

USW@Work

A Regular Publication of the United Steelworkers

Volume 14/4

A Powerful Voice for Workers



A NEW ERA of Legislative Activism

The United Steelworkers launched a new era of legislative activism during its annual Conference which was held late October. The three-day event featured several panel discussions, workshops on important Steelworker issues, a rally at the U. S. Department of Labor and the Union's annual descent on Capitol Hill during the USW Lobby Day. And, SOAR was there every step of the way to lend its voice and experience to a very successful Conference.

The gathering kicked off with a general session hearing from newly-retired USW Officer, and now SOAR member, Stan Johnson, talk about the importance of the Rapid Response program, which he oversaw for ten years, while serving as the International Secretary-Treasurer. Johnson

reviewed a list of legislation that the Steelworkers played a major role in passing, as well as several the union helped to defeat. He concluded his remarks by wishing delegates the best and urged them to go back to their locals with a "new energy to help develop the activism we need to meet the challenges of the New Year, which includes electing candidates who will support our working-class agenda."

Following Johnson's remarks, delegates were introduced to the future of the Union, as newly appointed Rapid Response Director Amber Miller took to the stage. Amber takes over for Kim Miller, who was recently called upon to serve as Assistant to the President. During her tenure as Rapid Response Director, Kim brought a wealth of technical advances to the Steelworker



Last fall, 46 SOAR members, representing every USW district, including Canada, joined more than 800 USW activists in Washington, D.C., for our union's annual Rapid Response, Legislative & Policy Conference.

activists' network. She received a standing ovation from delegates wishing her well in her new position.

Next, delegates heard from their new USW Executive Board members, which included International President, Tom Conway; International Secretary-Treasurer, John Shinn; Vice President At-Large, Roxanne Browne; and District 1 Director, Donnie Blatt, who was critical in piloting the program in 1995 in his home local, USW 5724. The delegation was also introduced to USW's newly appointed Legislative Director, Roy Houseman and Anna Fendley, the newly-appointed Director of Regulatory and State Policy. SOAR's International President William Pienta said of the conference, "This was one of the most exciting Steelworker events I have

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Defending Social Security—the Fight Continues



BILL PIENTA
SOAR President

Social Security is an essential program that provides a lifeline for some of the most vulnerable communities and people.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, approximately six million people receive Social Security benefits as survivors of deceased workers, including 3.7 million aged widows and widowers and 1.9 million children. Additionally, 8.8 million people receive benefits as disabled workers, and 1.8 million children and spouses of disabled workers.

Southern states tend to have a higher portion of residents collecting disability benefits. Four states, all of which are in the south, have greater than eight percent of 18-64 year-olds receiving disability benefits. On the other hand, western states tend to have lower disability rates.

One statistic that I find particularly interesting is that 9 of the 10 states with the highest percentage of residents receiving monthly SSDI payments are states that have enacted so-called Right-to-Work laws.

These states include:

1. West Virginia – 8.9%
2. Alabama – 8.5%
3. Arkansas – 8.4%
4. Kentucky – 8.2%
5. Mississippi – 7.9%
6. Maine – 7.7%
7. Tennessee – 6.7%
8. Missouri – 6.4%
9. South Carolina – 6.4%
10. Michigan – 6.3%

We know that the Social Security Trust Fund is supported through payroll taxes. Therefore, one could assume that low unemployment would mean a stronger future for these important programs. However, because of wage stagnation over the last three decades, the opposite is true.

In 2017, the Center for American Progress outlined a collision of factors that are taking a significant toll on

Social Security, particularly wage inequality and loopholes for high wage earners.

Specifically, they outlined the following:

- ▶ A failure by states to significantly increase their minimum wage results in only modest increases to the Social Security payroll tax revenues, even in times of low unemployment;
- ▶ Economic instability (like that which is experienced at a greater degree in so-called Right-to-Work states) makes it increasingly more difficult for people to save for retirement, which means the modest benefits Social Security recipients receive are even more critical; and
- ▶ The wealthiest Americans who could afford to pay more into the vitality of the Social Security Trust Fund are able to evade doing so because the payroll tax cap is set at just the first \$127,000 of income.

I believe that strengthening unions is the best way to address these issues. According to research by the Economic Policy Institute, workers in so-called Right-to-Work states make approximately \$1,500 less annually than those who live in states with high union density. Increased wages result in increased payroll contributions to the Social Security Trust Fund.

Further, unions afford workers the ability to negotiate for pensions that offer greater retirement security, as well as the opportunity to fight collectively for increased contributions to Social Security by wealthy Americans.

Unions are crucial for the quality of life of working and retired families and SOAR can play a key role in ensuring a strong labor movement for years to come. SOAR needs to work with local unions and organizations that support politicians who share our values and are committed to the fight to expand unions and defend Social Security.

Sources:

- <https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/policy-basics-top-ten-facts-about-social-security>
- <https://www.epi.org/publication/right-to-work-states-have-lower-wages/>



SOAR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SCHEDULED

The SOAR International Conference is scheduled for July 31-August 1, 2020 at the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, NV. Chapters large enough to send delegates were notified by mail.

For those chapters planning on submitting resolutions to the conference, all resolutions must be received in the SOAR office in Pittsburgh, no later than July 1, 2020.

Two SOAR Members Walk into a Barber Shop...



JULIE STEIN
SOAR Director

The first asks for the standard scissor cut he always gets and the second asks for his beard to be trimmed.

“Sorry. We only do buzz cuts now. Oh, and no more beards, only mustaches,” replies the barber.

“Any change in price?” they reply. “Nope,” says the barber. Unfortunately, this barber shop is the only one in town, and the next closest one is about an hour’s drive.

This barber’s approach is starkly similar to what’s being proposed with regard to Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) by the Trump administration and the billionaire Senator Mitt Romney of Utah. Each has recently proposed changes to SSDI they claim are insignificant; but, if implemented, millions of Americans will be worse off.

In October 2019, Senator Romney introduced the deceptively-named Trust Act (S.2733), which would create two “Rescue Committees,” one in the House of Representatives and one in the U.S. Senate. According to Social Security Works executive director, Alex Lawson, these committees would be entrusted a “fast-track, closed-door process for cutting Social Security and Medicare.” Any bill passed within these committees is not subject to being postponed or amended in any way by the House or Senate (S.2733, pg. 23, section d). Therefore, the only way to defeat any bill passed by a Rescue Committee would be a majority vote within a given chamber.

Retiree and disability advocates are also concerned about a January 2020 proposal by the Trump administration to implement a more rigorous and discriminating application process for Social Security Disability benefits which could result in “the loss of benefits for many thousands of disabled citizens of all ages.” Additionally, the Federal Register estimates these changes would cost \$1.8 billion in administrative costs to implement, which is almost equivalent to the projected “savings” (aka reductions in benefits to Americans) of \$2.6 billion cuts in benefits over ten years.

President Trump campaigned on the promise to not cut Social Security, but it’s obvious his administration is open to proposals that essentially weaken the program. In fact, when recently asked by NBC whether cuts to Social Security would ever be “on the plate,” Trump responded, “(a)t the right time, we will take a look at that.” Romney, on the other hand, has never been discreet about his support for proposals like raising the age of retirement, means-testing, and decreasing recipients’ monthly benefit.

We won’t fall for their “good cop, bad cop” routine. Like that barber shop, SSDI is the only shop in town when it comes to financial security for many retirees and people with disabilities.

Lawson also reminded us that grassroots activism has been our best answer to defeating or beating back toxic proposals like Bowles-Simpson, means-testing, and the like. SOAR, USW Rapid Response, and our entire union couldn’t agree more. We are prepared to fight.

Sources:

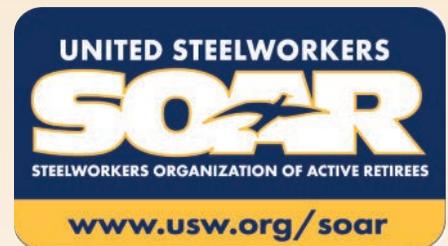
- <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/478929-the-trust-act-is-a-plot-to-gut-social-security-behind-closed>
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- <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/01/22/trump-opens-door-cuts-medicare-other-programs-davos/4544840002/>
- <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/transcript-of-romney-on-60-minutes>

Join with us, as we continue the fight to protect and enhance the quality of life of our retirees and working families.

We are stronger together!



facebook.com/groups/uswsoar



SOAR in ACTION
USW@Work

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SOAR in ACTION



SOAR Vice President and Canadian National Coordinator, Doug MacPherson, speaks with a Next Gen delegate about SOAR at the first-ever USW Next Gen Conference, held November 2019, in Pittsburgh.



Chicago, IL — District 7 SOAR Chapter 31-9 took a break in their regular meeting, on February 3, to call Congress and urge our Senators and Representatives to vote and campaign for the Protecting the Right to Organize Act (PRO ACT). One staffer replied, "Wow you folks are really making the calls. We do support it, but all this helps us make the case to others!"



Davenport, IA — SOAR Chapter 11-4 members join their home local, USW Local 105, on an informational picket during their contract talks at the Arconic plant, located in Davenport.



District 12 — Congratulations Steelworkers! In January, our brothers and sisters of Local 5114 ratified an agreement with Hecla Mining to resolve nearly a three-year strike at the Lucky Friday mine in northern Idaho's Silver Valley.



District 12 SOAR members are proud to have supported the strikers every step of the way. SOAR members joined USW locals in Idaho, Washington, and Colorado at rallies and on the picket lines. SOAR members, along with the labor movement, recognize that an injury to one, is an injury to all.



Martins Ferry, OH — SOAR Chapter 23-9 members show their support for the "Protecting Our Pensions" campaign, in support of the Butch Lewis Act (S.2254) during their December holiday meeting. The chapter, which was chartered in 1997, is home to the retirees of the former Wheeling-Pitt Corporation. When the company sold, and other buyers closed the steel mills, the chapter merged with USW LU 1223 of Yorkville, OH, and the amalgamated LU 1238-01, in Beech Bottom, WV, into one chapter. The chapter's meeting place is their former USW Local 1238 hall, which now serves as a USW District 1 staff office.



Granite City, IL — Mother Jones greeted the veterans on Veteran's Day at the SOAR Chapter 34-2 monthly meeting by reminding members, "The first veteran I met was during the Civil War." Loretta Williams, a Mother Jones reenactor entertained those who braved the first winter storm of 2019 with her wonderful impersonation of Jones, the fiery orator and organizer for the Mine Workers during the first two decades of the 20th century. Williams provided an Oscar-worthy performance re-enacting the fearless fighter for workers' rights, as "The Most Dangerous Woman in America."



Bettendorf, IA — SOAR Chapter 11-4 Recording Secretary Janice Payne (left) helping member



Lorretta Evans (right) update her voter registration and educating her about the Iowa caucuses, at their annual Chili Supper, in December. Janice never misses an opportunity to set up a table at the chapter events to make sure seniors keep their voter registrations current and to talk to them about the importance of voting.



Collinsville, IL — SOAR members of Chapter 7-34-2, took action on November 11, 2019, to deliver hot cheeseburgers and French fries to the 50 mechanics and service advisors of IAM Local 313, who went on strike in early November against the largest GMC dealership in the country, Laura Buick-GMC in Collinsville, Illinois, in response to the company's inadequate final contract offer which included eliminating their pension plan. On a cold snowy day the strikers were very appreciative of the hot meal and support.



Albany, OR — The members of Albany SOAR Chapter 12-7 recently celebrated their 9th anniversary by enjoying a piece of cake to honor their chapter's charter date of January 5, 2011. The members, who are retirees of USW Local 6163 and USW Local 7150, meet monthly at the Local 6163 Union Hall.



At the February meeting, members of SOAR Chapter 11-4 distributed proceeds raised at their Chili Supper, held in December. The proceeds, \$385, were split to two worthy charitable organizations—half to the local area Veterans to provide homeless or at-risk Veterans and their families access to services; and the other half to Family Resources, a social service advocacy, family restoration and education program, which helps children and families in need, due to domestic and sexual abuse, in the Quad-Cities area.

District 7 Welcomes New SOAR Chapter

SOAR members in Bridgeview, Illinois, were honored to have their SOAR Chapter 7-8 officially chartered by the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees. The new chapter will be home to the retirees of USW Local 7773 (Castle Metals).

On January 26, 2020, SOAR Board Member Emeritus, William Gibbons presented the charter to the officers and members of the chapter; Susan Shubert is serving as the chapter's first president.



Individuals receiving the charter pictured above, from left to right, are: Frank Shubert, USW Staff Rep; Joyce Gonzalez, Chapter Recording Secretary and Treasurer; Sue Romano, Vice President; Susan Shubert, President; Craig Langele, Trustee; William Gibbons, presenting the charter; Anthony Alfano, USW Sub 1-District Director. (Not pictured are chapter Trustees Ian Elfenbaum and Jose Guidino.)

Chapter 7-8 was established when Castle Metals announced the shutdown of its flagship facility in Franklin Park, Ill. Members of the former Local 7773 wanted to form a SOAR chapter to maintain relationships and the benefits of collective action. The chapter intends to grow their membership by welcoming active USW members, retirees (and their spouses), as well as any like-minded individuals age 45 or over, who agree with and support the guiding principles and programs of the organization, to join their chapter.



Brian Arnold

Gilles Bordeleau

Eleanor Gattafoni-Robinson



The Jefferson Awards MULTIPLYING GOOD

Since 2015, the USW has partnered with the Jefferson Awards Foundation, recently renamed Multiplying Good, to celebrate Steelworkers who do amazing works of community service.

Three of the 2019 Canadian recipients are members of SOAR and they were honored, in December, at a ceremony held in Pittsburgh.



**JEFFERSON
AWARDS
FOUNDATION**

Brian Arnold — District 3 ~ Local 7619 (retired)

During nearly 30 years working in a mine and continuing in retirement, Brian is devoted to the service and care of those around him. He visits hospitals to check on friends and co-workers, volunteers as a pastor to those in need and participates in community fundraisers, in Kamloops, British Columbia.

Gilles Bordeleau — District 5 ~ Local 6887 (retired)

Gilles is active on his local's retirement committee, helping workers and families understand pensions and other benefits. He helped start a children's breakfast program, organizes Christmas baskets for the disadvantaged and created a soccer league for people with trisomy, a genetic disorder, in Montreal, Quebec.

Eleanor Gattafoni-Robinson — SOAR ~ Local 9705 (retired)

Eleanor organizes the annual Terry Fox Run, fundraises for Relay for Life, is involved with her church's philanthropy, cooks and serves food for junior hockey teams and fans at Cominco Arena, volunteers at Trail Association for Community Living and is serving her fourth term as a city councillor, in Trail, British Columbia.

SOAR Members Across Ontario Have A Fighting Year Ahead

By Lena Sutton
SOAR Executive Board Member, District 6

Since the election of the Doug Ford Conservative government a year-and-a-half ago in Ontario, our members have been busy attending rallies, demonstrations and picket lines.

But this is only the beginning. Until the next provincial election in 2022, our members will be fighting this right-wing government for everything we believe in as retirees and trade unionists. There will be more rallies, more demonstrations and more action.

We have a public medicare system that ensures that every person living in Ontario is fully covered and no one falls through the cracks. Everyone can visit a doctor, the emergency room at a hospital, have necessary surgery and medical tests and not have to pay out-

of-pocket. This is something that we have grown to expect, but if we don't act, we may well lose it to for-profit private corporations, as in the U.S.

The Ford government is in the process of cutting funding to all of our public services: starving hospital budgets, cutting funding for long-term care and home care, mental health, autism services and funding and canceling overdose prevention sites.

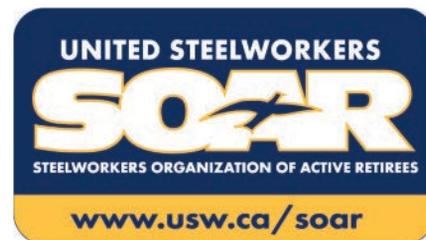
In addition to health care cuts, the Ford government is making significant cuts to public education: increased class sizes, forcing mandatory e-learning, eliminating teachers and legislating wage caps.

Ford's goal is to cut taxes for the rich and corporations and to sell public assets — including corporations outside of Canada.

As we wait to see what harm is next, we know it's going to be an active few years for our SOAR members and for all workers in Ontario.

Fortunately, we have a strong partner in the Official Opposition in Ontario: the New Democratic Party.

Through the hard work of SOAR retirees, along with NDP, labour and civil society activists, we will stand up to Doug Ford just as progressives will stand up to conservatives throughout Canada and the U.S.



DURING a TIME of HARDSHIP ~ *Steelworkers Unite*

While he was never a member of the United Steelworkers Union, John Parsons recently donated \$100 to the Steelworkers' Charitable and Educational Organization. What brought him to this decision is a story every worker needs to hear, and not just for those of us who carry a union card.

John Parsons was born in 1952. His parents, Norman and Bernadette Parsons, were native New Englanders. In early 1953, when John was about six-months-old, work for his father was scarce in Massachusetts, so he took a job as an electrician with U.S. Steel at the Fairless Works, and the family moved to the new town of Fairless Hills, carved out of the Pennsylvania farmland—and built with very much the same style housing as the adjacent Levittown. His sister Barbara was born in March 1954 and their sister Mary Katherine (Mary Kay) was born in April 1956.

Still, John remembers that his parents “didn’t have two nickels to rub together, and family was far away in Massachusetts.” The family’s financial situation became even more tenuous when tragically his infant sister, Mary Kay, choked to death on a rattle when she was just ten-months old. (This was long before product-liability testing and child safety standards became common.)

How the family made it through these struggles was beyond John’s youthful comprehension, especially when you take into account the added stress of providing for a proper burial for his sister. However, all of this became even less apparent to John when his younger brother Jim was born in 1958.

The following year there was a labor strike at Fairless Works, (the great steel strike of 1959.) As the strike dragged on, the need for a stable income became an undeniable reality. John’s father, Norman, took the family to stay with his parents in Hampton, New Hampshire, where his father had started a small one-man electrical business. Norman worked with him and at other local jobs until the strike eventually ended. By then, however, John’s parents had decided to move back to New England permanently, where Norman could help his father grow his electrical business, Parsons Electric Company.

Both of John’s parents had large families, so being back in New Hampshire, where they had support, helped to stabilize their finances. John’s grandfather died in 1966, which led to his father taking over the business. Norman Parsons retired in the early 90s and passed away in 1996 at the age of 68. John recalls that Parsons Electric provided a good life for the family as they were growing up. John’s younger brother Jim eventually took over and successfully ran the business until he sold it in 2019.

John decided to pursue his own interests, which led him to become a school teacher and a proud member of the National Education Association. He enjoyed a dual career in teaching science to middle school students, while also using his carpentry skills to build houses during summer and vacations.



Christmas 1956, at the house in Fairless Hills, Pa. Front-left, John Parsons, age 4; Center, Norman Parsons holding Mary Kay; Right-rear, John’s younger sister, Barbara, who was hiding from the camera. (Anyone who lived in one of those houses at the time will recognize the plywood interior walls.)

Fast forward to today; John is now 67 years old, retired and living in Durham, New Hampshire, in a house that he built, not

far from his siblings Barbara and Jim in Hampton, along with his mother nearby in Rye. With his working years behind him, John has noticed himself taking stock in life, and appreciating the long path that he and his wife, a retired special education administrator, have traveled over the years. They have two grown sons and a granddaughter; everyone is reasonably healthy, so life is pretty good.

In 2010, Jim Parsons contacted the cemetery management in Fairless Hills to determine the location of Mary Kay’s grave and to make the necessary arrangements for transferring her remains to New Hampshire. The two brothers then escorted their sister’s remains back to Hampton, where she was reburied in the family plot alongside her father.

John only recently discovered that his father’s fellow electricians at Fairless Works took up a collection to cover most of the cost of his sister’s funeral back in 1957. Of course, his parents didn’t discuss such topics with their children, so he didn’t learn about this until his sister Barbara recently mentioned that their mother had told her the story.

This prompted Parsons to reach out to the USW, eventually making contact with Julie Stein, director of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees. Stein helped him figure out that his father was likely a member of Local 5030, which was changed to Local 4889, in 1992.

“We will be forever grateful to my father’s co-workers at the Fairless Works for making it possible for my parents, in their time of need, to give Mary Kay a dignified service and burial, and she is now home with the rest of the family. These electricians remain anonymous to me and my siblings. They were far from affluent themselves, but we know they stepped up when a friend needed help.”

John thought it was necessary to somehow express his gratitude for the solidarity, kindness, and generosity demonstrated by these fellow steelworkers, more than half a century ago, which prompted his contribution to the Steelworkers Charitable and Educational Organization. “It’s the only way I can think of now to say thank you,” Parsons said.

During times of hardship, Steelworkers unite. That’s just what we do.



SOAR Continues to Play a Key Role with RAPID RESPONSE

From the very beginning of our union, we have worked as an organization to gain security for our members around a set of understood priorities.

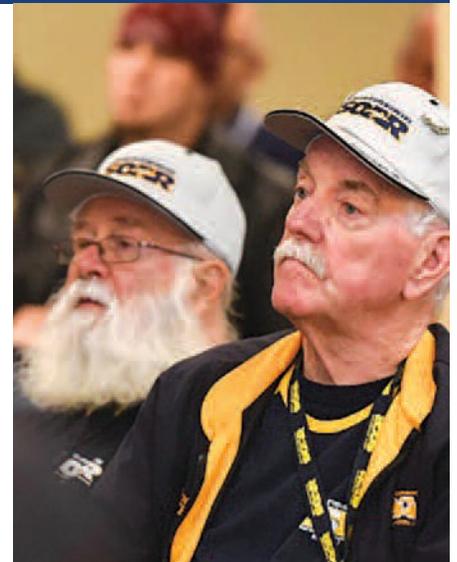
**Collective Bargaining • Safety and Health • Job/Security/Trade
Domestic Economic Issues • Health Care • Retirement Security**

Whether you are a Next Genner finding your path in the labor movement or a seasoned activist like those in SOAR, these issues touch each one of us, 100 percent of the time. It's why we must work together to guarantee they remain front and center. The work that we do in Rapid Response in conjunction with SOAR has been critical in doing just that.

2019 was no exception. Over the summer, the U.S. House delivered a bipartisan vote to pass the Butch Lewis Act (H.R. 397), 264-169. This is a major step forward in our union's multi-year effort to find a solution to the issues facing financially-distressed multiemployer pension plans. Cheers rang out from those watching in the House Gallery as the vote was announced. Impacted members and retirees from a number of unions, including our own, were part of the crowd. This work will continue

on into 2020 as we demand the bill gets a vote in the Senate and we push back on efforts that undermine our retirement security.

In October at the Rapid Response, Legislative, and Policy Conference, SOAR stepped up once again. The executive board met ahead of the conference and held discussions with one another on how to continue to build activism among our retirees, and those same executive board members spent their week helping our delegates push our agenda forward. One of the most refreshing things that could be seen at our conference was the mentoring that took place. You saw it in workshops, between sessions in the hallways, and on the Hill. These conversations were not only critical in our efforts during the week, but they are the driving force in building power not just in the USW, but for our entire labor movement.



We wish to thank our wonderful SOAR activists for all that they do and have done to secure these core issues for not just the generations behind them, but for those ahead. And we can't wait to continue to see the rewards of those efforts as we move into this next year—eyes wide open, engaged, and ready to stand together.

UNITED STEELWORKERS
Rapid Response
EDUCATING • EMPOWERING • ENGAGING

ACTION! CUT! REWRITE!



A trade deal with China that levels the playing field for America’s manufacturing workers has been four years in the preaching and three years in the making since the president captured the hearts — and votes — of our nation’s hard-working men and women in 2016.

By Jeff Bonior

On January 15 of this year, the president signed what is being referred to as a “Phase 1” trade pact with the Chinese government.

The so-called “trade war” planted its roots early in his administration when he was able to levy tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum that had been flooding American markets and causing irreparable damage to the U.S. steel and aluminum industries.

These tariffs, which gave a short-term boost to American industries, caused a quick escalating trade fight between the U.S. and China

Well, now the president is calling his Phase 1 deal the answer to what ails us here in America and says things will further improve when the world’s two largest economies agree on a “Phase 2” deal.

The president said he would sign a deal with China, and he did keep his promise. The problem is that the Phase 1 signing fails to address the billions of dollars China spends on subsidies to its state-owned enterprises (SOE) that would not be able to compete in a global market and would ultimately fail.

There are also several other major issues that ultimately matter to USW brothers and sisters who want job security, a living wage, health care and pension benefits.

The Phase 1 deal does nothing to address China’s overcapacity abuse in steel and aluminum sectors, and its inadequate labor and environmental standards.

Three years of negotiations and the minor result of the trade deal is that China has agreed to buy more American products and the president has agreed to reduce tariffs, which are an invaluable tool in this fight for equality.

And, does anybody believe the Chinese Communist Party leaders will follow through with the specifics entailed in Phase 1 of this trade agreement? China has been very consistent since joining the World Trade Organization in 2001.



Lots of talk and no action.

Alliance for American Manufacturing President Scott Paul said, *“The agreement does not level the playing field for American workers in the U.S. or global market. With nearly all the major structural issues left unresolved— including industrial subsidies, overcapacity, state-owned enterprises, predatory investment, currency manipulations and misalignment, cyber intrusions, worker rights, environmental rules and tax policy— we urge an immediate resumption of negotiations and sustained economic pressure.”*

In the motion picture business, they don’t make sequels (Phase 2) unless the original film is a success.

When it comes to the U.S. - China trade agreement, Phase 1 needs a rewrite before it ends up in the discount bin at the local “Dollar Store.”

We are not asking the president to give up the trade fight with China. But the agreement needs solid, enforceable solutions to the substantial problems, inherent in trading with China.

Jeffrey Bonior is a staff writer for the Alliance for American Manufacturing.



SOAR EYES ON WASHINGTON

By Jay McMurren, SOAR Executive Board Member, District 2

In the previous “SOAR Eyes on Washington,” it was reported that the United States, Mexico and Canada Trade Agreement (USMCA) had passed the U.S. House of Representatives with a strong bipartisan vote in favor. It marked the first time that a trade deal received an endorsement from the AFL-CIO and major North American industrial unions.

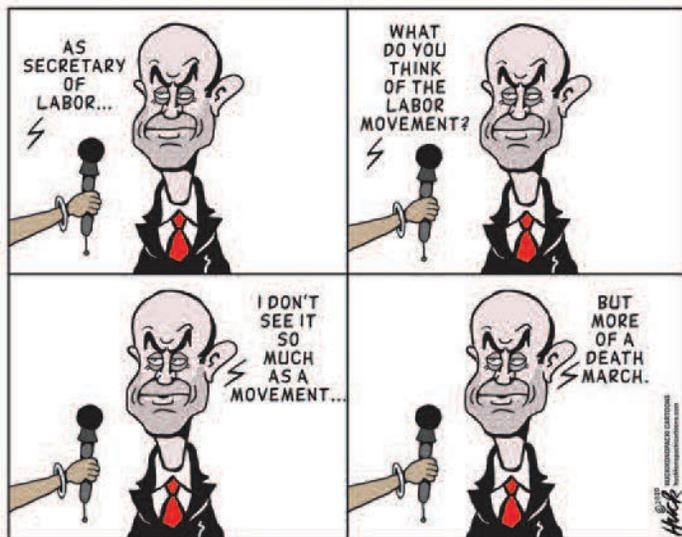


Jay McMurren

In January, the trade pact was brought to the U.S. Senate and was, again, passed by a strong bipartisan vote. Tom Conway, President of the USW International Union, called the agreement a win for American workers and urged Congress to use the USMCA as a template for future trade agreements. He told USW officers, “The new trade deal is not perfect. But we won language on our key issues, including the ability to enforce violations of labor law. But we aren’t

going to let up. We will keep pursuing improved trade agreements that work for our members.”

In other trade news, flanked by big names from Wall Street, President Trump signed “Phase One” of a new trade agreement with China. Unfortunately, this deal is not U.S. worker-friendly and both USW President Tom Conway and SOAR President Bill Pienta are urging active and retired Steelworkers to contact the president to voice opposition to the trade pact. As Pienta told a group of retirees in New York, “This agreement contains no enforcement provisions for violations of the agreement, while allowing the government to deny even the most basic labor rights for Chinese workers.”



Int'l. President Tom Conway told USW executive board members that the agreement, which the president hailed as a victory for working people, was more handouts for companies relocating operations to China and big pharma. He added that the deal fails to address such major concerns as production overcapacity, currency manipulation, and market access for U.S. products and services. He concluded his remarks saying, “All you have to do is look at the crowd he brought together at the signing ceremony to tell who the winners are in the agreement.”

China has an issue with overcapacity, which is causing great harm to U.S. manufacturing, especially the American steel and aluminum sectors. In China, the aluminum and steel mills produce more products than the markets can use. To keep the economy growing and workers on the job, the communist government pays companies to continue operating at full capacity. The products are then dumped on U.S. markets and are sold at prices below production costs. The Trump administration has put tariffs on Chinese products; however, the Asian country is avoiding the taxes by shipping goods through a third nation.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka told a press conference in Washington D.C., “There is precious little in this deal that addresses China’s long-standing denial of labor rights. It is another big giveaway to Wall Street and big business. The agreement prioritizes protections for companies that move to China, creating more incentives for companies to outsource.”

Finally, in other recent news, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi got the job done by working with members of the U.S. House to pass the Protect the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. The bill which went to vote on February 6, passed with bipartisan support of the U.S. House, by a vote of 224-194. It now goes to the Senate, where Majority Leader Mitch McConnell will let it die on his desk if organized labor does not put up a fight. Steelworkers and SOAR are being encouraged to call their U.S. Senators and urge them to not only support the PRO Act (S.1306), but sign on as a co-sponsor for the bill. It’s been 85 years since the passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which is the standard for unions and management to follow when it comes to union-representation election activities. It’s time to modernize the law and make it work for everyone, not just the union busters.

SOAR will stay the course and keep our eyes on Washington, as we continue the fight to protect and enhance the quality of life of our retirees and working families.



Threats to Medicare and Social Security can be Handled in the Voting Booth

By Robert Roach, Jr.

Recently, President Trump told a CNBC reporter that cuts to Medicare and Social Security were on the table — as soon as the end of this year.

This is an especially cruel threat. Millions of seniors rely on the health and retirement benefits they earned after a lifetime of hard work just to afford basic necessities. For 4 in 10 older Americans, Social Security is their only source of income. For even more retirees, Social Security provides 90 percent of their income. These benefits are modest, averaging just \$1,461 per month for a retired worker.

The last thing struggling retirees need is to have the rug pulled out from under them. We should be working to expand Social Security and increasing benefits for both today’s seniors and future generations. This is attainable — it can be accomplished by making the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share. It is ridiculous that the richest man in America, Amazon CEO Jeffrey Bezos, finished paying all his Social Security taxes for the year on January 2. In fact, workers in his warehouses pay a higher percentage of their income in Social Security taxes than he does.

We should also strengthen and expand Medicare. The first thing we need to do is rein in high drug prices, which are the biggest driver of Medicare costs. Last year the

House of Representatives passed H.R. 3, the Lower Drug Costs Now Act. It would save taxpayers billions of dollars, cap out of pocket drug spending at \$2,000 per year for retirees and add hearing, dental and vision benefits to Medicare by requiring Medicare to negotiate lower prices.

That legislation is sitting on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s desk, along with hundreds of other bills passed by the House that have not advanced.

Elections have consequences, and 2020 is a chance to be heard. Let’s consider what the president said about cutting Medicare and Social Security when we go to the polls in November. And let us also keep in mind all the House-passed bills — including the one requiring Medicare to negotiate drug prices — that could become law if the Senate had new leadership.



Robert Roach, Jr. is president of the Alliance for Retired Americans. He was previously the General Secretary-Treasurer of the IAMAW.

For more information, visit www.retiredamericans.org.

A NEW ERA of Legislative Activism

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attended. It took a serious look at the issues that are currently at-hand. But, it also offered a look at a promising future that will be led by our new leadership team.”

The event wasn’t all speeches, though. On Tuesday, October 29, delegates headed outside for a march from the conference center to the Department of Labor, some five blocks away. Steelworkers were there to urge speedy passage of the Workplace Violence Prevention Act, which the USW is backing to stop a rash of violence against health care workers. The march was attended by over 800

Steelworkers and supporters, who eagerly chanted to DOL workers and delivered letters of support to the Department Secretary.

Finally, on Wednesday, October 30, the delegates headed to Capitol Hill to lobby their Representatives and Senators on several USW issues. The first, of course, was for passage of the Workplace Violence Prevention Act. They also discussed the need to pass the Protect the Right to Organize Act (PRO), which would modernize the 87-year old National Labor Relations Act. Steelworker retirees then got the opportunity to lend their voices to the discussion by encouraging elected officials to support the expansion of Social Security and the passage of the Butch Lewis Act. Butch Lewis is legislation that was already passed in the

House, but is being sat on by Mitch McConnell in the Senate. It creates a program to revive multi-employer pension plans and addresses funding for the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC).

Julie Stein, Director of SOAR, said she believes the energy Steelworker retirees brought to the conference surely added to its success. “This was the largest delegation of SOAR activists that has participated at this gathering, in recent years. The SOAR delegates were knowledgeable regarding the issues and experienced when it came to talking to members of Congress. They certainly helped advance our discussions about the complicated and important issues.”



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