

Connection

Billy's Banter

Why Seniors Should Care About The Minimum Wage



I recently had a conversation regarding the federal minimum wage and a person told me that an increase in the wage would impact me by increasing the cost of goods I may purchase. So, I decided to do a little math to see if there was a benefit for me, if the federal minimum wage increased to \$10 per hour from the present \$7.25.

Of the estimated 75.3 million workers in the U.S., 3.53 million of them receive the minimum wage. I realize all of them do not work 40 hours per week, but for the sake of this discussion, let's assume they do.

If you are a senior who holds one of these minimum wage jobs, the benefit is obvious. For others, a \$10 minimum wage represents an additional \$13.64 weekly joint contribution to the Social Security Trust Fund. Multiply that number by 52 weeks, times the number of minimum wage workers and I can find \$2.5 billion reasons annually why seniors should be pushing for an increase in the minimum wage.

The purpose of this message is not to make seniors look greedy but to show how issues that we may think have no direct impact on us really do. We are all in this together; whether we realize it or not. Minimum wage, trade agreements, balancing federal budgets and many other issues impact ALL of us, some directly and some indirectly. Seniors must get involved and stay involved.

Bill Pienta, SOAR President

District 12



SOAR Chapter 38-1 had their regular bi-monthly meeting and heard from an outstanding speaker from Providence Adult Day Health Center. He explained the causes and what can be done for those with dementia or Alzheimers still living at home. The center cares for these people six hours each day; usually one or more times a week, giving the caregiver a break.

This was one of our largest regular meetings to date and it was a one-hour presentation. I highly suggest a similar program for all of our chapters. The average age of our members is late 70's.

Our USW Local 338 also funded us again with a gift of \$1,000, for which we are grateful. We are developing plans how to best utilize this donation. Our chapter also signed cards for the Rapid Response action to stop Fast-Track on the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Cathy Gunderson, President SOAR 38-1

Beneficiaries Celebrate the New Year with a COLA



Many people ring in the new year with champagne. People who receive Social Security or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) get to ring it in with a COLA. For 2014, more than 60 million Americans will get a 1.5 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in their monthly benefit payments.

The 1.5 percent increase begins with benefits for more than 57 million Social Security beneficiaries in January 2014, and payments to more than eight million SSI recipients in late December 2013.

Some other changes that take effect in January of each year are based on the increase in average wages. For example, the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security payroll tax will increase to \$117,000, up from \$113,700. Of the estimated 165 million workers who will pay Social Security taxes in 2014, about 10 million will pay higher taxes as a result.

Get Benefit Verification Online

This time of year, a lot of people need proof of their income. People can use their cost-of-living adjustment notice or their SSA-1099 to verify their benefit income. But if they have lost their documentation and need proof of income, it's easy to get a benefit verification letter at our website.

This letter is sometimes called a "budget letter," a "benefits letter," a "proof of income letter" or a "proof of award letter."

A benefit verification letter can be used to prove income or benefits if someone is applying for a loan or mortgage, needs housing assistance or other state or local benefits, or needs to prove retirement or disability status, Medicare health insurance coverage or age to a third party. Someone can instantly obtain and print their benefit verification letter by taking a few minutes to create an online [my Social Security](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount) at www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount.

Congressional Testimony about Disability Appeals



Glenn Sklar, Deputy Commissioner for Disability Adjudication and Review, testified before Congress about Social Security's efforts to improve the management of the disability appeals process.

"Over 50 years ago, Congress created the disability program to help some of our most vulnerable citizens," Sklar said. "We thank you for your interest in helping us improve our service and ensure ongoing confidence in our programs. We also ask for your support for the President's budget request, which will provide us with funding to continue to improve our hearings process, to improve the integrity of our disability programs, and to reduce improper payments. With past support from Congress, we

have made progress in both the administrative and program integrity arenas, and we all benefit if that progress is not lost."

SOAR Chapter Connection

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for the next issue is March 25



Upcoming Events

Feb 10-11 Good Jobs Green
Jobs Conference

Feb 10-12; Rapid Response
Conference

March 2-3 SOAR Executive
Board meets

April 28-May 1 Alliance for
Retired Americans 2014
National Membership
Convention

August 8-9 International
SOAR Conference

August 11-14 United
Steelworkers Convention

The McNeil Report

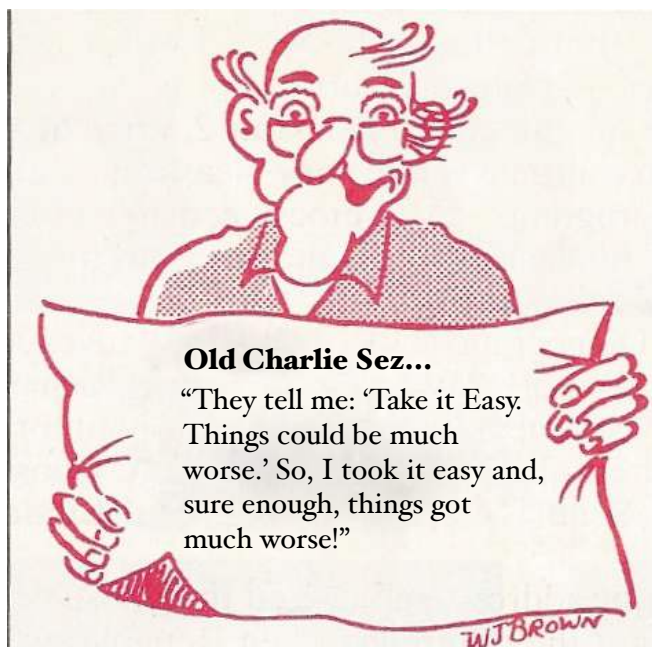
Ruth and I were sitting on the couch watching TV. We were watching a program about how to prepare in case of death. I said, "Honey, I want you to promise me, that if there ever comes a time that I am dependent on just machines and bottled fluid, that you'll make sure to put an end to it." "No problem hun," she said, and then promptly got up, turned off the TV, and poured my beer down the drain.

From the Editor

- Don't forget that this newsletter is online at <http://www.usw.org/resources/soar/news?id=0003>
- Many thanks to those who send in articles and photos. Don't forget that any SOAR member can contribute an article. Please share this newsletter with your chapter members. It's my opinion that if you want someone to read your article, you will keep it as short as you can.
- You don't have to have a computer or typewriter to send us an article. See my mailing address on the left. Tell us what your chapter is doing.
- Do a Google search for Charlie Averill where you will find links to my blog, Soundcloud, Facebook page, twitter account, Youtube videos and images. There's also a Facebook page for SOAR. More SOAR Photos can be found here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usw>

Charlie Averill, Secretary/Treasurer and Editor



Report from the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)



At the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM) we talk a lot about trade, often focusing on China to explain how severely unbalanced trade causes really big economic problems. But for a moment, let's review how trade looks between the U.S. and Canada so our brothers and sisters across the continent can see a more rational trade arrangement. It's not perfect, by any means, but it's definitely not a case of David (U.S.) and Goliath (China). Here's a look at the most recent data.

Canada bought more U.S. goods than any other country in 2012, making \$292 billion in purchases. Big sellers were vehicles, machinery, oil and natural gas, and agricultural products like fresh fruit and veggies. At the same time, Canadian exports of goods to the U.S. were \$324 billion and included crude oil and natural gas, vehicles, machinery, and agricultural products like snack foods and vegetable oils. If you subtract what the U.S. bought by what it sold, you have a trade "surplus" in Canada and a trade "deficit" in the U.S. of \$32 Billion. Canada was the second largest goods supplier to the U.S. in 2012, way behind China.

What's the U.S. trade relationship with China look like? A staggering \$315 billion deficit in 2012 alone, the largest one we've ever had with another country. Trade arrangements like this don't create jobs; they cost them. AAM's goal is to have trade that is mutually beneficial, not unfair trade. And we're moving forward to make trade work for American manufacturing. Join the fight.

For more information, call me at 260-633-1060. Thanks for helping to "Keep it Made in America" www.americanmanufacturing.org

Rachel Bennett Steury, AAM Field Coordinator

District 12

On December 11, members from the Albany SOAR Chapter 12-7 attended the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans picnic in the AFL-CIO building in Portland, Oregon. We made some great contacts with other labor unions and are planning to start an Oregon ARA chapter in our area.

Our chapter canceled the January 10 meeting so the family of a fallen brother could have a memorial at the hall to honor him. Rest in peace, Brother Dave Pecnick.

The USW held a two-day Organizing Training January 14-15 at Local 6163 and Local 7150 union hall in Albany, Oregon. Around 40 brothers and sisters from Oregon and Washington attended. Maria Somma from the USW Organizing Department and Bob Gooch were the instructors. Also present were Chris Youngmark, District 12 assistant director, Ernie Lamoureux, District 12 staff representative, Ron Rodgers, District 12 staff representative and Jim Kilborn, District 12 casual employee. The training was excellent and was well received. The education will be useful in the future.



SOAR was there and will help our active members whenever the need arises.

Garry Steffy, District 12 SOAR Coordinator

From The Director's Desk

Family Values my A**!



The “family values,” espoused by the far right in Washington, is a national disgrace. They want to punish the poor and middle class by reducing their benefits to accommodate one percent of the extremely wealthy with unwarranted tax cuts. They continue to profess that they’re concerned about our Christian values, yet they hypocritically and carelessly dismiss these values when it behooves them, philosophically, to disregard.

Out of one side of their mouth, the far right talks about the importance of education; and the need for technology and research. Out of the other side they promote cuts in the very funds and programs needed to educate our nation’s youth. They sanctimoniously decry the condition of our failing health care system while cutting funds from Medicaid programs. At the same time, they continue to subsidize insurers and protect the profits of pharmaceutical companies.

It is a whacky world we live in!

We are still struggling to recover from the financial crisis that began over five years ago. Instead of focusing on passing legislation to help create jobs, the House of Representatives have voted 46 times to either repeal or defund the Affordable Care Act (ACA), all unsuccessfully.

If “family values” are indeed important to our elected officials, it is time for them to legislate that way. The ACA should be strengthened not unfunded; Social Security benefits should be enhanced not cut and Medicare should be expanded not turned into a voucher system. The best way to ensure “family values” is to make sure everyone who wants a job, has one. It’s time for our elected representatives in Washington to start to face the many problems facing our country and to stop the ongoing tax cuts for their wealthy friends.

Jim Centner, SOAR Director

District 1

I worked for Republic and LTV Steel for 43 years. I started in general labor and when I retired in 1995, I was a heater. I enjoyed a few dinners on the company during those 43 years, but to receive a VEBA check every year is truly a blessing to me and my family. I want to sincerely thank both the local and national union for a job very well done. Keep up the good work.

Kind regards,

Jimmy L. Read Sr., President SOAR I-979, Cleveland, Ohio

“The lowest form of humanity that exists is a scab, how any so-called respectable trade union can even talk to them is a total disgrace.”

Jack Munro, former president of the IWA.

What's New with Medicaid

by Barbara J. Easterling



Medicaid is a social safety net program that provides health coverage for low-income pregnant women, children, the disabled and seniors. About 67 million people receive Medicaid benefits, including:

- 32 million children
- 19 million women 18 to 64 years old
- 11 million disabled



Beginning in 2014, the Affordable Care Act provides for the expansion of the Medicaid program to include coverage of individuals not previously covered, such as low-income males, and raises the income eligibility to include individuals with incomes up to 133% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$15,281.70 for individuals and \$31,321.50 for a family of four; these figures are expected to rise slightly this spring). Not all states have agreed to expand their Medicaid program.

Medicaid is the largest payer of nursing home and home care services, paying 62% of these services. Seniors with annual incomes up to \$25,956 for an individual, or \$38,952 for couples, may qualify to receive these benefits. The Medicaid program provides assistance with cost-sharing for low-income seniors, through the Medicare Savings Program (MSP). Under this program, Medicare beneficiaries with limited incomes may be eligible for assistance paying their Part B premiums of \$104.90 per month.

The Paul Ryan House Republican budget “block grants” Medicaid and slashes its funding by \$1.4 trillion. Currently, the Medicaid program pays for all medically-necessary services. Under a block grant program, states would receive a fixed amount, making it difficult for them to continue to offer needed benefits. States would most likely change eligibility or increase cost sharing for individuals.

Barbara J. Easterling is president of the Alliance for Retired Americans.



- **Workers Facing Layoff At Regina Steel Mill Given One-Week Reprieve** – District 3
Improved availability of rail cars has led to a one-week delay in implementation of a potential layoff affecting hundreds of workers at a Regina steel mill.
- **Thirty-Two Arrested at a LaGuardia Rally for Higher Wages**– District 4
Around thirty-two people were arrested on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, including Representative Charles Rangel and nine New York City Council members, when they blocked a bridge to LaGuardia Airport during a rally for livable wages and an MLK Day paid holiday.
- **District 2 publishes a really good and informative newsletter** that can be seen/downloaded from the District 2 web site. If you know a member that does not receive this newsletter but would like to be included, please have them send us their name, address, phone number, local union number and, of course, their email address; and we will gladly update our distribution list for the next electronic mailing. This contact information can be sent to Art Kroll, Editor “District 2 NEWS” at d2@usw.org

Lynn Williams Award Presented in Canada



Photo left to right: Doug MacPherson, Canadian coordinator; Joyce Cruickshank; Harry Hynd, SOAR vice president

Joyce Cruickshank of SOAR Chapter 6-80 received the third annual *Lynn Williams Award for Service*, for her work with labor and community services, as well as her volunteer work in the community of Kitchener-Waterloo and her ongoing work with SOAR Chapter 6-80 and the Kitchener-Waterloo Area Council of the Congress of Union Retirees (CURC), as well as the Ontario Federation of Union Retirees (OFUR).

Congratulations Joyce, you have set a high standard for the award. The award was created in 2010 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the creation of SOAR in 1985 by International President Lynn Williams. The award is the highest tribute a member can receive from SOAR. This Canadian award is presented annually to a SOAR nominee who has demonstrated exemplary leadership in their community and commitment to the mandate of SOAR.

District 8

West Virginia Alliance for Retired Americans



Officers Left to Right: Pres. Virginia Moles (AFSCME) Vice Pres., Ernest Terry (AFSME); Rec. Sec., Betty Totten; (SOAR 23-16) Treas., Clyde McKnight (UMWA)

Cedar Lakes, WV: SOAR was well represented at the annual West Virginia Alliance for Retired Americans Conference held on November 20-21, 2013. Twenty nine of the eighty nine delegates were SOAR members. The theme for the meeting was "Promises Made, Promises Kept," to highlight the fight of retirees from Century Aluminum and Patriot Coal and their struggles to protect their pension and health care benefits.

The group heard from a variety of speakers. Perry Bryant from the WV for Affordable Health Care; Dr. Emily Murphy and nutritionist Kristen McCartney from the WVU Institute of Labor Studies; WVU Professor Jason Kozlowski, who did a presentation on WV Labor History; and WV House of Delegates Majority Whip, Mike Caputo, who is also a member of the United Mine Workers.

SOAR representative, Betty Totten; recording secretary of chapter 23-16, was elected Secretary of the state organization. In addition, SOAR members Karen Gorrell, Larry LaCorte and District 8 Executive Board Member Bob Adkins, serve as Congressional District Vice Presidents.

Bob Adkins, District 8 SOAR Board Member

Christmas Party in Granite City - District 7



On Monday December 9, the Granite City SOAR Chapter 34-2 held our annual Christmas party. The party was well attended by over 200 participants with many state and Madison County elected officials in attendance. Judge Ann Callis, candidate for Illinois Congressional District 13 was also in attendance.

The Christmas party was sponsored and catered by the Becker Law Firm, in the honor and memory of Jane Becker. Jane was a strong supporter of SOAR and she was instrumental in the formation of a USW retiree organization, which became SOAR as we know it today.

The members also took action to name our future annual Christmas parties in the memory of Jane Becker and the name of our annual scholarship, that we award to a graduating High School Senior related to a SOAR member, will also be titled in the future as the "Jane Becker Scholarship."

Thanks to everybody who worked very hard in making our 2013 SOAR Christmas party a huge success.

At our monthly meeting in January, Local 1899's Rapid Response Coordinator, Terry Biggs, was one of our guest speakers on the current Rapid Response "Invest in America" action call. Our members signed 75 cards that will be sent in with the Local 1899 cards.

Dennis Barker, chapter 34-2 Vice President



Chapter 19 Report from Regina, Saskatchewan

In October we were asked to participate in Local 5890's good works project for Habitat Humanity. On October 7, the local union hosted a bar-ba-que with the proceeds going towards building a home for a deserving family. Once again, several of our members turned out, not only to donate but to flip burgers and turn hot dogs for two or three hours. Several hundred people came to support a very worthwhile cause.

On Remembrance Day, we joined representatives from the United Steelworkers to honor our veterans.

On December 10, our chapter held its annual Christmas dinner, where 95 members and invited guests enjoyed a great turkey dinner followed by a 50-50 draw. The draw fetched us over \$150 of much needed cash.

Dennis Carrigan, President Chapter 3-19



Chapter 19 members L-R; John Szala, Dennis Carrigan, Randy Steininger, Lyle Lasher and Al Gibbons.