Connection

From the Director’s Desk - Reflections

The election is now over and the people have spoken. For those of us who advocate on behalf of retirees and the working class, we know the weeks, months and years ahead will not be easy; but we will get through them together and we will come out stronger together, just as we have done in past.

Today, we rededicate ourselves to our role as activists and recommit ourselves to mobilizing our members and like-minded fellow Americans to protect and defend what was won in the halls of congress and in our collective bargaining agreements.

We knew this was an election about change and a revolt against the political elite. It was a revolt against what those in power in both parties have done or accepted; global trade and tax deals for corporations; Wall Street bailouts; big-money politics and decades of promises not kept. After neglecting the working class for decades, that class, working folks, abandoned the Democratic Party that once represented them, said enough is enough and voted for what they thought was real change.

Time will tell if this election will truly make a difference.

However, in the meantime, I am scared out of my wits of the agenda of the far right now in power in the House, Senate and the White House. What will happen to Social Security and Medicare? We all know these two critical programs that mean so much to retirees have been in their crosshairs for years.

There is already talk of turning Medicare, one of our government's most successful programs into a voucher program. There is talk once again about privatizing Social Security, which in its present form has kept so many retirees from living in poverty. Changes to these two very successful programs could very well destroy the quality of life of older Americans and place retirement for the next generation out of reach.

We must be steadfast in our diligence and pay close attention to what is going on in Washington. We must be prepared to fight to protect what is ours! Social Security and Medicare are earned benefits not entitlements, as the Washington elite would like you to believe.

The battle continues…..

Jim Centner, SOAR Director

“Simple can be harder than complex. You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it’s worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains.”

- Steve Jobs
Billy’s Banter
Solidarity Now More Than Ever

I want to start by thanking all those who got involved in this year’s election. You have proven that we still can contribute and are willing to remain involved and be a valuable source of information and activism.

We must now unite and become even more vigilant in making sure that those in office not destroy the benefits we have worked so hard for over the years. I tend to believe what people say, until their actions cause me to believe otherwise and I fear some people will do just what they say.

Speaker Ryan’s plan to eliminate Medicare’s guaranteed health benefits in favor of a system of vouchers is outlined in his “A Better Way,” a document that promises cuts to Social Security and Medicare. Seniors would have to use government vouchers or coupons and buy insurance on the private market.” I do not believe this is in our best interest nor do I believe that the person chosen to lead the discussion on Social Security is going to support status quo or improvements, if I can believe what he has said in the past about this issue.

The retired lobbyist President-elect Trump has named to lead his Social Security transition team is Michael Korbey, he has tried to eliminate or cut Social Security for decades. Back in 1996 he said of Social Security: “It's a failed system, broken and bankrupt” and that although cuts would hurt seniors, “the government needed to focus on other constituents.”

During George W. Bush’s administration, Korbey was a senior advisor to the Social Security Administration and helped spearhead Bush’s effort to privatize Social Security.

I hope I am losing sleep over nothing but I believe we will be better off if we get prepared for a fight and do not have it, than be un-prepared and play catch up on these very important issues. If we choose not to be involved, who will pick up the fight for us? We cannot stand divided we must unite on these important issues if we hope to retain our dignity in retirement. We need to maintain and improve existing benefits. Please let your Representatives know that you do not want vouchers or reduced SS for yourself or future retirees. Let us start now.

Bill Pienta, SOAR President

Tell Congress: Don’t Carve Up Social Security

Paul Ryan and Donald Trump plan to carve up Social Security like a Thanksgiving turkey. They want to increase the retirement age to 69 – making us work longer, deeply cut benefits for middle-class workers and reduce annual Cost of Living Adjustments. We need your help to stop them!

Social Security is a promise that must not be broken—we’ve worked hard for it and paid taxes for it. It belongs to all of us. Call your United States Senators and your Representative. Tell them not to cut Social Security. Help ensure that your Social Security will be there for your children and your grandchildren.

Please e-mail this message and tell your friends, family and co-workers to add their voice and participate. Don’t let politicians in Washington cut OUR Social Security!

P.S. If you don't act, Congress will assume you don't mind your Social Security benefits being carved up like a turkey.
Open letter from the United Steelworkers Leadership:

On November 8, voters across the country took advantage of the hard-fought right to cast their ballots. The election is over and Donald Trump will be our next President.

The USW endorsed Hillary Clinton. We believe she exhibited the qualities and experience most needed for our next president. She outlined a detailed set of policy initiatives on jobs, trade, infrastructure, education, health care, race relations and immigration that would not only move our nation forward, but expand opportunity for all.

We fully recognize that the members of our union were divided this election season. While our nation’s economy has begun to grow after the devastating economic collapse during the Bush years, it has failed to grow quickly enough. And, as the members of this union know better than anyone, the growth has failed to stimulate the manufacturing sector because of our nation’s failed trade policies which grow out of both our political parties. Donald Trump used our own words to speak to these problems, and to the real suffering, fears and anxieties that so many feel.

Today I am sending a congratulatory letter to President-Elect Trump indicating that we will work with him to advance the interests of our nation and our members. On trade law overhaul, infrastructure rebuilding, and job creation we expect to work with his transition team and his administration to reclaim American jobs, revitalize manufacturing and rebuild our communities and nation.

The letter also indicates that we will disagree where we must. We expect that we will not be able to support many of his campaign promises. On issues such as worker rights, collective bargaining, health care, harsh immigration tactics, race relations, respect and equity for women, criminal justice reform, safe workplaces and a healthy environment as well as the Supreme Court, we will fight. We need to build bridges both literally and with each other, not walls. We need to unite our nation and our union, not create deeper divides. America and the USW are better than that.

In the coming days, we intend to work to achieve our common goals and promote the well-being and livelihoods of our members and all Americans. Those who work hard and play by the rules are due all of the greatness that this nation can offer.

Sincerely,
Flint, Michigan experienced a terrible tragedy. Lead was flowing through the pipes, right into the glasses of children. Exposure leads to irreversible learning deficiencies and behavioral problems that persist throughout life. This story rightly sparked national outrage. It also boosted awareness that there are many Flints out there waiting to happen given the deteriorated and failing condition of our nation’s water infrastructure.

Potential Good News

The good news is that both the U.S. House and Senate have passed different versions of a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) that will help. Because there are two versions, a group of Senators and Representatives are meeting now to work out differences. Our USW representatives in Washington are pushing hard to ensure the final bill is as strong as possible and delivers maximum economic benefit.

Lawmakers also need to hear our voices.

Buy America Must Remain

Only the Senate version has strong Buy America provisions. When we use domestically-produced iron and steel, we maximize our tax dollars and support U.S. jobs and communities. An Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM) poll shows a whopping 89 percent of voters support Buy America, including Democrats and Republicans. Unfortunately, there is a well-funded group of outsourcers, importers and foreign governments who are trying to undermine Buy America. We need to make sure Buy America stays in the bill.

Take Action!

Rep. Fred Upton, the Chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee, is in a critical position to determine whether or not Buy America and aid for Flint will stay in the bill.

Please dial Rep. Upton toll-free at: 1-844-329-6606

Tell the staff that answers that you want Rep. Upton to include Buy America provisions in the Water Resources Development Act along with aid for Flint.

Want to learn more? Check out AAM’s letter on Buy America, our USW letter and the Senate’s summary.
The McNeil Report

When I went to lunch today, I noticed an old man sitting on a park bench sobbing his eyes out. I stopped and asked him what was wrong.

He told me, “I have a 22 year old wife at home. She rubs my back every morning and then gets up and makes me pancakes, sausage, fresh fruit and freshly ground coffee.”

I continued, “Well, then why are you crying?”

He added, “She makes me homemade soup for lunch and my favorite biscuits, cleans the house and then watches sports TV with me for the rest of the afternoon.”

I said, “Well, why are you crying?”

He said, “For dinner she makes me a gourmet meal with wine and my favorite dessert and then we cuddle until the small hours.”

I inquired, “Well then, why in the world would you be crying?”

He replied, “I can't remember where I live.”

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

Elaine Sez...

To all of our friends far and near and we’ve made a lot throughout the years. Thanks to SOAR for all its good deeds; marches, rallies and meetings to lead. We all do our part whether large or small To keep SOAR going and we shall not fall. To all our friends we send this greeting. Whatever you celebrate have a wonderful Holiday Season!

Old Charlie Sez...

Many thanks to all of our chapter officers for your past service and congratulations to our newly elected chapter officers.

From Charne
Social Security Is In Grave Danger

(Washington, DC) — The following is a statement from Nancy Altman, founding co-director of Social Security Works:

“With Republicans soon to be in full control of Congress and the White House, Social Security and Medicare are at greater risk than they have been for a long time. Speaker Paul Ryan has spent decades working to cut, privatize, and dismantle these vital programs. We fully expect him to redouble these efforts during Donald Trump’s administration.

During the presidential campaign, Trump promised that he would not cut Social Security or Medicare. While we were skeptical of this pledge, it showed that he understands the politics of Social Security very well – Americans of all ages, races, genders, and political affiliations are overwhelmingly opposed to cuts.

We hope that the President-Elect’s pledge is one he will honor. In standing up to Ryan and other powerful Republicans, he would be standing up for the American people. Our job will be to hold Trump accountable to his “no cuts” pledge, and convince him to work with Democrats to expand Social Security. If he violates his pledge, we will make sure the American people know it.”

Nancy J. Altman, founding co-director of Social Security Works

Public Option Key To Reining In Health Care Costs

Yale University Professor, Jacob Hacker, argues in a recent New York Times opinion piece that a public option is key to driving competition and reining in health care costs in the state health insurance exchanges. Premiums in the state exchanges are set to increase more than 20 percent in 2017, and these increases are unsustainable. If we add a public health insurance option, a Medicare-like health plan, we can stabilize the state exchanges and help ensure that health care is affordable.

People who oppose the public option claim it will push private insurance plans out of business. But, we know that is not true. Traditional Medicare competes with Medicare Advantage plans successfully. In fact, it provides a benchmark on prices, helping the private commercial insurers that offer Medicare plans to keep their costs down. At the same time, traditional Medicare offers people one choice they can count on. Medicare Advantage plans enter and leave the market as they will, and their networks of doctors and hospitals are constantly changing.

Back in 2009 and 2010 polls showed that a substantial majority of the public valued a public health insurance option. The public option, if designed like traditional Medicare, would offer people a wide network of doctors and hospitals. It can also drive health system change to improve health care quality. And, it can rein in prices. For inpatient care, Medicare rates are 53 percent of private commercial plan rates.

Moving Congress to adopt the public option is no small feat, but it is possible. Today, 33 Senate Democrats support the public option. Moreover, Hillary Clinton has embraced it, which could spur Congressional support and action, if she is elected President. To avoid a filibuster, Hacker suggests that the public option could be adopted through the budget process—much like Republican legislation repealing the Affordable Care Act, which President Obama vetoed. Moreover, the public option would reduce the deficit by $158 billion over ten years, according to the Congressional Budget Office.
Report From The Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)

President-elect Donald Trump focused on many hot-button issues during the Republican primaries and the general election in which he defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton. Trump, ever the savvy salesman, began the dialogue about American manufacturing and trade right out of the gate, despite the traditional Republican mantra promoting “free trade agreements.”

Trump quickly promised crackdowns on unfair trade deals and called NAFTA the “worst trade agreement ever.” He was particularly focused on China and Mexico where many American manufacturers have moved their factories to increase profits. He promised 45 percent tariffs on China if it continued to “dump” its overcapacity of steel in the United States because it was costing America millions of dollars and middle-class jobs.

It was a “do as I say, not as I do” situation. Trump used steel manufactured in China to build the Trump International Hotel Las Vegas and purchased Chinese-made aluminum for the Trump International Hotel and Tower in Chicago. It is likely he has built additional structures with Chinese steel. He has a penchant for having his products manufactured in other parts of the world. We know he is an eager consumer of low-cost products made in China, Mexico and many other offshore manufacturers around the globe. His suits and neckties are made in China, while his furniture and kitchen goods lines are also manufactured overseas.

Trump’s early statements about the steel industry and manufacturing in general are considered important reasons why he did so well winning most of the “Rust Belt” states on election night.

On June 28, 2016 in Monessen, Pennsylvania, an area once the heartland of the American steel industry, Trump was in full-fear mongering in a speech before thousands of people affected by the crash of American steel.

“A Trump Administration will also ensure that we start using American steel for American infrastructure. Just like the American steel from Pennsylvania that built the Empire State building. It will be American steel that will fortify America’s crumbling bridges. It will be American steel that sends our skyscrapers soaring into the sky. It will be American steel that rebuilds out inner cities. It will be American hands that remake this country and it will be American energy – mined from American resources – that powers this country. It will be American workers who are hired to do the job. We are going to put American-produced steel back into the backbone of our country. This alone will create massive numbers of jobs.”

Within the past year, more than 15,000 USW members have lost their jobs and the situation is getting worse. Maybe if President-elect Trump and his billionaire buddies can practice what Trump preaches, the American steel industry can stop the bleeding and re-open the many idled steel mills waiting to get back on line. That would definitely create thousands of jobs for skilled American steelworkers.

Jeff Bonior, AAM staff writer, Alliance for American Manufacturing

“Like a morning dream, life becomes more and more bright the longer we live, and the reason of everything appears more clear. What has puzzled us before seems less mysterious, and the crooked paths look straighter as we approach the end.”
- Jean Paul Richter
Saving Carrier Jobs Is Just The First Step

by Robert Roach, Jr.

On the campaign trail, President-elect Trump discussed workers’ understandable apprehension about losing jobs and what it means for the future of their families. He promised to stop Carrier Corp. from moving 2,100 jobs it had planned to shift from Indiana to Mexico.

The United Steelworkers had tried negotiating with Carrier in order to keep the jobs in the United States by pledging $23 million per year in savings it could offer to the company. But Carrier rejected the offer, citing its expected savings of $65 million each year by moving to Mexico.

A spokesperson for the United Steelworkers 1999, the union representing Carrier’s production employees, told The Washington Post that the union was boxed out of the talks. It seemed Carrier was determined to choose additional profitability over its dedicated workers.

Now, after a lobbying effort from the incoming Trump administration, Carrier has agreed to keep about half of those jobs in Indiana. In exchange, the company will receive new government incentives.

The Alliance will continue to stand with our friends at USW and hope that Trump succeeds in keeping additional jobs in the United States.

However, we still need to make sure Trump doesn't advance Republican plans to attack unions at every turn. Labor’s foes want to go after our pensions, keep the minimum wage low, and make health care less secure for workers and retirees. We must ensure that this one victory for Carrier’s workers is not used by the Trump Administration as a smokescreen to do more damage elsewhere.

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 Need More Senators Like Indiana Senator Joe Donnelly

I want to let you know about concerning discussions that are already under way by some in Congress to privatize Medicare, which would saddle seniors with higher out-of-pocket costs for health care.

Let me say unequivocally to you now: I have fought to protect Medicare for this generation and for future generations. I will oppose any effort to privatize Medicare or turn it into a voucher program.

WATCH my video message about my commitment to protecting Medicare for Hoosiers, by clicking HERE or on the image below.

Sincerely,
Senator Joe Donnelly
Elections Have Consequences

With the election of a Republican Congress and President, I have great concerns regarding the future of retirees and workers. It is no secret that the agenda of many of these Republicans is to do away with Medicare as we know it and attack Social Security, attack Unions by having a national “Right To Work” (for less law) and to attack many Executive Orders that President Obama enacted including: improved overtime pay, more transparency in Union organizing campaigns on the spending of company money to defeat employee organizing efforts, eliminate prevailing wages on government contracts, etc. This, all in the name of eliminating regulations.

We will also be confronted with the possible appointment of anti-Union and corporate interest individuals to the Supreme Court and regulatory agencies. For example, the Trump business is fighting the employees in Las Vegas who are trying to form a Union. He will now have the right to appoint members to the National Labor Relations Board that will tilt the scales not only in his business interest but throughout the Country.

This is my opinion and I hope we are not confronted with the possibilities, but we must pay attention, and be prepared to oppose such anti-worker, anti-union efforts and those that will attack the welfare of retirees including Social Security and Medicare and health care benefits of over 20 million people who could lose them if the ACA is eliminated.

p.s. By the way shouldn’t we be concerned and demand an investigation over the involvement of Russia in our Presidential election?

Bill Gibbons, PACE Representative

SOAR International Conference Scheduled

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.

Medicare Part D Enrollment Deadline Approaching

Don’t forget that open enrollment for Medicare Part D prescription drug programs ends on December 7. You can join a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan; Switch from one Medicare drug plan to another Medicare drug plan, or even drop your Medicare prescription drug coverage completely.

“It is nobler to declare oneself wrong than to insist on being right --especially when one is right.”
- Friedrich Nietzsche
Americans United Around Social Security

November 2, 2016

These days, it can be hard to find issues upon which the overwhelming majority of people in the U.S. agree. But, the latest poll from Public Policy Polling shows that Americans are united around keeping Social Security strong. Regardless of race, gender, age or party lines, people want to increase Social Security benefits—not cut them—and have the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share.

Social Security benefits us all. It’s an intergenerational program that supports families. It helps ensure older adults, people with disabilities, and families where a breadwinner has died prematurely, have some financial security. In the process it allows their kids, grandkids, parents, and siblings to sleep better at night.

Who supports expanding Social Security?

- 75 percent of men and 69 percent of women
- 69 percent of whites, 82 percent of African-Americans, and 79 percent of Latinos
- 70 percent of 18-29 year olds, 65 percent of 30-45 year olds, 76 percent of 46-65 year olds, and 70 percent of Americans over 65
- 87 percent of Democrats, 73 percent of Independents, and 51 percent of Republicans

The Democratic leadership is fully aligned with the public, committed to expanding and not cutting Social Security. Now, it’s time for the full Congress to listen to the public and to unite around Social Security, expand benefits and require the wealthiest Americans to contribute their share into the Social Security Trust Funds.

Expanding Social Security is smart public policy. Social Security is a critical source of retirement security. Few Americans still have defined benefit pensions, and 401k plans do not measure up in terms up guaranteeing retirement security. Americans are struggling to save, with as many households nearing retirement with less than $14,500 in savings than those with more, way too little to replace job income. Not surprisingly, 60 percent of older adults depend on Social Security for the majority of their income, and 33 percent depend on Social Security for essentially all of their income.

In sharp contrast, President elect Trump has flip-flopped in his commitment to not cutting it. Moreover, the Republican leadership, his Party’s leadership, have a longstanding commitment to cutting Social Security. President Elect Trump will feel pressure to support his party on this issue.

Rob Shenk of JustCareUSA

The Trans-Pacific Partnership Is Dead, Schumer Tells Labor Leaders

The Senates soon-to-be top Democrat told labor leaders Thursday that the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the trade deal at the center of President Obama’s “pivot” to strengthen ties with key Asian allies, will not be ratified by Congress.

That remark from Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.), who is expected to be the incoming Senate minority leader, came as good news to the AFL-CIO Executive Council, which met in Washington. Schumer relayed statements that Republican congressional leaders had made to him, according to an aide who confirmed the remarks.