

Active and retired Steelworkers joined forces at the 2015 Rapid Response and Legislative Conference to get educated, empowered and engaged in the critical issues facing our union. For three days in April, over 600 Steelworkers—including almost 20 SOAR members—heard from legislative leaders, attended workshops, conducted meetings on Capitol Hill and more.

Pairing Up to Tackle Legislative Challenges

“It’s critical that the experience and voices of our SOAR members are a core part of our union’s legislative work. Our retirees know the issues. They’ve lived through NAFTA. They’ve seen our Middle Class shrink. They know the impacts,” notes Jim Centner, Director of SOAR.



The necessity of partnering across generations for our fights was underscored in the workshop, Getting Everyone Involved: Partnering with Other USW Programs to Maximize Our Voices. The panel featured SOAR, Women of Steel, Next Gen and Civil Rights representatives. Through the discussion, the panelists noted how we can work together to ensure that all our voices are utilized to maximize our strength and potential for success.

The final day of the conference, that sentiment was put into action as Steelworkers joined environmentalists, religious activists and other union members for a 1,200-strong rally on Capitol Hill opposing Fast Track.

20 Years of Rapid Response Activism

The final evening of the conference commemorated 20 years of Rapid Response activism within our union. A feature presentation included the memories of active and retired members during the two decade span of the program. Presenters shared stories about the first trainings held for Rapid Response, the

challenges of getting a new program started and even the comparisons in technology considering that Rapid Response information was first shared by fax machine.

From the first days to the present, the core values and need for broad-based involvement remain.

Greg England, former District 9 Rapid Response Coordinator, sums up the need for sustained engagement, “Activism can’t stop when your time in the workplace ends. It just marks a new phase and we have to continue to speak up and speak out.”





BILL PIENTA
SOAR President

Sick and Tired

I am sick and tired of listening to politicians and retirement planners, as well as AARP, maintain a position that people should delay collecting Social Security until age 70 to increase their retirement income. I am also tired of hearing politicians maintain we need to reduce benefits to preserve Social Security. What a crock!

Now I am sure, there is an exception to every rule but can you imagine a country of 70 year old people in the work force. Sure there are jobs you can work until you die. But how many people can perform their jobs if they worked in a paper mill or steel mill at 70? Thirty-five or forty years on those jobs wear the body out. I would not want a 70 year old policeman or fireman answering my distress call. Would you?

Many jobs do not allow us to physically perform them in later years. Working in a coal mine or working as an iron worker at 70 would be extremely difficult for most.

Millions of people have jobs that limit their physical ability to perform them in the later years.

Working longer is not an option for many. Increasing the cut-off for Social Security contributions from wages is. According to IRS figures, approximately 14 million people did not pay Social Security tax on a portion of their income. Eliminating the cap would produce significant income to the fund. Increasing the minimum wage for millions of workers would also generate revenue for the fund. It would be nice to see our elected representatives passing pro-worker legislation to encourage unionization instead of Right to Work for Less Laws. I think that might help to increase wages and an increase in revenue to the fund would be the end result.

I think it is criminal to say that an average Social Security benefit of \$1,331 needs to be reduced. It needs to be increased and I just explained how to pay for it. Now all we need are the right people elected to office that pay attention to us instead of the big corporations.



JIM CENTNER
SOAR Director

Groundhog Day

When I pay close attention to the noise out of our nation's capital about the budget discussions and deficit, it reminds me of the 1993 comedy movie with Bill Murray, "Ground Hog Day." For those of you not familiar with the film; Murray plays Phil an arrogant Pittsburgh TV weatherman who, during an assignment covering the annual Groundhog Day event in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, finds himself in a time loop, repeating the same day again and again.

That is exactly what is happening in the political theater in Washington, D.C. The U.S. House and Senate began releasing and debating their respective budgets with Republicans and some Democrats calling for a return of the "Bowles-Simpson" commission, which would cut critical programs for children, veterans, retirees and disabled workers. This approach plays right into the hands of Wall Street billionaires who have been demonizing earned benefits with the hopes of getting their hands on our retirement income.

If you remember, the Bowles-Simpson commission was created by an executive order in 2010 to find solutions to our nation's mid- and long-term fiscal challenges. In reality, it was nothing but smoke and mirrors. Its members

made a big show of laboring over "painful" choices and considering all options in their quest to bring down the deficit. But the commission's real goal was to reduce the deficit on the backs of the old and the poor, through cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. It was commonly referred to as the "Cat Food Commission" since that's what its victims would have been forced to eat once they got done slashing away at retiree's modest earned benefits which they wrongly titled entitlements.

We need to get Congress out of its "time loop" and back to reality. They need to debate real issues not the comedy of errors of the past. Social Security never contributed one penny to the deficit and should be taken off the table.

Medicare has prevented millions of retirees from falling into bankruptcy. Before the enactment of Medicare, only 50 percent of seniors had health insurance and 35 percent lived in poverty. That was a time when even a minor illness or injury could bankrupt older Americans and their families.

It's time for our representatives to get serious about our nation's debt. They need to pass legislation that creates jobs, stop negotiating trade agreements that takes our manufacturing base off shore and increase taxes on the filthy rich. Social Security and Medicare should be strengthened not destroyed for the benefit of the wealthy. The time has come for them to pay their fair share.



Chapter Calls Meeting Over Provider Feud

The two major health care providers in Western Pennsylvania have been in a two-year battle for dominance in the marketplace. The end result of this feud has been mass confusion and deep concern on whether bills will be paid. While these two giants slug it out, our members are very confused on whether their physicians, hospitals and testing facilities are “in-network” or out-of-network.” As you all know, an “out-of-network” provider places a huge financial burden on the family budget.

Al Brezezinski, president of Chapter 10-8 in Leechburg, Pa. called a meeting to try to clear up some of the confusion on this issue. Over 80 retirees showed up at USW Local 1138’s union hall the morning of March 30, 2015 to get some answers. Wayne Donato, USW Servicing Representative was there to provide some guidance. He walked those in attendance through a Consent Decree that the two health providers agreed to earlier

this year. That document outlined who and what facilities would be covered as in-network for this group of retirees. He also cautioned them to protect themselves they should also ask every time they make a doctor’s or medical appointment, to ask that provider, if they accept their insurance coverage as in-network to eliminate any surprises down the road.

The retirees also heard from SOAR Director Jim Centner. He discussed why it’s important to continue to be connected to the union in their retirement. He also discussed the real harm to Social Security and Medicare if the budget Bill the Republican led House of Representatives recently passed became law. He cautioned our members “to pay very close attention to the budget discussions in Washington, D.C. ... They have your benefits in their sights and they want to cut them to give tax breaks to those on top and big corporations.”

District 10 staff representative Wayne Donato discussing insurance issues with Chapter 10-8 members and Local 1138 retirees.




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USW/SOAR Lobby Indiana State Reps

Indianapolis, Ind.— Over 30 SOAR activists were among the more than 400 active and retired Steelworkers participating in the annual USW District 7 Lobby Day on March 16, 2015. The lobbyists participated in a morning session, conducted by District Director Mike Millsap and Rapid Response Coordinator Jerome Davison, which prepared them to discuss their issues of concern with the elected representatives of the General Assembly.

The delegation fanned out through the State Capital in Indianapolis. They met with their representatives and voiced their concerns about the continuing attacks out of the state capital on the working class and poor. They voiced their strong opposition to Indiana's Right to Work law and lobbied vigorously to get it overturned.

"This was a great event," stated Victor Storino from Chapter 31-9, "...they knew we were here!"

Hey Chicago Auto Show: Oil Worker Safety Matters

District 7 SOAR members from six chapters in Illinois and Indiana organized a day of action at the Chicago auto show February 21, 2015; to call attention to the dangerous working conditions our striking members deal with in the oil industry. The t-shirts said it all, "Hey BP, Safety Matters" on the front and, "SOAR Supports BP Oil Workers" on the back.

The District's SOAR members have been working closely with USW Local 7-1 at the Whiting BP refinery since the strike began. They designed a leaflet that explained why plant safety is not only important to the workers, but to the communities in the



area. The flyers were well received and got a great response from workers and the huge crowd at the show. Many of the show's attendees asked for leaflets so they could share them with friends and neighbors.

However, the SOAR members were not treated as well from the oil company's big shots. Judging by the stern and panicked looks from executives at the Shell Oil display booth, they figured their time at the show would be limited, and sure enough, a short time

later, security kick our folks out. Fortunately, the guards were sympathetic to our cause, as soon as our members were out of sight of the executives; the security guards told them to walk slower so more of the crowd could see them.

It was a good day! Our members passed out several hundred leaflets and talked to a lot of people. BP knew they were there, other oil companies knew they were there and they made it clear, "One Day Longer, One Day Stronger!"



District 7's Newest SOAR Chapter

You might say District 7's newest SOAR chapter was born in fire. Chapter 7-PC-6 burst on to the scene in full fight-back mode; offering unified strike support for their home Local, USW 7-1 at the BP Oil Refinery in Whiting, Ind.

On March 25, 2015, District 7 Executive Board Member Scott Marshall journeyed to Whiting to present our newest chapter with their official charter. As was fitting, they gathered at the plant gate where Chapter President, Ed Hamilton, Vice President, Mike Hill, and their members often staff the picket line in support of the striking members.

The new chapter sets the standard in their support and has been instrumental in building support for the strike from other chapters and SOAR members from across the District.

The strike rat was on hand and joined in the presentation.

Special thanks to SOAR Executive Board Member, Bill Gibbons and District 7 SOAR Coordinator Jerry Brooms Jr., who worked closely with the local union and retirees to get the chapter off the ground.



INSPIRING

by William Gibbons, SOAR Executive Board Member

While there are many important issues to write about, including the recent planning by the Republicans to attack and dismantle Medicare and Social Security, I feel it's important to write about the dedication and activities of our SOAR leaders and members in District 7.

As you all know, our Union has been engaged in tough bargaining and an unfair labor practice strike at a number of oil/chemical companies across the country. One of these facilities is the BP Refinery in Whiting, Indiana, represented by USW Local 7-1. They have been on strike since early February.

A call to action for SOAR members was made by SOAR Chapter 7-PC-6, President, Ed Hamilton, also known as "Bone." Ed and his wife, Kate, worked tirelessly to aid the strikers. They manned the picket line on numerous occasions picketing all night along with other officers, members of their chapter and other SOAR members from across the district. In addition to their picket duty, they also coordinated the effort to collect donations and fire wood to provide some comfort to our members picketing in one of the coldest Februarys on record. District 7 SOAR Executive Board member Scott Marshall, Chapter 31-9 Officer Emeritus, Vic Storino and members of his chapter were frequent visitors to picket lines to lend their support to Chapter 7-PC-6 efforts.

On March 19, 2015 the union sponsored a rally and demonstration in front of the BP offices in Chicago, Ill. SOAR members from across the district were among the hundreds on hand to show their support. Ninety Seven year old Bea Lumpkin from Chapter 31-9, and Dan and Phyllis Frost from Chapter 31-5 were among the many SOAR members in attendance.

I found this whole experience very inspiring and what a great example by all of these individuals and so many others not named that joined the picket lines, made contributions and engaged in other activities on behalf of SOAR and our members. I truly apologize for not being able to mention everyone's name. But please know this, your contributions were noted and appreciated by the striking members and our union.



SENIORS' VOTE Let's Make It Count



Doug Macpherson, National Coordinator

Canada has a growing and aging population. In 2014 there were more than six million Canadians aged 65 or older representing 15.6 percent of the population. By 2030, seniors will number more than nine million and make up about 25 percent of the population.

Health Care Reform

At a time when Canada needs a national strategy and leadership on health and aging, we find the government moving away from funding our cherished national, universal health-care system, which was based solely on need and not how much money one had.

At one time the envy of the world, Canada's health-care system is slowly being eroded and privatized. March 31, 2015 marked the one-year anniversary of the DEATH OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH ACCORD. This article should be edged in black to commemorate that date in 2014 when the federal government allowed the 10-year health accord to expire and refused appeals by provincial and territorial leaders and many in the health community to renegotiate an accord for the next 10 years to provide national standards and secure funding going forward.

Kay Noonan Vice President SOAR Chapter 3-14 and Fred Girling Recording Secretary Chapter 3-14 join with Canadians across Canada to mourn the death of the health accord on March 31, with others in Surrey BC.



Instead the Conservative government left it open for private clinics and even some hospitals to begin charging for services on the pretext that the money is just not in the system.

Recent studies by the C.D. Howe Institute and the Wellesley Institute confirm that a government-funded national pharmacare program would ultimately be more cost-effective than our current system. They conclude over time that the increase in government spending would be more than offset by savings to patients, employers and individuals who are obliged to purchase stand-alone private drug coverage. If implemented, the program would save the Canadian health-care system several billions of dollars annually, money that could be reinvested in much-needed services for homecare, dementia care, etc. Canada remains one of the few G7 nations that do not have a national dementia strategy.

We need federal leadership in health care. The federal government must work with the provinces and territories to create a national pharmacare plan with the ultimate goal of eliminating copayments and deductibles.

We need the federal government that will work with the provinces to fund and set standards to improve access, affordability and quality of post-acute and chronic care; in the home and in the community, with particular focus on dementia care.

Pension Reform

We need federal leadership in pension reform to ensure that people do not outlive their savings. We need to expand and increase the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) as proposed by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), restore the Old

Age Security (OAS) eligibility age to 65 from 67, increase the earnings exemption for Guaranteed Income Security (GIS) and increase the amount of OAS and GIS for low-income Canadians.

Support for Seniors

Seniors call for action on the following:

- ▶ Increase financial support and provide workplace protections for caregivers.
- ▶ Work with provinces to ensure every Canadian has access to housing appropriate to need, including affordable and supportive housing, and assisted living services.
- ▶ Work with provinces to reform the tax code in a way that addresses income inequality.

More and more seniors are falling below the poverty line. Seniors are also concerned that too many of our children and grandchildren are facing precarious work and a bleak financial future.

It does not need to be this way. Seniors vote in greater numbers than other demographic groups. Seniors are the most committed voters—65 percent or more of older voters turn out to vote regularly, so there is an opportunity this October for us as seniors to tell the politicians what we want from future federal and provincial governments.

Recently, representatives of national and regional senior organizations, retirees, professional and advocacy groups called Seniors Vote have agreed to work collaboratively on issues that affect seniors. We demand better, not only for ourselves but for future generations coming behind us.

We can do better. It is time for real change. Seniors vote, let's make it count.

Should Employers Share Their Profits With Their Employees?

by Ken Munro, Chapter 6-1

Should employers share their profits with their employees? If the employers can enhance the lives of their employees, don't the employers have a moral obligation to share their wealth? After all, a happy employee is a productive employee. One who is less likely to book off sick, less likely to steal!

It just makes good economic sense.

But more importantly, by not sharing their profits, is it not some form of abuse?

Since neglect is a form of abuse, isn't the employer guilty of such abuse when he could share his profits but refuses?

If the employer can abuse his power by not enhancing the lives of his workers, what other forms of abuse should be tolerated?

Should the employer, for example, be allowed to use derogatory names that would be an insult to his employees' sex, faith, skin colour, sexual orientation, etc?

Abuse is abuse.

S.O.S. A Better Mental Health System

by Ken Munro, Chapter 6-1

The mental health system is broken and in need of great repair.

There really is no place, no "home" that truly empowers those suffering from mental health illnesses. This is especially hurtful for seniors.

Most agencies cater to the marginalized. Those with very little confidence. It's difficult to maintain any self worth when one is only a step away from living on the street.

Some, who fight for patients' rights and needs, are a radical breed who believe mental illnesses are a myth. Or, want you to adopt their terminology. They fight suppression but now become the suppressors. They believe one is better in a prison than a hospital.

Some mental health care attempts to address the patients' brain chemistry by popping tiny pills to neutralize the patients' pain. Though meds have a place in recovery, they are a "bandage solution to a cancer tumour."

Meds do not give wisdom to patients. Only people who can empathize with the hurting do.

Meds do not give patients purpose. Only people who are compassionate to the needs of the patients do.

Meds do not love patients. Only people with caring hearts do.

Mental health care must address the entire needs of the patients and not just the illnesses. The system must address things like faith, hope, love, a sense of purpose, etc. Patients have very low self esteem. And these values have a positive effect on the patients' illnesses.

But the mental health system often is reluctant to do this: it would interfere with the use of meds since the drug companies sponsor much of the research.

Dr. Jerome Frank, an American psychiatrist, once said that "any treatment that does not minister to the human spirit is grossly deficient."

HISTORY OF WORK

Now 90 years old, labour activist Daniel McNeil has no plans to quit fighting for workers' rights and safety.

by Joe Thomson

WHILE IT MAY SOUND LIKE A TROPE ripped from the most uninspired Canadiana, 90-year-old labour activist Daniel McNeil has indeed come a long way since working the coal mines of Cape Breton. At 16, McNeil began work in the same coal mine where his father was killed eight years earlier. It was a way of life back then, he says. There were several mines in the area, and it

was a given that young men would start their first job in one of them. Close to eight decades later, McNeil remains taciturn on the subject of his father's death. When asked if he was afraid to work in the same mine where his father died, McNeil echoes the stoicism that is deeply ingrained in many men of his generation. "No, no," he says. "Look everyone gets almost killed in the mine, one way or another. You survive it, and it's just another miracle. I've had some very close calls like everybody else in the coalmine but I survived."

While it's easy to forget now, unhealthy and immediately dangerous workplaces like those coal mines were once considered just a part of life. Workers today can thank people like McNeil that such working environments are no longer the norm. As stoic as he is on the subject, McNeil's early experiences proved to him that, above all else, unions are an important part of industrial life—workers need them to protect their safety. "The big thing with unions is safety first," McNeil says. "Inspections of plants and the working conditions? Well, that doesn't get done where there's no union."

McNeil first became involved with union advocacy when he moved to Toronto at age 27 to work as a labourer at Stelco's Swansea plant. While at Stelco he became politically active through the United Steelworkers, serving on the union's political action committee and, as a lifetime New Democrat, eventually managed several campaigns for candidates at the provincial and federal level. Political icon Tommy Douglas, the man who introduced universal health care to Canada, knew him by name, something McNeil humbly points out as an afterthought, preferring to attribute it to Douglas' generosity. "He was quite a guy," McNeil says.

Before he officially retired in 1984, McNeil held just about every position a person can in the union—except for financial secretary. ("I stayed away from the money," he quips.) Even today, he has continued to work tirelessly for labour rights, actively participating as a member of the Ontario Health Coalition and the National Seniors Citizens Coalition. He was a founding member of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada, and was appointed an emeritus board member of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees with which he is still active.

"We've tried to get across to retirees, as well as the working people," he says, "that there's still quite a lack of social justice out there." And McNeil firmly believes that any time institutions are not doing what's best for the people they are behaving unjustly. "It's funny, you can't get it across to everybody, but I just think unions and labour parties are better for the people." And it's that straightforward sentiment that has led him to fight for those that produce in this country—an idea that often gets muddled by ideology and the type of politics that preys on the fears and prejudices of the working class.

McNeil has watched Canada slowly become agnostic on the issue of labour, a product of half a century of eroding union culture, or at the very least an erosion of the recognition that a strong, organized labour force is an essential right for citizens. McNeil says he understands the changing nature of the global market and the pressure it puts on companies to compete for cheap labour, but still urges service and part-time workers in this changing economy to organize. "I think there's a big difference today and I don't know why it is," he reflects. McNeil cites World War II and the immediacy of its tragedies as an impetus for his generation to get organized and protect their rights with the collective energy that the war inspired in them. "People came back and realized, you've got to get organized." Even now, you can still hear the excitement in his voice rise when he speaks about getting organized—and why wouldn't he be? McNeil has seen Canadian workers go from rioting over inhumane working conditions in the 1930s to having unprecedented rights and a seat at the bargaining table. He has seen the rise and the backslide and he believes it will get better.

His wife, Ruth, trumpets his accomplishments endlessly when I speak with her, showing off the type of fierce loyalty that 65 years of marriage will create. She makes sure I mention he was given the Union Pioneer Award from the USW, and then tells me why Dan continues to inspire her. "He really believes in what he's doing and he promotes it all the time," she says, "for the good will of people that are left by the wayside. He's always fought for the underdog and I admire that in him. I admire his persistence."

From the editor: Dan joined SOAR as a Charter Member in 1985 and has served as District 6 Executive Board Member. He was instrumental in the creation of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) and served as 1st Vice President and President. He recently stepped down from the Presidency and now holds the position of Immediate Past President.

Dan relinquished his position as District 6 Board Member upon his appointment as Emeritus Member of the Board in 2011. In 2012, Dan received the Lynn Williams Award. This award was created by a resolution passed at the 2011 International SOAR Conference. It is awarded to a SOAR member who demonstrates exemplary leadership and commitment to the mandate of SOAR. It is the highest tribute a member can receive from the International Executive Board.



Fair Trade –Not FREE Trade!

The global economy connects us to markets all over the world, but it also poses a challenge to our ability to make trade fair. Many of America's chief trading partners, using various deceptive and unethical methods, have manipulated the global economy to disadvantage workers everywhere, often leading to crises for American families simply trying to make a living.

Certainly, if we're all playing by the same rules, we'd have more parity. The U.S. trade deficit would not be climbing, and our economy would be on the rebound, creating jobs instead of offshoring them. But often weak economic and environmental standards in the countries we trade with challenges the notion that trade works for everyone. By allowing trade cheats to skate, we're encouraging a global race to the bottom in wages and quality of life. That's not a race America's workers want to win.

► **When trade is distorted, jobs are lost.**

Japan ships 1.5 million vehicles to the U.S. annually, while we ship 20,000 to Japan. Over 900,000 U.S. jobs were lost in 2013 due to the trade deficit with them.

► **When the environment is exploited, our health is at risk.**

As much as 25 percent of the particulate matter air pollution over Los Angeles can be traced back to China.

And in China, 250,000 people will die prematurely due to high levels of unchecked industrial air pollution.

► **When workers are viewed as disposable, poverty runs rampant.**

The average manufacturing worker earns just \$100 a month in Vietnam. The United States is currently negotiating a trade deal that includes the Vietnamese government, but improved labor standards will be incredibly difficult to enforce there.

Continuing down the path of "free trade" only exacerbates a system that isn't working for workers.

Join us, instead, to work for fair trade and full enforcement of our trade laws.

<http://goo.gl/7Vg8Pm>



SOAR Chapter 34-2 Honored



The Greater Madison County Federation of Labor presented the Karen Brown Heart of the Community Award to our Granite City SOAR Chapter 34-2 at their 26th annual awards dinner March 26, 2015.

Dennis Barker accepted the award on the chapters behalf and stated he "was proud to accept the award for our SOAR Chapter in recognition of our membership's continued commitment in giving back to our community."

Pictured left to right: SOAR members Jim Childers, Marlene Carey, Dennis Barker; Gene Hudson, United Way Labor Liaison; Dean Webb, President Greater Madison County Federation of Labor; and Roz Sherman-Voellinger, Greater St. Louis United Way Labor Liaison.



Washington Wrap

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

The Income Gap



In 2013, the CEO-to-worker pay ratio was 331:1 and the CEO-to-minimum-wage-worker pay ratio was 774:1. America is supposed to be the land of opportunity, a country where hard work and playing by the rules would provide working families a middle-class

standard of living. But in recent decades, corporate CEOs have been taking a greater share of the economic pie, while wages have stagnated and unemployment remains high.

Highly paid CEOs of low-wage employers are fueling this growing economic inequality. In 2013, CEOs of the Standard & Poor's (S&P) 500 Index companies received, on average, \$11.7 million in total compensation, according to the AFL-CIO's analysis of available data from 350 companies.

Today's ratio of CEO-to-worker pay is simply unconscionable. While CEO pay remains in the stratosphere, production and nonsupervisory workers took home only \$35,239 on average in 2013, and a full-time worker making the federal minimum wage earned only \$15,080.

Even as companies argue that they can't afford to raise wages, the nation's largest companies are earning higher profits per employee than they did five years ago. In 2013, the S&P 500 Index companies earned \$41,249 in profits per employee, a 38 percent increase.

It doesn't have to be this way. Politicians should raise the minimum wage.



Carol Simpson Cartoons © 2005

The Ownership Society

Corporations should pay their employees a living wage. And workers should have a collective voice on the job to demand their fair share.

Currently, United States income inequality ranks around the 30th percentile globally; meaning 70 percent of other countries have more equal income distribution than the U.S.A. Income inequality must be reversed. **Working America needs a substantial wage increase.**

Consider the following examples from the AFL-CIO Pay Watch. In 2013 the average workers hourly wage was \$16.94 the average CEO made 331 times more than the average worker.

In 2014, Michael T. Duke, CEO, WALMART, received a compensation package of \$5,643, 677, 160 times the average worker's pay. If the minimum wage increase would have kept pace with productivity gains since 1968 the minimum wage would be \$18.30. If it would have kept pace with the income gains of the top one percent, the minimum wage would be \$31.45.

Why has this been allowed to happen? Alan Krueger, former economic advisor to President Obama, stated that inequality in incomes is creating an unhealthy division in opportunities and is unhealthy to our

economic growth. A report by the non-partisan Congressional Budget office offers readers a comparison of how tax cuts have contributed substantially to income growth of the top 1 percent wage earners and very little to the bottom 20 percent. Tax reform cries out for equitable growth.

The Republican passed budget is a disaster. Eliminating the Affordable Care Act, changing Medicare as we know it into a more costly voucher program is reprehensible. Congress must renew the Older Americans Act and the Elders Justice Act (EJA is part of the Affordable Care Act). Other safety net programs are also at risk. Our voices must be raised and heard in the Congress, including tax reform that will be fair and equitable.

We must take every opportunity to organize new members into SOAR. It is not a choice, it is a necessity. More voices, more power. All retirees, non-members included, have so much to lose if Medicare vouchers become law and Social Security benefit calculations are changed. The difference in dues of one dollar a month compared to losses of SS income and rising Medicare care costs should be a sufficient cause to join SOAR. Too much is at risk to consider otherwise.

National Institute on Retirement Security's Newest Report Shows Large Deficiency in Retirement Savings

By Barbara J. Easterling

A recent report from the National Institute on Retirement Security (<http://tinyurl.com/okcuygf>) computes the dwindling retirement savings in the

U.S. The report states that the median retirement account balance for the average working household is only \$2,500. Along with that, the median retirement account balance for a near-retirement household is \$14,500.

In addition, 62 percent of working households between the ages of 55-64 will be unable to maintain anything close to the same standard of living they currently have in retirement, because their retirement savings are less than one times their annual income.

Even if we calculate retirement savings in an overly generous manner by including the entire households' net worth, 66 percent of these working households are still determined to fall below the conservative retirement savings target, based on their current income and working until 67.

The good news is that public policy can play a major role in securing retirement savings for working households

across America. By strengthening and expanding Social Security, increasing access to low-cost, high-quality retirement plans, and helping low income workers and families save more money, we can make sure that hard-working Americans are getting the dignified retirement they deserve. If Social Security is strengthened, it will help increase earned benefits for even the most vulnerable households.

This report shows us that we need to continue fighting for policies that allow workers to save more and ensure that the earned benefits for which have been working their entire lives are protected. But it all starts with good jobs. After all, you can't save what you don't earn!

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.



SOAR Director Visits Chapter 23-9 in Martins Ferry, Ohio

The chapter invited Jim Centner, SOAR Director to attend their meeting on April 1, 2015. Director Centner updated the over 50 members in attendance on the status of the organization and discussed the continuing saga of our do nothing Congress in Washington. John Saunders, who serves as a trustee on the retirees VEBA (Voluntary Employee Benefit Association) updated them on the status of the fund and discussed the challenges the trustees face in securing the best benefits for our members, while ensuring the fund's ability to sustain itself over the long haul.

Editors note: Shortly before going to press, long time Chapter President, Ron Gildow, pictured here passed away April 15, 2015. Ron was a dedicated union/retiree activist and will be missed by all who knew him.



Pictured left to right: Ross Campbell, chapter treasurer; Ron Gildow, president; Ben Blair, recording secretary; Ron Holzopf, trustee; Carl Brown, trustee; Frank Papini, vice president and Jim Centner, director.