From the Director’s Desk

Time to Hang it up!

I have reached the conclusion that’s it time for me to retire. This year I celebrate my 40-year anniversary as a dues paying member of the United Steelworkers. From my 11 years toiling in the mill though my 29 years working for our union, it’s been a truly rewarding experience. Over the years, I have served as a Health and Safety Grant employee, a Health and Safety Technician, Assistant Director of our union’s Membership Development Department and for the last 16 years as your SOAR Director.

To say it’s been an interesting journey would be a huge understatement. But, the best part of the job has always been our members. I have had the opportunity to work with and meet some of the most amazing people. Their dedication and commitment to our union; and to social justice reinforced my beliefs. It energized me to do the very best work I could do, not only for our members and retirees, but for all working families.

As it’s been said, all good things must come to an end. I thank the leadership of our great union for letting me have the opportunity to serve. I thank the SOAR Executive Board for all their hard work and support. All that we’ve accomplished over the last 16 years, we did as a team. I thank our members for their activism and most importantly, I thank my wife Carol for being there and supporting me over the years. I know it hasn’t been easy!

Jim Centner, SOAR Director

USW Constitution Article 19
Steelworkers Organization of
Active Retirees (SOAR)

Section 1. The Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), an affiliate organization of the United Steelworkers, is governed by By-laws which are subject to amendment by the International Executive Board of the United Steelworkers.

Section 2. All members in good standing of the International Union who retire shall, at the time of retirement, be granted membership in SOAR. All members of SOAR shall be eligible for SOAR chapter membership under conditions and with such rights as are set forth in the SOAR By-laws.
It’s Time For Activism

Winter has come to an end and many of our members will be returning home up North and with the SOAR Conference being held on April 7-8 it is a good time to start thinking about activities and ways in which we can mobilize our members and participate in some actions in both the US and Canada. Invite elected representatives to come and speak at your meetings and be prepared to ask questions not just sit and listen. If they won’t come to us, go to their office and invite the press, they love to take pictures of us in action.

Download petitions regarding our pensions, healthcare, Social Security or Medicare, go to meetings of organizations that share our beliefs and ask for support. Present petitions at local municipal meetings or Labor gatherings and ask that motions be made to support these petitions.

If you need help in developing or finding petitions that have already been written, contact your SOAR Board member for assistance or call me if you want.

Recently, Congress in the United States came home during their recess and held town hall meetings. The attendance and enthusiasm shown at these meetings indicates we are on the right side of the issues. It is very clear to me that if we as seniors do not stand up and speak out on the issues that impact our lives, no one will. We can and should join with organizations that share our beliefs to increase our numbers and our voice.

We can stand on the dock and watch the ship sail or we can choose to become involved and be part of the decision making as to the direction the ship takes. We as an organization must lead and you as leaders of SOAR are the people who are most qualified to do it.

Bill Pienta, SOAR President

USW Constitution Article 19 Section 3.

Section 3. Local Unions and SOAR Chapters

(a) Each Local Union having more than twenty-five (25) retired members is encouraged to form and sponsor a SOAR Chapter. Local unions may, where appropriate, form one SOAR Chapter for the retirees of several Local Unions within a geographical area or region.

(b) Each Local Union is encouraged to select a representative to serve in an advisory capacity to the SOAR Chapter and each SOAR Chapter is encouraged to select a designee to serve in an advisory capacity to the Local Union.

(c) In each set of collective bargaining negotiations conducted by the Union, the bargaining committee shall be expected to meet with the appropriate SOAR representative to become acquainted with the needs of the retirees, to attempt to arrange for a SOAR representative to be present during negotiations for the purpose of making a presentation on those matters of concern to the retirees and to keep the SOAR representative advised of the progress of negotiations on those matters.
Report from the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)

President Donald Trump has consistently told Americans that his administration will follow two simple rules concerning manufacturing: Buy American and Hire American.

But when it comes to purchasing steel, American companies want to make sure the president understands what is considered Made in America.

The Buy America program states “the longstanding requirement that all steel manufacturing processes occur in the United States for a product to be Buy America compliant.” This ranges from the actual production of steel to steel finishing processes know as “melted and poured.”

Buy America opponents are trying to weaken Buy America provisions by allowing imported steel to be finished in the United States and then used in taxpayer-funded infrastructure projects. This is of no benefit to the American steel industry, United Steelworker employees and the American economy. Weakening Buy America standards could even put American steel companies out of business.

One example is Russian steelmaker NLMK, which makes its steel in Russia before shipping it to a plant it owns in America where it is modified. Loosening the Buy America “melted and poured” standard would allow NLMK to abuse the Buy America rules and further hurt American steelmakers.

AAM President Scott Paul put it plainly into perspective.

“Saying their Russian steel is American-made is like importing a foreign car, putting windshield wipers on it here, and then telling everyone that it’s American-made. It’s ludicrous.”

Ten organizations, including AAM and the USW, co-signed a letter to President Trump making him aware that strong Buy America laws maximize the return on the nation’s investment in our infrastructure.

The letter emphasizes the most important point concerning the American steel industry.

“Put simply, steel is ‘made’ here only if it is ‘melted’ here.”

All SOAR and USW members need to contact their representatives in Congress and let them know we need to strengthen Buy America provisions, not weaken them. Call or email their district offices or reach their offices in Washington, D.C. by calling the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121. Ask for your U.S. House Rep. or Senator by name and you will be connected to their office.

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

You Can Use Twitter Without An Account

A lot of web sites require an account but with Twitter, this isn’t the case. Twitter has a lot of good information on it but you don’t need to log on or even have an account to use it. All you have to do is go to www.twitter.com and disregard “log on” or “sign in” but simply start using it.

So, why would you even want to Twitter? Well, once you’re on the Twitter page, just locate the search bar in the upper right hand corner and type in the name of your congressman or search a particular subject or search for Steelworkers, or whatever else suits your fancy. So you see, you don’t have to remember a user name or password to use Twitter, we all can use Twitter.

Charlie Averill, SOAR Sec/Treas
The McNeil Report

- In the proposed Trumpcare plan, the only listed Preventive Care feature of coverage was “an apple a day” and the only expense covered 100 percent was embalming.

- Looking 60 is great if you’re 70.

- True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country.

- Seniors are worth a fortune; they have silver in their hair, gold in their teeth, stones in their kidneys and gallbladder, lead in their feet, and gas in their stomach.

- You're getting old when you get the same sensation from a rocking chair that you once got from a roller coaster.

- "I was thinking about how people seem to read the Bible a whole lot more as they get older. Then it dawned on me . . . they're cramming for their final exam."

- District and Chapter articles and photos should be emailed to the SOAR Director, Jim Centner, at the address at the left.

- The SOAR International Conference is scheduled for April 7-8, 2017, at the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. Congratulations to the delegates who will be attending this important conference. Prepare yourselves to do the work necessary to keep our SOAR organization strong.

Elaine Sez...

Spring is here. Most people look forward to March because they know warm temps are just around the corner.

I look forward to March for basketball! Yes, I am a bb junkie. I love college basketball! When the NCAA tournament is on, Charlie can find me in my sanctuary and I will be at my sewing machine working on my annual March Madness quilt.

Charlie is not allowed in that room during games. Heaven! I hope I am not alone in my madness!

Old Charlie Sez...

Basketball.....phooey! Married 52 years; take away 52 March Madiences means Elaine and I have only been married 47 years. Oh, woe is me.
The Health Care Debate Will Go On

The Republican attempts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA), commonly called (Obamacare) although it failed, illustrates the confusion, misinformation and in many cases the total lack of understanding regarding health care. The Republican’s plan would have adversely affected seniors, workers, the poor and the middle class and rewarded the wealthy and insurance companies with tax breaks.

The facts are clear that over 20 million people gained health care coverage under the ACA and many improvements have been made. Insurance premiums were rising at a high amount before the ACA. However, there are problems with the ACA that require fixing. The Republicans have no interest in fixing any problems with the ACA. Insurance is not health care; access does not mean actually having affordable, quality health care.

A “Single Payer”- Medicare for all type of health care coverage, would address an effective replacement and repair of our system and would save money. In the United States, we pay two to three times more per person for health care than other advanced countries with national health care and still have millions not covered and outcomes that rank us low in health care, and declining life expectancy. Medicare, which is a Single Payer type of system, is proven successful with an administration cost of approximately one percent compared to insurance companies at approximately 30 percent, much of which goes to pay CEO’s.

Think about it. We decided years ago that a public education system is necessary for our children and the country as a right. Shouldn’t affordable, quality health care be provided for all as a right?

P.S. Concerns about insurance providers in the ACA could be quickly resolved by adding a “Public Option.”

Bill Gibbons, PACE Representative

The Cold Within
By James Patrick Kinney

Six humans trapped by happenstance
In bleak and bitter cold.
Each one possessed a stick of wood
Or so the story’s told.

Their dying fire in need of logs
The first man held his back
For of the faces round the fire
He noticed one was black.

The next man looking ‘cross the way
Saw one not of his church
And couldn’t bring himself to give
The fire his stick of birch.

The third one sat in tattered clothes.
He gave his coat a hitch.
Why should his log be put to use
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought
Of the wealth he had in store
And how to keep what he had earned
From the lazy shiftless poor.

The black man’s face bespoke revenge
As the fire passed from his sight.
For all he saw in his stick of wood
Was a chance to spite the white.

The last man of this forlorn group
Did nought except for gain.
Giving only to those who gave
Was how he played the game.

Their logs held tight in death’s still hands
Was proof of human sin.
They didn’t die from the cold without
They died from the cold within.

The poem is in public domain, which has been confirmed by Timothy Kinney.

“Learn poetry by heart. If you know a poem by heart, no one can take it away from you, and you can take advantage of it anytime.”
--Raymond Aubrac
New Cost of Living Formula Could Put Real Money in Seniors' Pockets

There is a new push on Capitol Hill to link Cost of Living adjustments (COLAs) for federal retirement programs to a much more powerful indicator of the prices seniors really pay for crucial goods and services. It’s called the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E), an experimental metric by the Bureau of Labor Statistics that more accurately reflects senior’s costs than the traditional Consumer Price Index (CPI), or even the Consumer Price Index for Wage Earners (CPI-W), which the government currently uses to calculate COLAs for Social Security. Switching over to the CPI-E could mean a substantial increase in benefits for retirees.

Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA) is reviving a 2015 House bill to mandate that the CPI-E be used to calculate cost of living adjustments for federal retirement programs. The National Committee has endorsed Garamendi's legislation.

"The consumption patterns of seniors are different from those of younger people. Using the CPI-E will ensure that benefits for retirees are not diluted by disproportionately rising costs in sectors affecting seniors. The CPI-E is the most accurate and balanced measure of the real costs that seniors face in retirement." – Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA)

Like the standard CPI, the new index calculates the prices of a typical basket of goods and serves that are affected by inflation. The difference is that the CPI-E looks at a basket that reflects the kinds of items seniors spend money on. For instance, housing and medical costs make up a much bigger chunk of seniors’ expenses (58%) in the CPI-E than in the traditional CPI. On the other hand, food and transportation costs are de-emphasized in the CPI-E, since seniors typically spend less of their money on those items than the general population does.

If Congressman Garamendi’s bill were to become law, the CPI-E could mean serious new money in retirees’ pockets. Research compiled from Bureau of Labor Statistics data (based on the current CPI-E model) reveals:

- If the CPI-E had been in effect for the past 30 years, retirees would have received 22% more in cost-of-living increases.
- If you as an average worker retired in 2015 with the current CPI-E in place, you would receive nearly $30,000 in additional benefits for the rest of your lifetime.

With 1 out of 3 seniors relying on Social Security for all or most of their income, those increases could make a huge difference. At a time when Congressional Republicans (most notably Rep. Sam Johnson of Texas) are planning to cut COLAs, the Garamendi bill plants a flag on a crucial issue that could mean the difference between financial stability and poverty for millions of seniors.

"If we don't fight hard enough for the things we stand for, at some point we have to recognize that we don't really stand for them."
-Paul Wellstone
Ryan's Revised Healthcare Bill Even Worse Than the Original

Let us not speak of pigs and lipstick, but simply say that the freshly tweaked GOP health care bill introduced a few days ago still socks it to older Americans. In an attempt to throw bones to both moderate Republicans and Tea Partiers, Speaker Paul Ryan came up with a revised bill that was even worse than the original for seniors and “near seniors” (under 64 years of age).

MEDICAID

Millions of seniors depend on Medicaid to cover the cost of long-term care, while low income Americans 50-64 rely on the program for basic health care. The original GOP bill cut nearly $1 trillion from Medicaid and imposed per capita caps on federal payments to the states. The revised legislation added another insidious idea to the equation by introducing block grants, where states can decide to curtail or outright cut certain services. Per capita caps and block grants mean one thing: less funding for older patients who need medical services and long-term care - and in some cases, complete loss of coverage. For seniors, It was two bad ideas in one bill.

AGE RATING

The revised GOP bill did nothing to address a major problem with the original. Under the revised legislation, Insurance companies would still be able to charge older Americans up to five times as much as people in their 20s (a practice referred to as “age rating”), one reason why the Congressional Budget Office estimated that 24 million people would lose coverage under the Republican plan.

PREMIUM SUPPORT

Obamacare provides generous subsidies to people who can’t afford private insurance premiums. The GOP bill replaced those subsidies with paltry tax credits that discriminate against older patients. Paul Ryan’s tweaked version kicked the problem over to the Senate by authorizing the upper chamber to increase tax credits for older Americans… if it wants to. There’s no guarantee the Senate would actually do this, or that fatter tax credits would make it into the final bill. Once again, the revised GOP plan left older folks worse off.

TAX CUTS

While giving nothing to seniors, the revised bill still repealed $600 billion in tax cuts for the wealthy (and $24 billion for pharmaceutical companies) that Obamacare utilized to expand health coverage and strengthen Medicare. The tweaked bill actually sweetened the deal for the wealthy – repealing the taxes in 2017 instead of 2018.

MEDICARE

The GOP plan still weakened Medicare through the repeal of a 0.9% tax on income over $200,000. By rescinding the tax, the GOP plan reduced the solvency of Medicare by 3 years – and the revised bill did nothing to lengthen it. Reducing Medicare’s solvency would give budget hawks an excuse to privatize and cut the program, which hurts seniors.

Fortunately, with our members making phone calls, writing letters and raising hell, the Republicans weren’t able to get enough votes to bring it to the floor. Speaker Ryan squandered an opportunity to reverse some of the damage to healthcare and long-term care for our older and most vulnerable citizens.

Source: NCPSSM with edits by Charlie Averill
Affordable Health Care Lifts All of America

by Robert Roach, Jr.

The labor movement has long fought to provide workers a secure retirement after a lifetime of hard work. Affordable, quality health care is a key part of that plan. The Republican “Repeal and Replace” plan is not – it is nothing more than code for taking away from the hardworking men and women of our country and giving more to the rich.

The American Health Care Act (AHCA), put forward by House Speaker Paul Ryan and endorsed by President Trump, was an unprecedented threat to the promise of a secure retirement. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that 24 million people would lose health coverage if the legislation were fully implemented. In the face of overwhelming opposition from all sides, President Trump and Speaker Paul Ryan withdrew the bill because it did not have enough votes to pass the House of Representatives.

However, we must remain vigilant. Future attempts to weaken our health care system are likely to include elements of the legislation that failed. The AHCA hit older people especially hard, showing that the Administration and Speaker Ryan are unconcerned with their needs. It enabled insurance companies to charge older Americans five times what they charge young adults for the same coverage. The $880 billion in Medicaid cuts would have been devastating to many seniors.

In the biggest slight to working Americans, millionaires, who have no concept of struggling with rising premiums and costs, were given tens of thousands of dollars in tax breaks in a windfall they don’t even need.

The CBO report found that doing all of that would reduce the lifespan of the Medicare Trust Fund by at least three years, from 2028 to 2025. That is scary news for all retirees - and anyone who hopes to retire one day. We won the first round, but this battle isn’t over yet.

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.

Getting Information To Your Chapters

I can think of nothing more valuable for a SOAR District Executive Board Member to do to organize the activities of the chapters in a district than to produce and distribute a paper newsletter to the various chapters in the district.

In a perfect world, all of our retirees would have an email account but that’s just not the way it is.

What I mean by a newsletter can be a single sided one sheet of paper either typed or written with a pen or even a pencil or double sided if more information is required, an envelope and a postage stamp. No big whoop.

I know darned well that not every chapter president has a computer, has an email address or even checks their email often enough to receive a newsletter in time to share with those at their monthly meeting.

I realize that this can be a little extra effort, but it’s so important for chapter presidents to be kept as informed as possible and as often as possible so that we can all work together from the same page. There’s power in unity.

Charlie Averill, SOAR Secretary Treasurer