

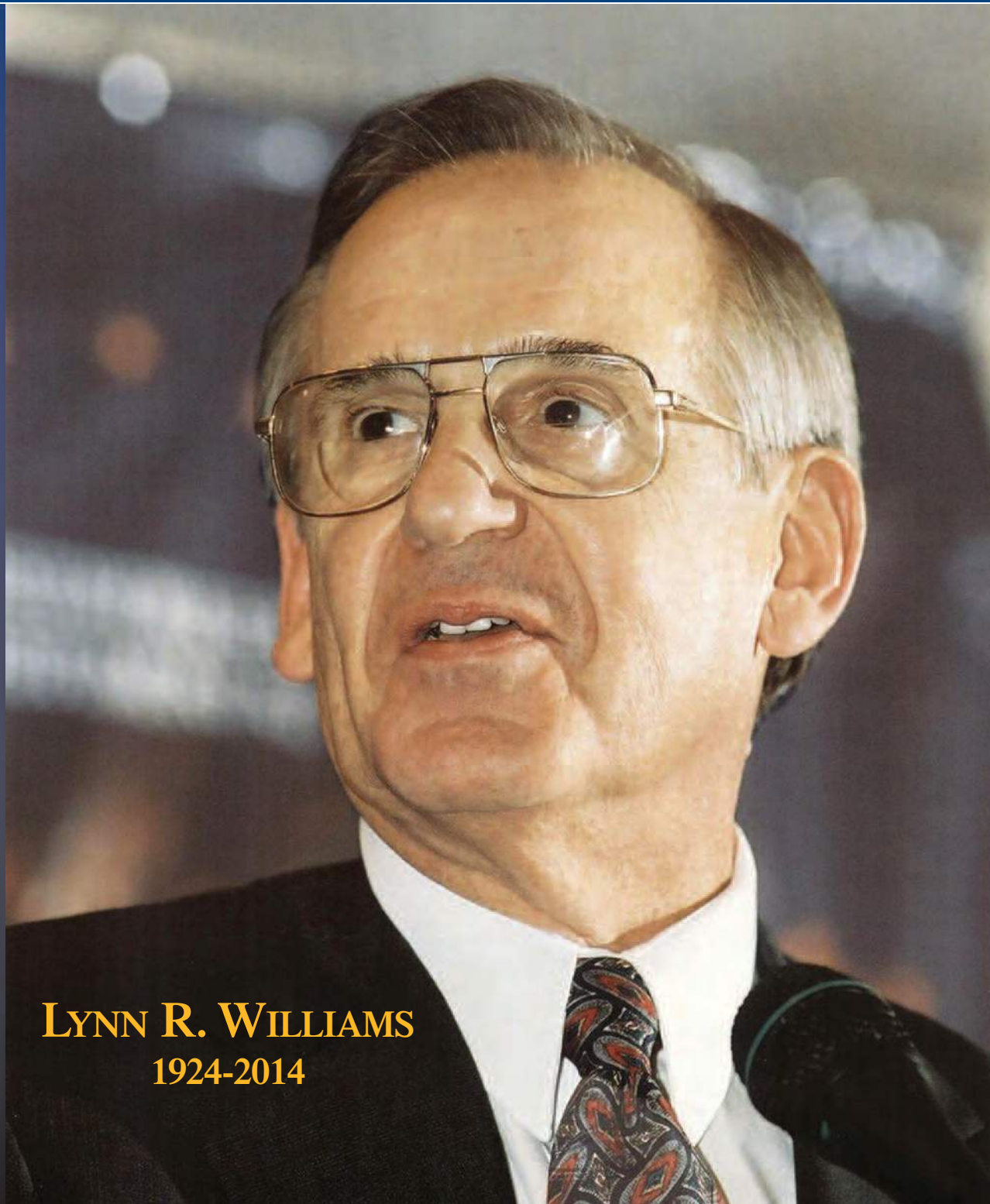
SOAR in ACTION

USW@Work

A Regular Publication of the United Steelworkers

Volume 9/3

A Powerful Voice for Workers



LYNN R. WILLIAMS
1924-2014



BILL PIENTA
SOAR President

It's Deja Vu All Over Again

Here we go again! Members of the USW are once again fighting for their industrial lives against a foreign country. South Korea is looking at the United States as a way to improve their economy, at the expense of American workers, by dumping "Oil Country Tubular Goods" (OCT) in the United States. OCT is the steel pipe used in oil and gas extraction.

I joined the United Steelworkers in 1966 and aside from the first few years of my employment (when I was young, foolish and easily distracted), I cannot remember any long period of time when we were not in some form of dispute, protest or legal challenge over the way foreign countries ignored or circumvented our trade laws by dumping their products on our shores. I remember marching in Washington, D.C. and going to the steps of the White House in

an attempt to bring attention to the dumping of stainless steel. That protest was almost 40 years ago.

Some may say "what good have we done over the last 40 years," as country after country continue to "dump" their products in the U.S.? I ask "where would we be if we gave up or worse yet never took up the fight?" That is one of the things I am most proud of as a member of the United Steelworkers. We do not measure how difficult or lengthy the fight may be, but whether the fight is right and just. The United Steelworkers do not select their battles based on cost or popularity, but on what is best for our members.

With the next Constitutional Convention quickly approaching, I would hope our Union will spend some time discussing these battles and victories and remind all why we do it. The United Steelworkers is a union of, by and for its members and that is what I am proud of most; as we all should be!



JIM CENTNER
SOAR Director

Social Security is Being Starved to Death!

Our Social Security system has been under attack for decades. Since 2010, some members of Congress have been so intent on cutting your earned benefits that they've held hostage our nation's credit, threatened to shut down the government, and forced Congress through a nauseating series of self-inflicted crises. At long last, cries to cut benefits have grown quieter as the program's enemies have seen the

American people working together to beat back anything they throw at us. But benefit cuts aren't the only way to dismantle our Social Security system. There is already an invisible war under way—and we're losing it!

The Social Security Administration is funded the same way Social Security benefits are—by payroll taxes that all of us pay. Its expenses have no impact on the federal debt, and represent less than 1 percent of Social Security's annual expenditures. But Congress has still cut 14 of the last 16 SSA budget requests! And now, these

cuts are being felt, as the Social Security Administration is forced to shutter dozens of field offices around the country.

R.J. Eskow wrote on the *Huffington Post* that, "Many disabled and elderly Social Security recipients depend on field offices, and the workers in them." And as Michael Hiltzik of the *Los Angeles Times* said, "They haven't been able to cut benefits, so they're doing the next best thing: making it hard for you to know what you're due, and harder to get it when it comes due."

The bottom line is, Americans came together to create the Social Security system to provide a basic, reliable foundation for retirement and disability. Closing field offices and making it more difficult to access benefits information is an attempt to dismantle that foundation. It's time to stop it.

**Pick up the phone; dial 1 (866) 297-3817—
Tell Congress: Quit playing games with the Social Security Administration. Re-open the field offices that were closed in 2014!**

“SOAR was Lynn’s vision. He thought the union was always ‘too hard on our retirees.’ He told me many times that SOAR ‘was established to provide an opportunity for our members to continue their life long involvement in their union and to provide them a platform for their continued activism for economic and social justice.’ Not only did Lynn see this as his vision, he dedicated the last years of his life to making it a reality.”

Jim Centner
SOAR Director

LYNN R. WILLIAMS 1924-2014



SOAR mourns the loss of a great leader. Lynn R. Williams, the son of a Canadian mill-town minister who led the United Steelworkers (USW) as its international president during a turbulent decade of steel industry consolidation, died May 5 at age 89 in Toronto, Canada.

The first Canadian to lead the USW, Mr. Williams was its president from 1983 to 1994, a time of crisis in the North American steel industry, which, confronted by unfairly traded imports, underwent unrelenting bankruptcies and consolidations.

“Lynn Williams held this union together through the worst of times, the massive bankruptcies and consolidations in the U.S. steel industry,” said USW International President Leo W. Gerard. “Lynn showed that he was a leader of great compassion and ingenuity, securing deals to help save as much of the industry as possible while at the same time preserving pensions and benefits for workers.”

“If you can imagine an old mattress out in the junkyard with the springs popping up, I was like a guy lying on the springs trying to hold them all down,” Mr. Williams said in a 2010 interview. “And I didn’t have enough body parts to put a hand on this one, a hand on that one and a knee on another one. I didn’t have enough body parts to hold them all down.”

Lynn used concession negotiations during the crisis to bargain innovative employment agreements and secure for the union a seat in corporate boardrooms, management meetings and sale discussions — places where few American unions appeared at that time.

His innovations during this time included establishing Voluntary Employee Benefit Associations (VEBAs) to protect workers employed by companies going through bankruptcy. A VEBA is a trust funded usually by the corporation to help provide benefits such as pensions and health insurance for workers.

Lynn was a driving force behind the creation of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), which allows retirees to remain active in politics and other issues important to the union. He was president emeritus of SOAR.

“Lynn’s vision was that the union should be there to help people — not just when they are at work, but when they are out of work and retired,” Mr. Gerard said.

He also helped to launch the Institute for Career Development, which provides advanced educational opportunities for USW members at participating companies.

Because he saw the connection between unfair imports and American job losses, Mr. Williams worked to broaden the union’s involvement internationally.

“Lynn’s gift was to bring people together and get the best ideas from everyone, and then try to move us in a strategic direction,” Mr. Gerard said.

In retirement, Mr. Williams moved from Pittsburgh back to Canada, where in 2005 he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada, the country’s highest civilian honor, in recognition of a lifetime of achievement in the labor movement.

The city of Toronto also named a street after Mr. Williams in the former factory district near the John Inglis Co., where he first worked as a steelworker

“Lynn served as a life-long mentor to me. He took me under his wing,” Mr. Gerard said and then explained, “The two big influences in my union life have been my father and Lynn Williams. My father taught me the fundamentals of workplace militancy. Lynn taught me the value of patience, of keeping a clear head in the midst of chaos...we owe him much more than we can say.”

SOAR in ACTION

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District 4 SOAR 4-1 Joins SEIU Rally

Fredonia, New York—International SOAR President Bill Pienta and members from Chapter 4-1 were among the over 300 union members, politicians and local community residents that packed Barker Common Park in downtown Fredonia on May 29, 2014 to support SEIU Local 266.

ConAgra, the newly acquired owner of Carriage House (formerly Red Wing) made the decision to shut down the facility that made jam, jellies and other condiments at that location since the early 1900s. That decision will put over 450 SEIU members out of work.

The rally was held to make sure the displaced union workers would receive a fair and just severance package from their previous employer and to pressure ConAgra into selling the facility to another food producer with no strings attached.



Pictured left to right: SOAR International President, Bill Pienta; District 4 Executive Board Member, Jim Bickhart; District Coordinator, Diane Pavlik; 4-1 Trustee, Theresa Bickhart; 4-1 Trustee, Marcel DeMonte; and 4-1 Vice President, Roger Calanni.

IN MEMORIAM

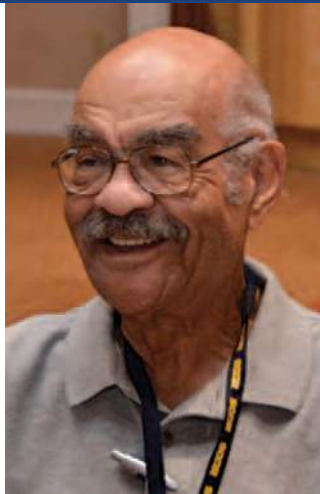
BOB PRYOR *SOAR Board Member*

Bob Pryor, SOAR Executive Board Member and Benefits Coordinator passed away May 27, 2014 after a lengthy illness. He was 89.

Bob retired in 1987 from the United Steelworkers, where he served the union members as a Technician in the Pension and Insurance Department. Prior to his transfer to the Steelworkers International Headquarters, Bob worked as an organizer for the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department and as a Servicing Staff Representative in the Greater Chicago area.

Brother Pryor started his union career after he was discharged from the Army after World War II. He worked for Reynolds Aluminum and was a member of Local 3911. While there he held numerous positions for his local including grievance committeeman, treasurer and president.

Bob served on the SOAR Executive Board since 1987. SOAR Director Jim Centner stated, "Bob represented workers and retirees his entire life. His selfless dedication to our members and his commitment to social justice were truly his passion. He lived it every day."



1925-2014



SOAR **International** **Conference** **Scheduled**

August 2014 in Las Vegas

The SOAR International Conference is scheduled for August 8-9, 2014, at the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada.



SOAR delegates in attendance pictured left to right: District 13 Coordinator, Emmett Sheppard; District 8 Board Member, Bob Adkins; International President, Bill Pienta; International Secretary-Treasurer, Charlie Averill; Director, Jim Centner; District 7 Board Member, Scott Marshall; District 9 Board Member, Don Badie; President Chapter 13-1, Andres Rosas; President Chapter 10-6, Carl Ramich and District 2 Coordinator, Mike Pyne.

BUILDING RETIREE POWER

*Laura Markwardt, Senior Communications Associate
Alliance for Retired Americans*

SOAR members joined our sister organization, the Alliance for Retired Americans (ARA), in Las Vegas for their annual membership convention this spring. SOAR members were among the over 500 retiree activists from across the country gathered to discuss issues of importance to retirees, their families and communities. Retiree advocates are not just concerned with protecting their own right to a dignified retirement; they are primarily concerned with preserving this right for future generations.

The Alliance for Retired Americans' 2014 convention themed "Building Retiree Power" focused on the issues of wealth and income inequality and preserving Americans' right to a secure retirement. Attendees spent four days connecting with other activists, listening to speeches from leaders in the labor movement and elected officials, joining action-focused workshops, and adopting resolutions on retirement security issues.

In his opening remarks, Alliance Secretary-Treasurer Ruben Burks focused on the widening income gap in our country and reminded attendees about the critical role the labor movement has played in expanding retirement security in America. "If it were not for the labor movement, there would be no Social Security or Medicare," he said, "It was only through our collective bargaining rights and our political strength that we were able to make these things happen."

United Steelworkers International President Leo W. Gerard shared a message: "As we work into 2014, it's tremendously important that we continue the activism of the Alliance—the activism to fight to protect Social Security; the activism to protect and enhance Medicare; the activism to fight for Medicaid; the activism to keep fighting for seniors. ... If we can bail out bankers, certainly we can protect seniors."

Of particular interest this year was information and action on exposing the secretive American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a shadowy organization that connects corporations with state lawmakers to quietly push an anti-worker agenda at the state and local level. ALEC operates by bringing together corporate lobbyists and legislators to vote as equals on "model bills" designed to protect profits at the expense of workers and retirees across the country. Retiree activists were surprised to learn that ALEC was 100 percent behind recent, anti-worker legislation across the country including efforts to destroy public pensions, weaken unions, and ship jobs overseas.

Alliance delegates also adopted resolutions against corporate attacks on post-retirement health care; for improving and expanding Social Security benefits; calling for Wall Street to pay its fair share of taxes; strongly opposing the American Legislative Exchange Council's corrupt and regressive agenda and supporting a campaign to inform the public about ALEC and ALEC-linked politicians; and much more.

Rising income inequality is squeezing our nation's middle class, making it more and more difficult for average Americans to save for retirement. Prominent Republican politicians are backing proposals to gut Medicare and raise the Social Security retirement age—changes SOAR and Alliance members say will only make the retirement security crisis worse. Heading into this election season, however, we will be putting their new skills and knowledge into action—fighting to support workers across the country and promoting retirement security for all. Our grassroots activists will be leading the charge to take on restrictive voter ID laws, push for a higher minimum wage, protect pensions, and put a stop to the dangerous efforts to dismantle Medicare and slash Social Security. Our task is to "Organize! Organize! Organize!"—and as always, we are up for it.

SOLIDARITY WITH CUBAN WORKERS

The Cuban Five

We all know something about Cuba—the revolution, the Bay of Pigs, the missile crisis during the Kennedy Administration. However, most of us know nothing about the Cuban Five, even though they have been in jail in the United States for more than 15 years.

Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González and René González, known as the Cuban Five, are intelligence officers convicted in Miami for committing espionage. The Cuban government acknowledges the five men were intelligence agents, but say they were spying on Miami's Cuban exile community, not the U.S. government. They were detained Sept. 12, 1998.

During their trial no proof was presented that they committed any crime in the U.S. Their trial was conducted in Miami, a center of anti-Cuban activism in the U.S. After many appeals and the refusal of the Supreme Court of United States to hear the case, Gerardo Hernandez was sentenced to two life sentences plus 10 years; Ramón Labadiño to 30 years; Antonio Guerrero to 21 years plus 10 months; Fernando Gonzalez to 17 years and René Gonzalez to 15 years.

René Gonzalez was released in October 2011 after completing his sentence but was ordered to stay in Miami for an additional three years probation. On April 26, 2013 Gonzalez was allowed to travel to Cuba for his father's funeral until May 3. Fernando Gonzalez was released on Feb. 27, 2014, and left for Cuba immediately.

The USW believes that the trial had too many faults to be considered fair and has worked to convince the U.S. government to release the Cuban Five and send them home.

USW delegation with René, Olga and their daughter Irma.



Fred Redmond and Steve Hunt with René Gonzalez, first of the Cuban Five to be released, and his spouse Olga Salanueva.

Delegation to Cuba

As part of a Workers Uniting delegation, SOAR Vice-President Harry Hynd, USW International Vice President Fred Redmond and District 3 Director Steve Hunt visited Cuba for 2014 May Day activities. They met René Gonzalez and his family who had recently been reunited. The delegation heard their stories but did not hear a word of bitterness. René, his wife Olga Salanueva and his daughter Irma only spoke of justice for the others still in jail and the need for understanding between the two countries. USW remains committed to supporting the call to free the Cuban Five.

The USW delegation visited the Pedro Soto Alba nickel mine that is owned jointly by the Cuban government and the Canadian company Sherritt International Corp. After a three-hour drive in a very small van, the delegation spoke with the administration and the local union and was pleased to see that high health and safety standards were enforced at the mine.

The delegation also visited the manufacturing plant Héroes del 26 de Julio in Holguín. The plant produces most of the agricultural implements and farm equipment in Cuba. After visiting the plant, they met with the local union. One of the union's leaders also is a member of the Cuban National Congress.

Finally, the delegation met with Ulises Guilarte, the General Secretary of the Cuban Workers Central, the main union body in Cuba, to learn about the economic changes occurring in Cuba and the impact on workers and families.

We learned there is more to Cuba than Bacardi rum or a good vacation destination and that workers in our three countries have lots in common. We share the need for a voice in the workplace and in society, for a decent standard of living, for free education and health care, the right to travel and the resources to do it. We learned that we can work together to build a better future for our countries and our families.

We're Rocking in Your Town Tonight

*Doug Macpherson
National Coordinator*

For active SOAR members Don Arkell and Peter Boyle, Chapter 6-16 (Kingston, Ontario), their summer road trip to 28 Ontario communities delivered a strong message about the need for improved long-term care in the province.



Don and Peter constructed a 12-foot rocking chair as a focal point of their tour. In each community they had to assemble and disassemble the chair, sometimes two or three times a day. This from two guys recovering from hip and knee-replacement surgery — indeed both of them use walking sticks to get around. Talk about commitment! It was my pleasure to be with them at rallies in Burlington and Hamilton.

With more than 20,000 Ontarians on wait lists for long-term care, the Ontario Health Coalition has launched a campaign exposing the urgent need for more hands-on daily care, for a minimum care standard of four hours per day and for improved access to care.

In every community they visited, Don, Peter and their chair were greeted enthusiastically by seniors groups, unions and personal support workers (PSWs). Many PSWs spoke passionately about the need to hire more workers so they can provide adequate care and companionship to our most vulnerable citizens in the closing days of their lives.

"If I was to tell you that we manage, I would be lying because we

don't. Whatever we don't get to, the next shift has to pick up, then the next shift and so on. It's a vicious cycle. It is very disheartening, really, when you finish at the end of the day. But you have to say that you have done the best that you can. It is caring work. It is rewarding work. But at the same time if you are not able to do your best, it is not so rewarding," said Gloria Hendricks, a Hamilton PSW.

"Ontario has an aging population and more and more residents have complex needs," said Malcolm Buchanan, president of the Hamilton Burlington Oakville chapter of the Congress of Union Retirees. "About 200,000 Ontarians currently suffer from dementia and by 2020 that number is expected to jump to 250,000, so funding and staffing for long-term care should grow accordingly."

The campaign caught the attention of Paul Miller, NDP Member of Provincial Parliament for Hamilton East and a SOAR member. Miller supports a minimum of four hours of daily, one-on-one time workers can devote to their patients. He also calls for increased staffing levels, higher wages for PSWs and more long-term care facilities.

District 5 Celebrates Newest SOAR Chapter

Delegates at the District 5 regional conference held in Mont-Joli, Quebec, celebrated the newest SOAR chapter by making a special presentation of the charter. New SOAR Chapter D5-07 has over 145 members, who are retirees from USW Local 6506. The local will pay the annual dues for retirees and spouses and surviving spouses.

Special thanks go to the local union, servicing staff representative Nicholas Lapierre, and District 5 SOAR board member Lawrence McBrearty for organizing the chapter. We are confident that our newest chapter will be an asset to the district and local. Congratulations to all.

On hand for the presentation of the charter for new SOAR Chapter D5-07 were USW Local 6506 President, Eric Matte; Secretary, Gilbert Beaulieu; Vice-President, Marcel Levesque; Chapter President, Laurent Desrosiers; SOAR Board Member District 5, Lawrence McBrearty; USW District 5 Director, Daniel Roy and USW Regional Coordinator, Alain Croteau.



Holding the Line for Workers' Rights

and Countering the Growing Web of Anti-Union Organizations in our States

Many state legislatures have ended their sessions for the year. While not all states have adjourned—and much damage can still be done—some of the worst attempts to undermine workers' rights were blocked for the 2014 sessions. These fights are continuing to expose a well-financed and growing network of corporate-backed organizations that are building policy-influencing infrastructure in states across the country.

As an example, perhaps the most significant push so far this year for a so-called “right to work” law happened in Missouri. These laws have nothing to do with making life better for workers. In right to work states, workplaces are LESS safe, wages are LOWER, and workers are less likely to have health care and pensions.

Knowing that the Missouri Governor would veto the bill, supporters tried to send the measure directly to the ballot. Steelworkers in the state got educated on the issue, lobbied at the state capitol, made calls and took other actions to prevent this from happening. Ultimately, these efforts helped bring together a bipartisan group of lawmakers who prevented the issue from getting to the ballot.

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) was a key player in this fight. This “bill mill” hands over

corporate-written legislation to state lawmakers who in turn introduce and help push the bills. Their “model legislation” on right to work has been repeatedly introduced in states across the country. ALEC holds regular meetings to devise their plans, including one in Kansas City during the middle of the right to work debate. The event drew large numbers of state lawmakers—who stand to benefit politically from the ALEC corporate sponsors—as well as protesters.

Many of the same backers of ALEC also help drive a web of state-level organizations collectively known as the State Policy Network. These supposed “think tanks” push a right-wing agenda that undercuts unions and the middle class, despite many of them claiming to be non-partisan. In the report, *Exposed: The State Policy Network*, the authors point out that this organization’s 2013 annual meet-

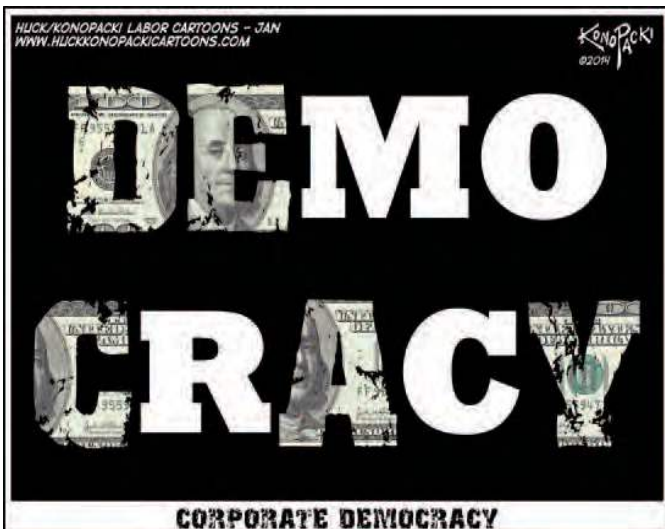
ing featured an agenda of “privatizing and profitizing schools, attacking the pensions negotiated for public workers, limiting the ability of states to tax, ending collective bargaining rights of workers, cutting federal spending out of state budgets, and thwarting the Affordable Care Act.”



Recently, signs are pointing to this effort expanding to the local level. ALEC has recently launched their American City County Exchange initiative to drive their policies amongst the 500,000 local elected officials across America.

Unions may never have the finances to counter these organizations dollar for dollar, but as voters and constituents, we have the power to counteract their influence. Through programs like Rapid Response we can take on out-sized challenges in an increasingly hostile political environment, making sure that Steelworker voices are at the table and that we’re holding the line where workers’ interests are at stake. Each of us must stay diligent in our communities and guard against efforts to undermine our local governments, our workers’ rights and more. That starts by getting informed.

Learn more about the American Legislative Exchange Council at www.alecexposed.org or www.standuptoalec.org. Learn more about the State Policy Network at www.stinktanks.org.



Global Glut Accelerates the Loss of American Manufacturing Jobs

Lt. General Chesty Puller was once quoted as saying, “Good, we’re surrounded, that simplifies the problem.” That seems to be the current situation for manufacturing workers and those who depend on manufacturing for their economic and retirement security.

According to a just-released report by the Economic Policy Institute and D.C. law firm Stewart & Stewart, the globe is awash in surplus steel from China, South Korea, India, and elsewhere. With imports both eating up sales and depressing prices, many in the domestic steel industry haven’t made a profit in four years. Why? Because foreign producers are dumping their steel and exporting their economic troubles and unemployment on the backs of American workers.

The alarm bell has sounded. Domestic steel producers and labor have responded with 40 recent antidumping and countervailing duty petitions. These cases show foreign countries are violating our trade laws to undercut domestic producers. Two cases—one on Oil Country Tubular Goods (OCTG) and another on passenger vehicle tires—tell the story. In 2008, the United Steelworkers and domestic producers were successful in a trade case against China on OCTG products that were overwhelming the U.S. market. That hard-fought victory to uphold our trade laws resulted in new investments in domestic OCTG mills and a lot of family-supporting jobs. Workers in Lonestar, Texas and McKeesport, Pennsylvania saw their plants revitalized and given a new lease on life. But then, producers in South Korea—a country with no market of its own for OCTG

products—began ramping up dumped exports into the American market. The result? Layoffs have been announced, including the indefinite shut-down of the McKeesport facility beginning in August.

Workers are mad as hell, turning out in massive numbers to protest our government’s unwillingness to address this assault on our jobs. In fact, over 1,000 people turned out for a “Save our Steel Jobs” rally in June at the Lonestar facility to demand that the Department of Commerce enforce our trade laws and hold South Korea accountable.

The tire case tells a similar story, with the Steelworkers forced to again seek relief in June from damaging imports of passenger and light truck tires coming from China. Similar to the OCTG case, trade enforcement was in place previously, which resulted in a fifty percent drop in the number of Chinese tires imports. Yet, over time, imports more than doubled to 50.8 million tires last year alone, and in the first quarter of 2014 imported Chinese tires surged an additional 24.6 percent. Again, overcapacity and illegal trade is resulting in the loss of American jobs as another nation exports its unemployment to American workers.

Additionally, there are the continuing violations around currency manipulation; a renewed effort by steel outsourcers to allow products made with foreign steel slabs to subvert our “Buy America” laws; and proposals to transfer tax incentives that support manufacturing over to the financial and retail sectors.

We may feel surrounded, but we’re ready to fight. Workers, employers, and their allies are rallying across the country this summer; we continue to file trade cases; high-level and rank-and-file delegations are in Washington to meet with our elected officials; and we continue our outreach into communities and using social media networks to both educate and organize support.

Commit to get involved. Go to www.americanmanufacturing.org/sosjobs and submit a letter of support to your members of Congress regarding the OCTG case. Or, text the word **steel** to the number 91990 to get updates on developments affecting our industry. Manufacturing continues to lag, despite other sectors in the economy gaining steam. But the fight is just beginning. Will you join in it?





Washington Wrap

By Ken Kovack
SOAR Legislative Director
Washington, D.C.

Our Chance to Seize the Moment?



The shock wave, following the June primary election defeat of Representative Eric Cantor (R-Va.) was immediate. What happened? Why did it happen? How could it happen? Cantor was a Tea Party favorite, a soul mate

House member that won his 7th term with 58 percent of the total votes cast. He held the House majority leader position and was considered to be a successor for the Speaker of

the House, a rising star among the powerful elite.

Political pundits offered numerous reasons for the defeat. Among them was the question is Cantor suffering ideological impurities? Could it have been his position on immigration? Amy Kremer, former president of the Tea Party Express, said "Cantor's surprise defeat by an off-the-radar political novice was fueled not by outside group spending but by activism on the ground. The real strength of the movement is on the local level, and this election proves it. There is passion and fire in the belly."

Let us not forget while the Tea Party and their candidates have suffered some defeats, they still seek ideological purity even if it means supporting a candidate to run against one of their own incumbents. These intra-party struggles give us our chance, a better chance, to seize the moment.

The USW and SOAR will work to do whatever it takes to retain our Senate majority and fight like hell to

regain the House of Representatives. We are not now or have ever been a single issue organization legislatively or at the bargaining table. Issues define our goals and our leadership and solidarity helps us reach them.

The November election is fast approaching. Our candidate support depends not on ideological purity but on real life issues, and there are many. Protecting and improving Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Defend and enhance the Affordable Care Act. We need real tax reform, income inequality, good jobs, infrastructure, worker safety and health. We must protect our environment, support renewable energy, affordable housing and fight poverty by passing a living wage law.

We can improve our lives, our union and the nation by electing candidates with a vision for the future that includes everyone. Remember, we win by activism on the ground and getting out the vote!

Congress Must Put a Stop to Social Security Field Office Closings



By Barbara J. Easterling

Just as Baby Boomers are hitting retirement age and applications for Social Security benefits are soaring, budget cuts are forcing the Social Security Administration (SSA) to shut down field offices across the country. In fact, the SSA is in the midst of the largest five-year decline in field offices in its 79-year history. Since 2010, 64 field

offices and 533 mobile offices have been shuttered. At the same time, operating hours and staff levels have been slashed at other locations.

This disturbing trend means waiting longer for an appointment, travelling further for face-to-face service, and difficulty verifying benefits. While the SSA is hoping to transition to an internet-based service model, millions of seniors and people with disabilities are simply not accustomed to accessing benefits information online. Furthermore, online service makes it more difficult for beneficiaries to be sure they're receiving the full benefits they've earned.

It just doesn't make sense to close field offices at a time when demand for their services is at an all-time high.

The SSA is funded through Social Security payroll taxes, just like benefits, and doesn't contribute a penny to the federal debt. In fact, less than one percent of Social Security expenditures go to operating the program.

President Obama has nominated Carolyn W. Colvin, who has served as acting commissioner of the SSA since last year, to serve a six-year term as commissioner. The Alliance for Retired Americans looks forward to working with her to address these issues. It's time for Congress to fully fund the Social Security Administration.



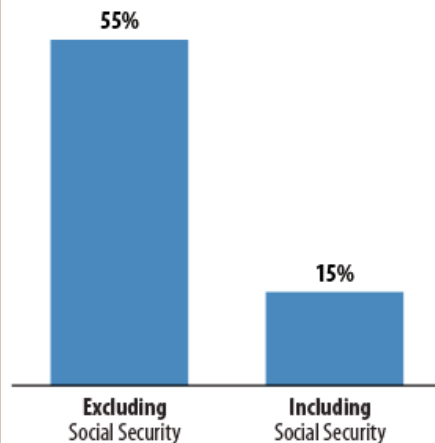
Barbara J. Easterling is president of the Alliance for Retired Americans. She was previously the secretary-treasurer of the Communications Workers of America. For more information, visit www.retiredamericans.org or call 1-800-333-7212.

Ten Reasons to Love Social Security and Medicare

Americans love their Social Security and Medicare yet these earned benefit programs continue to be the focus of attacks like the GOP/Ryan Budget or the endless slew of “bipartisan” commissions like Simpson Bowles or the Gang of Six. Here are 10 reasons why workers, retirees, the disabled and their families love Social Security and Medicare and how these benefits are so vital to middle class Americans.

Social Security Dramatically Cuts Poverty Among Seniors

Percentage of seniors in poverty, Supplemental Poverty Measure, 2012



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities | cbpp.org

1 Social Security benefits are guaranteed.

Unlike savings and investments, you can't outlive your benefits. Social Security benefits are especially vital to women, who live on average longer than men.

2 Social Security benefits are protected from inflation.

Social Security is one of the few retirement programs that provide an automatic annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to beneficiaries. The annual COLA is intended to ensure that retirees, survivors and the disabled maintain their purchasing power.

3 Social Security is a valuable life insurance policy.

Besides old age insurance, for the average wage earner with a family, Social Security insurance benefits are equivalent to a \$476,000 life insurance policy.

4 Social Security provides disability insurance.

Social Security ensures workers will have steady income if they become disabled and can no longer work. The insurance benefits are equivalent to a \$465,000 disability insurance policy.

5 Medicare provides comprehensive health care coverage for seniors.

Since its creation in 1965, Medicare has provided universal, reasonably affordable health care to millions of seniors. Before Medicare, more than half of seniors lacked hospital insurance. Today, virtually all people ages 65 and over are covered by Medicare.

6 Medicare provides free preventive health screenings.

Seniors do not have to pay for Mammograms, Diabetes or Cancer screenings thanks to new provisions in the Affordable Care Act.

7 Social Security has a \$2.7 trillion surplus.

Since 1982, Social Security has maintained a budget surplus. Social Security remains strong, despite the lingering effects of the recession, and will be able to pay full benefits for the next 25 years—until 2036. Despite the gloom and doom rhetoric of those who want to cut Social Security to balance the budget, the program continues to run an annual surplus.

8 Medicare's costs rise slower than private insurance.

Medicare spending per beneficiary rose more than 400 percent from 1969 to 2009 but inflation-adjusted premiums on private health insurance rose more than 700 percent. Although high healthcare costs system-wide affect Medicare, it's clear we have a health care problem, not a Medicare problem.

9 Social Security's administrative costs are low.

Less than one percent of Social Security's budget goes to administrative costs. In a privatized system, commissions and fees could easily burn up as much as 15 cents out of every dollar of a worker's annual investment as they do in some countries with privatized systems.

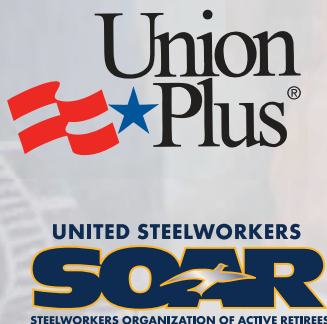
10 Social Security and Medicare are social insurance programs.

Perhaps one of the biggest reasons why Social Security and Medicare are universally cherished is that in return for the contributions to these programs we make during our working years, we receive guaranteed retirement, disability or survivor benefits.



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