

Connection

From The Director's Desk

Let's Celebrate the Win



We should all take a minute to revel in the success we recently enjoyed in the political arena. Over the last few years we have railed against the President's inclusion of the Chained CPI in his budget and the divisive politics in Washington. President Obama's removal of the chained Consumer Price Index (CPI), in his 2015 budget proposal to Congress, is a huge win for all of us. The other big win was Congress without the rancor of the past, voting to raise the debt ceiling that allows our nation to pay its bills.

We all should be thrilled that President Obama heard from our members and our allies from across the country and removed the chained CPI cut to Social Security and other programs from his 2015 budget. Our voices were heard. It demonstrates that nationwide, grassroots actions and people-powered politics work. We should applaud the President for doing the right thing; listening and keeping this unjust cut out of his budget proposal. Whether this was a negotiating tactic or not, cuts to Social Security's earned benefits will only serve to increase income inequality and hurt the most vulnerable members of our society.

Raising the debt ceiling was the right thing to do. The constant fighting in Congress over meeting our nation's financial obligations served no purpose. Congress finally realized that the bills must be paid. But this would not have happened if it were not for the grassroots action that you all engaged in. Your voices were heard.

These two victories clearly demonstrate that grassroots activism works! Enjoy the moment. Then, we go back to work, there is a lot more that needs to be done.

Jim Centner, SOAR Director

Notice of Change in Format

Many chapters are unable to have copies of this newsletter sent to all of their members. Several chapters have been sending in photos and articles for the newsletter that are never seen by their members so beginning with our next edition of the Connection, that type of submission will appear in the SOARinAction magazine so all members can view them. This newsletter will contain items that can be shared with members who are able to attend monthly meetings either verbally or by making copies. Articles and/or photos for the SOARinAction magazine should be emailed to SOAR Director, Jim Centner at jcentner@usw.org or mailed to him at SOAR, 60 Blvd. of the Allies, Pittsburgh, PA 15222.

Charlie Averill, SOAR Sec/Treas

Billy's Banter Our Proud History



I recently had the honor of attending the Installation of the Executive Board of our great union in Pittsburgh. During the event, while listening to some of the excellent speakers, I started to think about our history and the many reasons we are so proud of our Union. Also, looking around the room, I could not help noticed the large number of young people in attendance.

After a presentation to the SOAR Executive Board the next day, about a historical demonstration orchestrated by our union, the presenter was amazed to find a number of us were present at that demonstration. It made me think about the obligation and responsibility the older members of our union have in sharing our knowledge and history with the next generation of Steelworkers.

Many members of SOAR have participated in historic events and we need to make sure those stories are told to our younger members. Many of you have been on the front lines bringing attention to unfair trade issues, environmental problems, and human rights issues and many of our newer members would love to hear about your direct involvement regarding these issues. Please make yourself available to speak on these topics. They do not take much preparation because you lived them and all you need to do is tell your story.

Our union has a proud history and many of you were part of it and I feel you have an obligation to share that history with those that did not live it but read about it and would be excited to hear from someone who actually lived it.

Bill Pienta, SOAR President



Lawrence McBrearty Appointed District 5 SOAR Board Member



Lawrence McBrearty traces his union roots to the last historic campaign of the late 1950's and 60's to represent workers at the Gaspé Copper mine in Murdochville, Quebec.

He was only 19 years old when he got involved in that bitter struggle. He was quickly elected to the local union executive and, in 1970, was elected president of Local 6086. He held the position until he was appointed to the Steelworkers' staff in 1974. As a staff representative, he served Steelworker members on the North Shore of Quebec, the Gaspé Peninsula, Madeleine Islands, Labrador and Newfoundland.

In 1991, McBrearty was the Quebec Director and following that the National Director of Canada until his retirement in 2001.

He was then appointed a SOAR Coordinator in district 5 and this year was appointed SOAR Executive Board member in district five after the retirement of Bob Saumure.

Emeritus Report – Dan McNeil



The calendar says it is spring, but as I look out my window, it looks like anything but spring. Boy oh boy, did we have a cold and snowy winter. It doesn't look like winter is going out without a fight. Oh well, we know that spring and summer is just around the corner. In just another week baseball fans will pass the time watching their favorite teams. The Toronto Blue Jays are having a good spring training.

The Ontario Federation of Union Retirees (OFUR) biannual convention is being held on April 10 and 11 here in Toronto. We are expecting a good turnout of SOAR delegates. OFUR conventions are very good and very interesting, dealing with many submitted resolutions and lots of discussions on things that we seniors have to deal with on a daily basis. All in all, it is usually a very informative convention.

We wish all our SOAR members, and their families, good health and a happy spring and summer.

Dan McNeil, SOAR Emeritus Member

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The Attack On Unions And Why We Should Care



The benefits we enjoy as retirees didn't happen in a vacuum. Pensions, health care coverage, Social Security, Medicare, etc. are in place as a result of years of struggle with the USW and organized labor leading the fight.

We are now seeing a continued and unprecedented attack on unions. And as union strength is diminished, the status of the working class is also being diminished.

You may have heard or read about the how some Republican leaders in Chattanooga, TN actually interjected themselves in trying to get the Volkswagen employees to vote against their best interest and against the UAW. Certain statements were threatening in nature regarding the future of the plant operations and were inaccurate and misleading. This conduct is contrary to, and inconsistent with the policies of the United States of America, as stated in the National Labor Relations Act of 1935.

The USW and organized labor represents the fire wall of protection for USW retirees, workers and the working class. The wealthy 1 percent knows it, and is spending large amounts of secret money through misleading sounding organizations claiming to represent workers interests, while engaging in activities to deny workers of their rights and the right to engage in collective action.

A recent report by the Department of Labor showed that union workers earn 31 percent more in wages and benefits than non-union workers. This, in addition to basic rights acquired through being union and having a voice, in my opinion, is the reason for these anti-union attacks on workers.

If these anti-union forces succeed, we all lose.

Bill Gibbons, PACE Representative

Compassionate Allowances Program Opens Arms to 25 New Conditions



This month, Carolyn W. Colvin, Acting Commissioner of Social Security, announced 25 new Compassionate Allowances conditions, including a dozen cancers. This brings the total number of conditions to 225.

The Compassionate Allowances program expedites disability decisions for Americans with the most serious disabilities to ensure that they receive their benefit decisions within days instead of months or years. To date, almost 200,000 people with severe disabilities have been approved through this fast-track disability process.

“We are dedicated to providing vulnerable Americans with faster access to disability benefits through our Compassionate Allowances program,” said Acting Commissioner Colvin. “Social Security disability benefits are a vital lifeline for individuals who are facing severe diseases and we must ensure that they receive the benefits they rightly deserve.”

Learn more by reading the press release, where you’ll find a list of the new Compassionate Allowances conditions. www.socialsecurity.gov/pressoffice/pr/compassionate-allowances-0114-pr.html

For more information on the Compassionate Allowances program, including a full list of conditions, please visit www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances.



District 12



At the February meeting of the Albany SOAR Chapter 12-7, Crystal Kelley from CARDV (Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence) was our guest speaker. Crystal spoke about how her group helps people that are in abusive situations and how they help get them and their children into a safe environment until their lives turn around for the better.

Pictured left to right are Eileen Vetter chapter secretary, Crystal Kelley from CARDV and Barbara Crane, both SOAR members. I was so impressed at the wonderful things they do for the community that I signed up for the 40 hour advocacy training.



On February 5, over 100 union members and activists met in Salem, Oregon for Lobby Day in the Campaign for Oregon’s Seniors and People with Disabilities, sponsored by AARP.

On March 8, members of our chapter attended the Alliance for Retired Americans 11th annual state convention in Portland, Oregon. Highlights of the convention had to be Governor Barbara Roberts, the first female governor of Oregon 1990-1994. Barbara talked about the International Day of the Woman. She talked about her trials and struggles in her race for office, and the ordeals other women have faced and how they overcame them. After the convention we meet with John O’Brien, regional director of the ARA. We discussed how to start a ARA Chapter in our area.

Garry Steffy, District 12 SOAR Coordinator

SOAR Chapter Connection

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The deadline to submit material
for the next issue is May 25



Upcoming Events

March - chapters with more than 251 members hold election for delegates to the SOAR Conference.

March - last week of the month at large chapter lottery held

April 15 completed form for delegate selections must be received by SOAR office.

April - One Coordinator from each district will be notified.

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

July 9 Resolutions must be received in SOAR office by this date.

August 8-9 International SOAR Conference

August 11-14 United Steelworkers Convention

The McNeil Report

Honey, If I were to die first, would you remarry? The wife asks.

Well, says the husband, I'm in good health, so why not?

Would she live in my house?

It's all paid up, so yes.

Would she drive my car?

It's new, so yes.

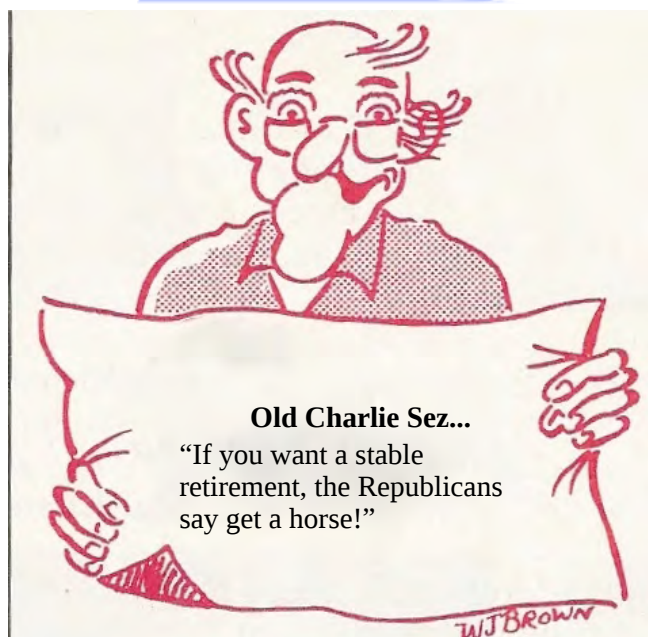
Would she use my golf clubs?

No, she's left handed.

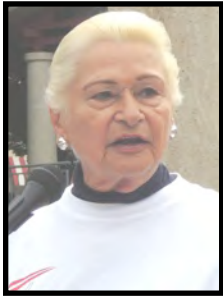
From the Editor

- Don't forget that this newsletter is online at <http://www.usw.org/act/activism/soar/resources/soar-chapter-connection>
- Please share this newsletter with your chapter members.
- 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>
- Labor Festival Commemorating the Republic Steel Memorial Day Massacre of 1937. Come join us in honoring them and the workers who still fight today. May 17, 2pm at 11731 South Avenue O, Chicago, Illinois. Info: 773-368-5775 or 773-646-4370.

Charlie Averill, Secretary/Treasurer and Editor



ALEC: A New Way to Put Corporations Before the Middle Class by Barbara J. Easterling



The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) has been described as a “shadowy group” of companies and politicians working behind closed doors to rewrite our laws; frequently to bolster corporate profits at any cost. Over the last 41 years, ALEC has worked tirelessly to tear down many of the programs and protections Americans, particularly seniors, have come to rely on. Only recently have many of their objectives come to light.



ALEC is in Washington, DC, as well as the backyards of every community in every state; pursuing their agenda at the federal, state and local level. When these representatives and corporations sit down at the table to craft “model” legislation, middle-class Americans don’t win.

These pieces of legislation are uniformly disastrous for retirees and anyone who hopes to retire one day. They include initiatives to wipe out public pension systems in favor of private 401(k) plans, even when the public pension is doing quite well. Policies like this scapegoat and attack public services, public workers and collective bargaining, while exposing workers to higher fees; which go straight into the pockets of Wall Street bankers.

ALEC is vulnerable. The efforts of individuals across every state to shine light on ALEC’s actions have produced clear results, and dozens of lawmakers have withdrawn their ALEC membership recently. ALEC legislation is beginning to collide with tough opposition state by state. Protecting corporations’ bottom lines at taxpayer expense has gone too far. It’s time to expose ALEC.

Barbara J. Easterling, President of the Alliance for Retired Americans



Report from the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)



As I’ve mentioned several times in this newsletter, at the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM), we’ve been working pretty steadily at addressing currency manipulation. To date, we have 155 members of Congress signed onto the Currency Reform for Fair Trade Act (HR 1276). While this is a pretty solid achievement, we need more. The more cosponsors we get, the more pressure we put on the Obama Administration AND China to address this unfair trade practice.

Many of you have been lending a hand in the effort to urge our legislators to cosponsor HR 1276 and we thank you. But, if you haven’t had a chance to pitch in and help on this campaign, now’s your chance folks! There’s no time like the present. Your call to your Congressperson could be the ONE call that convinces them to do the right thing. Not sure if your legislator is signed on to HR 1276? Take a look at our interactive map to see if they have, which you can find online here; <http://goo.gl/IEwNBE> Then, give your legislator a call by using this number: (202) 224-3121. If you give the operator your zip code, they can patch you through to your representative directly. Tell them that supporting HR 1276 can end currency manipulation and create millions of jobs. It’s that simple. Then let me know how it goes: 260-633-1060. Want to help out the campaign in another way? Give me a call!

Rachel Bennett Steury, AAM Field Coordinator

Just a Reminder

As you are all aware, SOAR chapters are direct affiliates of the United Steelworkers. As such, our chapter's political candidate endorsements should mirror that of the USW.

Please keep this in advisement, if your chapter decides to endorse political candidates. If you are not sure who the USW endorsed candidates are, you should contact your district board member or the USW district office in your region for this information.

If you are not sure who to contact in your district please call the SOAR office in Pittsburgh and we will get the necessary information to you as soon as possible.

As always, if you have any questions please feel free to call on our toll free number (866)208-4420.

Charlie Averill, SOAR Sec/Treas

Sign Up For, Share Our Spanish Friday Alert - Alerta Semanal

The Alliance for Retired Americans Friday Alert is now available each week in Spanish! Find last week's Alerta Semanal, at <http://bit.ly/1kMauwN> or on the Alliance's Spanish language page <http://tinyurl.com/nllcz6n>. You can also sign up for Spanish-language emails at <http://bit.ly/1jbQ0fd> or on the Spanish language page.

Medicare Means Testing Would Harm Middle Class

Alliance for Retired Americans member and AFSCME retiree leader, Charlie Hogan of Chicago, joined Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky on a press call Thursday; co-hosted by the Congresswoman, Social Security Works and the Medicare Rights Center. Mr. Hogan, a veteran, stressed that the retirees of today and tomorrow contributed to our earned benefits, Medicare and Social Security, and that promise should not be broken. Hogan said, "If we didn't have Medicare, if we didn't have insurance at work, we'd lose our homes, we'd lose everything"(<http://bit.ly/1h1kbt6>).

Elaine Says



Yesterday, I ran out of wine! So, I got in my car, plowed myself down the snowy driveway, and got on the highway to go to the store. As there was a travel warning in effect, and only in an emergency were you to be on the roads, I got pulled over by the police. After explaining my dilemma, and the fact that I had been confined in the house with Charlie for a week, he gave me a police escort to the liquor store. All is well.



Congressional Testimony Addresses Anti-Fraud Efforts



On February 26, 2014, Carolyn W. Colvin, Acting Commissioner of Social Security, testified before Congress about Social Security's ongoing anti-fraud efforts and our partnership with the Office of the Inspector General to root out disability fraud. In stressing the agency's ongoing commitment to combatting fraud, the Acting Commissioner reinforced that while there is a low level of fraud in our disability programs—less than 1 percent—no amount of fraud is tolerable.

"We are committed to preserving the public's trust in our programs," Colvin said. "We have no tolerance for fraud, and I reiterate to those who would defraud Social Security: We will find you; we will prosecute you; we will seek the maximum punishment allowable under the law; and we will fight to restore the money you've stolen to the American people. We have expended significant resources in our anti-fraud efforts and in support of the Inspector General, who is responsible for "provid[ing] leadership and coordination ... to prevent and detect fraud and abuse."

Read the full testimony at www.socialsecurity.gov/legislation/testimony_022614.html.

SSI for Same-Sex Married Couples

Social Security published new instructions that allow us to process some Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applications by people in same-sex marriages. These instructions come in response to last year's Supreme Court decision in *U.S. v. Windsor*, which found Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional.

As with previous same-sex marriage policies, we worked closely with the Department of Justice," said Acting Commissioner Colvin. "With the release of these instructions, we continue our commitment to treating all Americans fairly, with dignity and respect.

If a person believes he or she may be entitled to or eligible for benefits, they are encouraged to apply now. Learn more at www.socialsecurity.gov/same-sexcouples.



Let me tell you what happened to me

Our wives are very observant. You know what I mean; like that shirt doesn't go with those pants and so forth. Last week I was in charge of a lunch. I gave the blessing and introduced the person that we were honoring and then walked around greeting everyone. After the lunch we went shopping. When we got home, I went to the wash room, looked in the mirror and saw bird shit on the side of my head. I asked my observant wife why she didn't say anything to me. Elaine said she thought I hit my head on something and had a scab on my head. So much for being observant.

Charlie Averill