From the Director’s Desk

The Ryan Budget - Déjà-vu All Over Again

By now, I am sure all of you are aware that the budget battle is heating up in Washington. Paul Ryan, the failed Vice Presidential candidate and Republican Congressman from Wisconsin, is leading the charge from the far right to balance the budget on the backs of working families and retirees.

Once again, he has proposed a budget that the Senate roundly rejected in the last Congress; the same budget that the voters rejected when they dashed his ambitions to be Vice President. To those in D.C., he must seem like the crazy cat woman who lives down the street. This is the third time the House Republicans have released the Ryan Budget. Someone once told me that “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Fortunately for us, the Senate has declared the draconian cuts proposed by the Ryan Budget as “dead on arrival.” The time has come for Congressional Republicans to deal with the real challenges facing the nation; slow economic growth, high unemployment, and unprecedented income inequality. The GOP/Ryan budget targets working class seniors and their families with massive cuts to pay for tax breaks benefiting huge corporations and the wealthiest among us.

We must protect the social safety nets that are designed to keep retirees out of poverty and the poor from starvation. Medicare and Social Security are now more important than ever before. With employers abandoning defined benefit pension plans at an alarming rate and going to court to dump their retiree health care responsibilities, these programs must be preserved, not dismantled!

Jim Centner, SOAR Director

District 7 SOAR Chapter 34-2 Helps Mine Workers

Granite City, Illinois

Members of SOAR Chapter 34-2, along with Steelworkers local 1899 came to the aid of workers and retirees of the Peabody Coal Company who is trying to shed their responsibilities for healthcare and pensions for their retirees.

Left to Right are Jeff Rains, president of Chapter 34-2; Cecil Roberts, UMWA international president; Mick Meisenheimer, Local 1899 and Dennis Barker, Chapter 34-2.

Jeff Rains, Chapter 34-2 President
Connie’s Korner

We Need Your Help!

SOAR has never been more important to our retirees and to our union. Working families and retirees are under unprecedented assault. Corporations are using the excuse of the global economy to gut our contracts and abandon their obligations to their retirees. Congress is attempting to balance our nation’s budget on the back of the working class, while cutting the taxes of corporations and wealthy Americans.

The only way to defend ourselves is by organizing our retirees and partnering with our union’s active members to confront the issues that jeopardize our economic security and way of life. This is where we need your help. In order to maximize our impact, SOAR needs to grow. We need you to reach out to your fellow retirees and other like-minded retirees to recruit them into our organization.

Our union has fought hard for our retirees. In many cases, when the employer abandoned them through shutdowns and bankruptcies, our union was there. The USW established a number of VEBAs (Voluntary Employee Benefit Trusts) that help restore many of the benefits that were lost. I am amazed at how few of the beneficiaries of our VEBAs belong to SOAR. This is an area that we need to concentrate our organizing efforts. If your Chapter or retirees in your area are enrolled in a Veba, I am asking you to reach out to them and remind them that the union provided this benefit and we need their help.

But Veba participants cannot be our sole focus. All retirees are under constant attack. The only way to stop these attacks is to organize, agitate and educate. SOAR provides the vehicle to get it done!

Let’s get to work!

Connie Entrekin, SOAR President

District 7

Newly installed officers of SOAR Chapter 30-18 in Plymouth, Indiana, are left to right: Mike Henning, vice president; Alice Henning, trustee; Elaine Averill, recording secretary; Dorine Godinez, president; and Sharie Raymond, treasurer. Not shown is Carl Anspach, trustee and Shirley Rowe, trustee.

Charlie Averill
Emeritus Report – Canada

Well, they tell me that Spring has sprung. I don’t really believe them. I think we should fire both groundhogs who were not correct in their predictions of an early Spring. Almost all of our snow has gone, although they are still predicting the odd snowfall right into April. The only good thing about snow is how beautiful it looks on our trees and bushes. Pretty hard to beat when it first falls and everything so white and clean looking.

The baseball spring training season is almost over. Our Blue Jays will be flying north in a few days. The Jays have made many improvements and are looking very good. I’m keeping my fingers crossed for a successful year.

Our Federal Conservative Finance Minister, Jim Flaherty, released his budget earlier this week. As expected, you don’t even have to read between the lines to know there is no support for seniors. No increase in our Old Age Security (OAS) or our Canada Pension (CPP) or the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). He says he will write off the deficit by the year 2015. Maybe he will but it will be on the backs of the lower income people like seniors that he refuses to help in any way. Once again, the movers and shakers of Bay Street call the shots.

I would like to remind all our Chapters and individual members that it is time to renew your membership in The Congress of Union Retirees (CURC) and the Provincial Federation of Retirees (PFR). They both work very hard on our behalf and give us some good benefits.

I wish all our Canadian and United States friends a very “Happy Spring, and a Glorious Summer.” Let’s all work hard to increase our Chapter memberships.

Dan McNeil, SOAR Emeritus Board Member

District 11 Attends Presidential Inauguration

SOAR members Bonnie Carey, Jerry Porter, Janice Payne, and Vera Kelley, NAACP Branch President and active members Laura Rojas and Cassandra Dixon attended the Presidential Inauguration in Washington, DC.

Union, church and community activists joined with people from across the nation to brave the cold and attend the ceremonies and parade in DC. We were proud to represent the Steelworkers and SOAR at this historic celebration.

Photo right: SOAR Chapter 11-4 President Bonnie Carey, VP Jerry Porter and USW Member Laura Rojas.

Bonnie Carey, Chapter 11-4 President
The McNeil Report - The Bathtub Test

During a visit to my doctor, I asked him, “How do you determine whether or not an older person should be put in an old age home?”

“Well,” he said, “we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket to the person to empty the bathtub.”

“Oh, I understand,” I said. “A normal person would use the bucket because it’s bigger than the spoon or teacup.”

“No” he said. “A normal person would pull the plug. Would you like a bed near a window?”

From the Editor

• In each issue, we try to have a short bio of the SOAR Board Member from each USW District. This month’s issue on page five features District 5 and District 6.

• Reminder: SOAR has opened its membership to any retiree who agrees with our policies and principles. Any questions should be directed to the SOAR office at (866) 208-4420.

• Please try to limit articles to 250 words so we can get more articles in a limited amount of pages and thus save on postage costs.

• Many thanks to those who do send in articles and photos. Don’t forget that any SOAR member can contribute an article. Photos sent by email should be the highest resolution possible. Please share this newsletter with you chapter members.

• Steve Skvara, District 7 Board Member has passed away. Scott Marshall has been appointed by USW President, Leo W. Gerard to fill Steve’s unexpired term.

• Due to the size of the district, Terry Bonds, retired USW Director, has been appointed by President, Leo W. Gerard, to be the District 12 SOAR Board Member; to work in conjunction with existing Board Member, Joel Buchanan.

Charlie Averill, Secretary Treasurer and Editor

Note

The United Steelworkers and SOAR are sponsoring the annual commemoration of the Republic Steel Memorial Day Massacre of 1937, on Saturday May 18, 2013, 2:00 pm at the George Washington High School, 3535 E. 114th St. Chicago.
Robert Saumure, District 5 SOAR Executive Board Member

Robert Saumure comes from a large family of 19 children. At the age of 18, he began his working career at STELCO (Steel Company in Lachine, Quebec, Canada), where he worked for 20 years.

Bob became a Steward in USWA Local 3258 and later became Chief Steward. He was then elected President of the local and served in that capacity for eleven years before becoming temporary Staff for the union in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. He was appointed to permanent Staff in 1968 and served for 23 years. He also held the position of Unemployment Insurance Referee in arbitration for 31 years.

In 1987, Bob retired from the United Steelworkers of America at the age of 58. He was a member of SOAR before retiring. He remains involved in several Social and Union activities.

At 84 years old, Bob and his wife Rita, have been married for 60 years and have six children, 19 grandchildren and three great grandchildren. As snowbirds, they get the yearly call to migrate south to Hollywood, Florida, for the winter months.

Robert Saumure, 141 Avenue Lalonde, Les Cedres, Quebec Canada, J7T 1K3
PH: 450-452-2106 in Summer, 954-983-9798 in Winter

Doug MacPherson, District 6 and Canadian Coordinator

Doug was born in Perth, Scotland and immigrated to Canada in 1965. He began his union career in Scotland as a member of the Plumbers Union and attended his first union education, when he was 18 years old, at a Trades Union Congress (TUC) school.

Doug joined the Steelworkers in 1968 when he was hired on at Stelco, Parkdale Works, in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, USW Local 5328. Elected as steward, mechanical department chief steward, trustee, negotiation committee member, and ultimately president of the local. He also served as secretary of the Hamilton Steelworkers Area Council for a number of years.

Graduating from the Labour Studies Program of Hamilton’s McMaster University in 1982, Doug was appointed to the USW staff in 1985 and assigned to the Peel-Halton office of the union. In 1989 he was appointed by then District Director Leo Gerard, as Area Coordinator for the same area. In 1991 Doug was transferred to the District 6 office to be the assistant to District Director, Harry Hynd, where he served until December 2000.

Upon the retirement of Rod Bezo, Canadian SOAR Coordinator, Doug was appointed to work on increasing the membership of SOAR.

Doug is married, and has two surviving children, and 5 grandchildren. He lives in Burlington, Ontario with his wife of 50 years, Una.

Doug MacPherson, Canadian Coordinator and District 6 SOAR Board Member, USW Canadian Office, 234 Eglinton Ave. East - 8th Floor, Toronto, ON Canada M4P 1K7, PH: 416-544-6003
Ryan Budget Plan Would Make Big Changes to Medicare by Barbara J. Easterling

The 2014 budget plan recently proposed by Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), chair of the U.S. House Budget Committee, would make two major changes to Medicare that would be devastating for current and future retirees.

First, it would create a voucher system that would push retirees toward buying health coverage directly from private insurance companies. The very reason we created Medicare was to protect seniors from these companies that discriminate against the old and the sick and always seems to charge us more and give us less. I worry that these vouchers won’t be able to keep pace with the rising costs of health care and that seniors will keep paying more and more out of their own pockets. Paul Ryan would undo nearly 50 years of Medicare success with a plan that takes better care of CEOs’ wealth than seniors’ health.

Second, the Ryan budget would raise the Medicare eligibility age from 65 to 67. Because it also repeals the Affordable Care Act and its ban on pre-existing conditions, people age 65 and 66 will be on their own for health coverage. I know very few people in that age group that are either wealthy enough or healthy enough to buy their own insurance.

Under the Ryan budget, Medicare would be little more than an empty promise. We cannot let this happen. We owe it to today’s workers to keep the promise of Medicare alive for generations to come. Please contact your elected officials today to stop this dangerous plan.

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.

Report from the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)

Recently, the women of AAM joined the Women of Steel at their international conference in Pittsburgh to share information about trade and the importance of having a solid manufacturing base. This industry is important for women since jobs in manufacturing are often high-tech and offer better pay and benefits than many other sectors. But looking at the numbers, women are not employed in manufacturing at the same rate as men. In fact, only 27% of all manufacturing workers in the US (3.3 million) and Canada (500,000) are women. Those of us in manufacturing should promote the industry to our sisters and daughters, dispelling the outdated notion that manufacturing jobs are difficult, dirty and best left for men. We can recruit a new generation of Rosie the Riveters!

Our elected officials must invest in manufacturing so that more of these jobs are available. We need women AND men making things, creating things and inventing things but our lack of a comprehensive plan to drive innovation, education and job growth is holding us back. Without strong support for manufacturing, we could be dependent on other countries that support their manufacturing base, and that’s not good for national security or prosperity. Consider this: one manufacturing job can create 4 to 5 other jobs in our economy. No other sector has a multiplier effect like manufacturing. Are your elected officials making it a priority to keep making it here? Let us know! For more information, please visit www.americanmanufacturing.org

Rachel Bennett Steury, AAM Field Coordinator 260-633-1060
SOAR Chapter 23-16 Ravenswood and Century Retirees Group

Recently the West Virginia ARA Chapter held their Annual Conference at the Cedar Lakes Conference Center in Ripley, West Virginia. ARA members from across the state attended but the largest group to attend was from SOAR Chapter 23-16 in Ravenswood, West Virginia, and included the Century Retiree Group, led by Karen Gorrell who continues the fight to regain their health care that Century Aluminum stole from them.

This year’s conference was tempered by the recent state election results in which we lost 11 House seats and 4 Senate seats, as well as the loss of the Attorney General, Darrell McGraw, a true friend to seniors and labor.

The focus, however, was on the retiring West Virginia AFL-CIO Secretary Treasurer and this year’s West Virginia ARA Retiree of the year, Larry Matheney. Larry became a union member in 1966 with UMWA Local 12625 until that union merged with USW Local 12625 in 1972. Larry held many offices in his union including five terms as President. In 2004, he went on staff with USW as State Coordinator and Legislative Coordinator. In 1997 he was elected as a Vice-President with the West Virginia AFL-CIO and in 2004 was elected as Secretary Treasure. His dedication and passion for working families in West Virginia will be greatly missed.

Bob Adkins, District 8 Coordinator and Acting Board Member

Electronic Payments Are The Way To Go

Make sure you’re getting your payments the safest, and most efficient way: electronically.

Because of the U.S. Treasury initiative, most government payments (such as Social Security, Supplemental Security Income or SSI, Veterans Affairs, Railroad Retirement Board, and Office of Personnel Management benefits) will be made electronically beginning March 1 of this year — with some exceptions.

People still getting paper checks are encouraged to sign up for direct deposit of their benefits into the financial institution account of their choice or participate in Treasury’s Direct Express® debit card program. Learn more about the advantages of receiving benefits electronically at www.godirect.org.

Currently, about 94 percent of Social Security beneficiaries and 83 percent of SSI recipients receive their monthly benefits electronically, the most reliable method of payment delivery. Although people who have not signed up for electronic payments will continue to receive printed checks, they can expect the Treasury Department to be contacting them regularly about the requirement to switch to electronic payments.
Tribute to Steve Skvara

I find it sad but necessary to write about a loss to SOAR, the USW and the cause of workers and retirees and a friend and that is the death of our brother, Steve Skvara, District 7 SOAR Board Member. Steve was a retired Steelworker from Youngstown Sheet & Tube in East Chicago, Indiana, the President of SOAR Chapter 31-5 and the District 7 SOAR Executive Board member.

I had the opportunity to work with Steve. His dedication to SOAR was second to none. Before his health began to fail, you could always count on him to be active in protests and demonstrations; whenever the cause of workers and retirees were at stake.

One of the most memorable events was in 2007 at the Presidential Candidate forum in Chicago, when Steve related to the candidates including Barack Obama, his health care dilemma and concern for his wife’s health care. As a result, he appeared on a number of national TV broadcasts.

Even in the 2012 election, Steve helped Elizabeth Warren win the Senate election in Massachusetts when she was attacked for protecting steelworkers’ benefits during the LTV Steel Corporation bankruptcy.

Steve’s legacy should be an inspiration for all of us to be engaged and involved to carry on the fight for workers’ and retirees’ rights and benefits.

Bill Gibbons, PACE Representative

At left is District 13 SOAR Executive Board member, Jack Golden, as he talks with retirees from USW Locals 369 and 589.

On February 12, Jack held a meeting in Fort Smith, Arkansas, with our retirees from the Locals in the area to help them set up a SOAR chapter in Fort Smith. He had about 20 retirees present from Locals 370, 13-656 and 7893. Jack’s message was about the need for involvement from everyone on the issues facing us today. The retirees will meet again after inviting other retirees to attend and kick off their SOAR Chapter. Everyone is excited about having a strong SOAR Chapter and pledged to do what they can to help.

Assistant to the Director, Jim Lefton, spoke to the group about the need for everyone to be involved in our union, both active and retired members. He thanked the retirees for their hard fought struggles to give us the Union and the benefits that we hold dear today. He stated that it is up to us, (the current members), to continue the fight so that we can leave a strong union for those coming behind us, just as these retirees have done for us. Other speakers included District 13 Rapid Response Coordinator, Andy Frye and SOAR Coordinator, Dan Henry.

“We went to Crossett, Arkansas, on February 13, and held the same type meeting with retirees from locals 369 and 589. We had about 30 retirees in attendance. Look for two new SOAR Chapters in Arkansas and more to come!!!”

Jack Golden, SOAR Board Member