. Alliance for Retired Americans members are mobilized to ensure it never advances.

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.

Suppose they’re working you so hard it’s just outrageous,  
They’re paying you all starvation wages;  
You go to the boss, and the boss would yell,  
"Before I’d raise your pay I’d see you all in Hell."  
Well, he’s puffing a big see-gar and feeling mighty slick,  
He thinks he’s got your union licked.  
He looks out the window, and what does he see  
But a thousand pickets, and they all agree  
He’s a bastard - unfair - slave driver -  
Bet he beats his own wife.

—Pete Seeger, folksinger, songwriter, activist, pacifist, and humanist, from "Talking Union" (1941)
Programs for vulnerable Americans on chopping block
May 24, 2017 by Diane Archer

President Trump has released his budget, and it puts programs for vulnerable Americans on the chopping block. Along with food stamps, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and CHIP (the Children’s Health Insurance Plan), Trump proposes to slash Social Security, expressly violating his campaign pledge not to touch Social Security. All told, Trump’s budget slashes $1.7 trillion from these programs over 10 years.

Trump’s plan would cut as much as $62 billion from Social Security Disability Insurance and $9 billion from SSI. It also ends the Community Services Block Grant, which supports the Meals on Wheels programs that provide hot meals to older adults in their homes; it cuts $193 billion in food stamps. And, it ends the low-income Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), which helps older adults pay for the cost of their heat. Under the plan, Medicaid cuts would total $610 billion, putting at risk long-term care for vulnerable older adults.

Trump’s budget plan is in line with those of the Republican-controlled House, which is also looking to pay for massive tax cuts by stripping funding from programs for vulnerable Americans, according to Politico. People in need of help paying for food, housing, education assistance are all at risk. Republicans are even considering cuts to veterans’ benefits. The American Health Care Act (AHCA), if passed, would cut $880 billion from Medicaid.

Bottom line, to balance the budget in ten years, President Trump and Republican leaders are willing to slash hundreds of millions of dollars currently supporting programs that protect low-income and working families. At the same time, their goal is to come up with the money needed to enhance funding for the military and cut corporate taxes. Balancing the budget will require about $8 trillion.

Which specific programs serving vulnerable Americans get cut likely won’t be determined until the fall.

Politico further reports that the Republicans in charge of the 2018 fiscal budget are likely also to propose privatizing Medicare, essentially adopting Speaker Ryan’s plan, though that would be symbolic this year.

Republicans hope to get their plan through Congress without a filibuster, using the budget reconciliation process, which only requires a majority vote to pass. But, it’s not clear whether they will be able to get support for slashing low-income programs from moderate Republicans.

Source: just+care web site