Connection

Billy’s Banter

SNAP and the House of Representatives

A great deal has been written recently regarding the abuse of food stamps. The recent legislation passed in the House has cut nearly $40 billion from this vital program. I decided to do some research to try to understand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) a little better. I was surprised to learn that the maximum benefit a couple could receive was $6.11 per person per day, based on a 30 day month. This amount does not leave much room for abuse and pretty much puts to sleep the stories of exorbitant amounts of money spent in stores for food and other “goodies.” I was also surprised to read about what you can and cannot buy. I must also add that the $6.11 amount is the “maximum” daily benefit; the SNAP benefit is reduced using a formula, if there is any additional income. I for one would not want to try figure out how I would prepare three meals a day with six bucks.

With many of our retirees having to retire without pensions or with reduced pensions, it is becoming more important that we make sure that our elected officials do not become over zealous in their attempt to reduce the deficit, that they created, on the backs of our retirees. While there may be misuse in the system, I hope they concentrate on addressing those issues instead of attacking the safety net of the young and elderly who have come to need this benefit just to be able to feed themselves.

Bill Pienta, SOAR President

SOAR and USW - Proud to Stand with the UMWA

Over 4,000 rallied in St. Louis in the fight with Peabody, Arch and Patriot Coal Corporations for hard earned UMWA Members’ Retiree Benefits. Cecil Roberts (UMWA International President) calls this fight the Civil Rights movement of our time.

Cecil then challenged all workers and organized labor to engage in this fight for a “Fairer America” that rewards work and not capital.

Cecil Roberts’ challenge, “Organized labor needs to get off our asses and get on our feet and get out the door and get into the streets. I want to see an America in which every one born here has cradle to grave health care. An America with equal rights for all people regardless of color.”

Dennis Barker, Vice President, Chapter 34-2
From The Director’s Desk

Politics as Usual

Here we go again. Partisan politics are threatening to bring our fragile economic recovery to a screeching halt. We have once again reached the point where Congress has to pass a Continuing Resolution in order for the United States to meet its financial obligations and to prevent our government from shutting down.

Continuing Resolutions are not new. It has been 14 years since the House, the Senate and the president have all agreed on a bill to fund the government for an entire fiscal year. In the past 26 years, Congress and the president have agreed to a year-long budget only three times, in 1989, 1995 and 1997, according to a report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

So what is the big deal? Instead of moving forward and passing the resolution to keep things running, the Tea Party supporters are attempting to hold our government hostage in another attempt to destroy the Affordable Care Act. They have wasted countless hours and squandered millions of dollars opposing a bill that was passed by Congress, upheld by the Supreme Court and validated by a majority of Americans by the reelection of President Obama.

A recent CNBC poll indicates a solid majority of Americans generally oppose defunding the new health care law by a margin of 44% to 38%. The opposition increases sharply to 59% to 19% when the issue of shutting down the government or defaulting on debt obligations is included. Even Republicans oppose defunding, 48% to 36%, when the issue of a government shutdown or default is at stake.

The only groups who support defunding Obamacare are Tea Party supporters, even if it means a government shutdown or default on our debt obligations. It is a repulsive aspect of our democracy when such a relatively small group of right-wing extremists (Tea Partiers), driven largely by prejudice, greed and cold-heartedness, can have so much influence over the Republican Party and Congress in general.

Jim Centner, SOAR Director

District 1
The Canton-based Timken says its steel division will become one stand-alone, publicly traded business, while its bearings and power transmission division will become another.

District 2
The head of the Wisconsin state's labor commission told unions Monday he would continue to adhere to a law restricting collective bargaining for public workers, taking a stance that is expected to prompt unions to file contempt-of-court accusations against him.

District 4
A steelmaking company based in Dubai has chosen Buffalo for development of a new $102 million plant that will employ an estimated 172 workers.

District 10
Rivers Casino signed a settlement agreement with the National Labor Relations Board Monday that would resolve 29 complaints that have been filed against the company by employees.
Report from the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)

An Easy Fix: Lower the Trade Deficit, Lower the Budget Deficit

While tax reform and social program reforms are contentious topics in DC, America’s manufacturing sector waits for our legislators to turn their attention to our problematic trade deficit; which has been staring us in the face for decades. There is an obvious connection between the trade deficit and the budget deficit. More people working decreases demand for public services while increasing tax revenue, which in turn, would lower our budget deficit.

But we can’t fix our budget deficit or our trade deficit without addressing the elephant in the room: trade with China. China’s trade practices, including its currency manipulation and the illegal subsidies it provides its industries, interfere with our ability to increase exports and create jobs.

There’s a clear connection. In the decade after the U.S. helped China join the World Trade Organization in 2001, America lost 2.4 million middle-income factory jobs. [http://www.epi.org/publication/bp260/] and our trade deficit with China keeps growing: It was $315 billion in 2012 alone.

HR1276 -- the Currency Reform for Fair Trade Act -- would give American businesses the ability to seek redress when a foreign government targets their industries with a rigged currency. The bill has 129 cosponsors but we need more members of Congress to step up for American manufacturing. Stop by your Congressperson’s office and ask them to support this bill. Tell them that if you fix one deficit, you fix the other! Millions of out-of-work Americans are waiting for their support.

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 3
In an annual Labour Day tradition dating back more than 35 years here, Thompsonites gathered outside United Steelworkers Local 6166’s union hall on Elizabeth Drive Monday to mark Labour Day with a picnic for everyone held under sunny skies and 27 °C temperatures – a full 11 degrees higher than the seasonal normal of 16 °C for the date.

District 9
Volkswagen is working with the United Automobile Workers at its Chattanooga, Tenn., assembly plant on how to unionize the plant and create a German-style works council there, the president of the labor union said.

District 11
The Iowa chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and the League of United Latin American Citizens of Iowa have sued Iowa Secretary of State Matt Schultz (R) over a rule that aims to remove names from voter rolls if a federal immigration database suggests they are not authorized to vote.

“A girl phoned me the other day and said… ‘Come on over, there’s nobody home.’ I went over. Nobody was home.”
Rodney Dangerfield
Emeritus Report - Canada

Wow, it’s time to do my article for our SOAR Connection. Where have the past two months gone? In Toronto, we have the Canadian National Exhibition every year during the last two weeks of August. It ends on Labour Day and along with it’s departure, we usually say goodbye to Summer. Unfortunately it also means that Fall is here and that is followed with WINTER. We had a fairly good summer, weather wise. Quite hot some days and cooler at night. They say that a lack of rain will make produce more expensive. I hope that all our SOAR friends with gardens will have a good and bountiful harvest.

Our Federal Conservative government is still on holidays. Having the summer off apparently is not long enough. Mr. Harper stated that he needs to extend the resuming of Parliament for another month. Our Senate is in trouble with some Senators having trouble with their expense charges. The problem was handed over to the RCMP. It appears that our Conservative government is in big trouble and wants to hide until it is over.

Here in Ontario, our Liberal government called for by-elections in five ridings that were vacant of an elected member of Parliament. They were of course expecting to improve their standings. It didn’t happen. They only won two seats. The (NDP) New Democratic Party won two and the Conservative Party won one.

Workers at the US Steel Nanticoke plant who were on lockout since April have agreed to a new contract with some concessions that will get them back to work. United Steelworkers Local 8782 voted 57% to accept the new contract.

I’m happy to advise you that we have successfully formed a new Chapter. It is in Peel Halton and is officially up and running. It is SOAR Chapter 6-13. We wish them good luck and hope they continue growing in membership.

I wish all our SOAR friends a very happy healthy Fall season. Until the next time.

Dan McNeil, SOAR Emeritus Member

Same-Sex Couples Eligible for Social Security

Social Security now is processing some retirement spouse claims for same-sex couples and paying benefits where they are due. We continue to work closely with the Department of Justice. In the coming weeks and months, we will develop and implement additional policy and processing instructions.

“The recent Supreme Court decision on Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act helps to ensure that all Americans are treated fairly and equally, with the dignity and respect they deserve,” said Carolyn W. Colvin, Acting Commissioner of Social Security. “I encourage individuals who believe they may be eligible for Social Security benefits to apply now, to protect against the loss of any potential benefits.”

You can read the latest on this important topic at www.socialsecurity.gov/doma.
Report from PACE

Is Our Country Heading In The Wrong Direction?

I just attended a protest held by the West Virginia Century Aluminum retirees in Chicago who are protesting this company for taking away and eliminating retiree health insurance benefits.

The plight of the Century Aluminum retirees is all too common. For years now, corporate America has been reducing or taking away employees health care coverage and in particular eliminating retiree coverage. This is especially devastating for those retirees who are not covered by Medicare. This greedy conduct should be considered illegal.

While the extreme Republicans are trying by unorthodox means to eliminate what is called Obama Care (Affordable Care Act-ACA), which was properly legislated and established constitutionally by the Supreme Court, it may be the only relief that those under age 65 have to get some type of affordable health care coverage.

These same Republicans have not proposed any type of replacement plan or improvement in the ACA; they just propose the elimination of any opportunity to provide health care coverage for almost 30 million Americans. The ACA won’t even take full effect until January, 2014.

Their answer is - let the market place take care of health care. Wait a minute, isn’t that what got us in this health care mess to begin with - 50 million people without health care, two thirds of personal bankruptcy’s caused by health care costs?

I find the actions of these extreme Republicans scary. Think about what they may try regarding other social programs that are so important to us, such as Social Security, Medicare, Workers Rights, etc.

Bill Gibbons, PACE Representative

Direct Deposit is the Way to Go

As you probably know, by law, most federal benefit payments must now be paid electronically, with some exceptions. Each year, more and more people who receive a paper check make the intelligent decision and switch to electronic payment. Last year, for example, we issued more than three million paper checks each month. This year, we can report that the number of paper Social Security payments each month is less than one million!

If you still receive paper checks, we encourage you to switch to the safest, most convenient way to receive payments. Anyone can “go direct” at www.socialsecurity.gov/deposit.
District 7 SOAR in Action

District 7 SOAR members at the 2013 Convention of the Illinois Alliance for Retired American, doing our part: Standing Up - Fighting Back!

“Just returned this evening from inspiring convention of Illinois ARA. You will be glad to hear that a number of SOAR chapters were well represented and SOAR made a big contribution to the event.”

Bea Lumpkin, SOAR Chapter 31-9

August and September saw District 7 SOAR members in action around a variety of issues. On August 8, SOAR and USW members joined hundreds of other labor activists to protest the American Legislative Exchange Council’s meeting in Chicago. ALEC, as it’s known, is financed by big business and rightwing billionaires, like the Koch brothers, to push right-to-work-for-less and other anti-union laws. ALEC also pushes undemocratic voter suppression laws. (see photo)

SOAR members also took part in two other demonstrations in August and September in support of Walmart workers and fast food workers rights to organize.

In addition, District 7 SOAR members joined USW Local 9777 for mass picketing at Allied Tube to demand the company sign a fair contract. USW members there have been without a contract for over a year.

On September 23, SOAR and USW activists joined Century Aluminum retirees in mass picketing at a Chicago meeting of the company’s stockholders. The Century retirees car pooled from Ravenswood, West Virginia, to Chicago to protest the company’s dumping of their health care benefits.

Scott Marshall, SOAR
Board Member
District 12

Things have been busy in District 12. Some news has been good and some not so good. In Colorado the labor movement and friends were able to get a jobs bill. The Save Colorado Jobs Act passed allowing Colorado manufacturing companies to gain certain tax exemptions for creating jobs in Colorado. The bill was signed by Governor Hickenlooper at the USW Local 2102 hall in Pueblo Colorado. SOAR Vice President (West) and Chapter 38-3 President AL Becco worked tirelessly on this bill.

In Denver, SOAR Chapter 12-01 President Dave Nefzger, with help from District 12 Director Bob LaVenture, Assistant Director Chris Youngmark, SOAR Director Jim Centner, and myself, have identified over 1700 retirees in the Denver area who are not SOAR chapter members. Invitations to attend a luncheon and discussion on October 17 at USW Hall Local 8031 in Golden Colorado have been mailed out. This will provide USW retirees an opportunity to learn about SOAR and also hear from Dr. Irene Aguilar, the Assistant Majority Leader of the Colorado State Senate, on the status of health care reform in Colorado and how it will affect retirees. Anyone interested in attending can contact Dave at soarchapter1201@yahoo.com.

This past summer has presented lots of challenges to District 12. Fires, floods, recall elections and attacks from special interest groups leading campaigns to erode or eliminate social programs essential to retired members, have proved that our union’s retirees need an opportunity to have their voices heard and SOAR provides the means to do that.

Joel Buchanan, Executive Board Member

SOAR Celebrates Labour Day

In Toronto we had a wonderful day. It started by arriving at the USW downtown hall at Cecil Street at 6:30 am. Margaret and I assisted in handing out hoodies to the many marchers, who were lined up at 7:30 am.

The march as usual was well attended, and free entrance to the Canadian National Exhibition grounds were given to each of the marchers who completed the march.

Everyone was invited back to Cecil Street at the conclusion of the march for lunch provided by the Toronto Area Council of the USW, President Carolyn Egan and committee.

Our own SOAR member Brando Paris and others cooked up a wonderful lunch of hot dogs, sausages, corn on the cob and salad. The SOAR group served the returning marchers with lunch and various treats.

The day ended with music, dancing and entertainment. A great Labour Day was enjoyed by all.

Harry Hynd, International Vice President SOAR
The McNeil Report

While eating at a restaurant the other day, I heard a young girl behind us say to her boy friend, “When we get married, I want to share all your worries, and troubles to lighten your burden.”

Her boyfriend responded, “it’s very kind of you sweetheart, but I don’t have any worries or troubles”.

The girl responded with, “Well, that’s because we aren’t married yet.”

A wife asked her husband, “What do you like most in me, my pretty face or my sexy body?” He looked at her from head to toe and replied, “I like your sense of humor!!”

From the Editor

- In each issue, we try to have a short bio of the SOAR board member from each SOAR District. This month’s issue, on page nine features District 12.

- 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.

- 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. My opinion is that if you want someone to read your article, you will keep it as short as you can.

Charlie Averill, Secretary/Treasurer and Editor

Some SOAR Photos
http://www.flickr.com/photos/usw

Charlie’s blog:
http://www.charlieaverill.blogspot.com/

My Youtube channel:
https://www.youtube.com/user/abbysan

SOAR Facebook page:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/USWSOAR/

Podcasts:
https://soundcloud.com/charlie-averill

Elaine Sez

Every time I say the dirty word “exercise” I have to wash my mouth out with white wine and chocolate :)

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Joel Buchanan, District 12

Joel started working for CF&I Steel Company, Pueblo Colorado in 1970 after serving in the U.S. Navy. He started in the Ore Preparation Department and became a Millwright in 1972. Joel became active in USWA Local 2102 that year serving as assistant grievance rep and department safety committee chairman. He also worked in the Blast Furnaces, Coke Plant, and Open Hearth departments until 1982 when he transferred to the Power Department.

The company forced a strike on October 3, 1997 which became the longest labor dispute in the history of the United Steelworkers. The illegal lockout lasted for seven years. During the lockout, Joel served as picket captain then as a “Road Warrior” for three years. As a “Road Warrior” Joel served in Houston, San Francisco, and Portland Oregon.

After returning to work, Joel served on the Joint Health and Safety Committee and was elected to the USW Local 2102 Executive Board first as Trustee then Treasurer. He also served on the negotiation committee. During the 2012 election cycle he served as USW District 12 Political Director for Southern Colorado.

Joel retired December 1, 2011 and was appointed by USW International President Leo W. Gerard, in consultation with District 12 Director Robert LaVenture, as SOAR Executive Board Member for District 12; completing the unexpired term vacated by Bob Rankin’s resignation.

Joel Buchanan, 4 Bruce LN, Pueblo, CO. 81001, Cell Phone 719-821-1486, email joelbuck99@yahoo.com

Terry Bonds, District 12

A native Texan, Terry worked as a roughneck in oil fields around the Texas Gulf Coast before going to work as a millwright at Alcoa’s plant in Point Comfort, Texas, where he joined USW Local Union 4370.

He was elected vice president in 1970, became president in 1972 to fill an unexpired term, and was elected president in 1973.

In 1976, Terry was appointed as a staff representative in the former District 37. In 1984, he was named Sub-district Director for the Houston area and later for all of Texas and served as the district’s organizing coordinator and legislative representative. In 1995 he was named assistant director for the new District 12.

Terry was elected Director of District 12 in November 1997, reelected in 2001 and was reelected by acclamation in 2005. Shortly after his election as Director of District 12, President George Becker appointed Terry Chairman of the union’s Non-ferrous Industry Conference.

Terry retired as Director in 2009 and in 2013 was appointed District 12 SOAR Board Member by USW President Leo W. Gerard, in conjunction with the existing Board Member, due to the size of the District.

Terry Bonds, 7400 Vivian Dr. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109, PH: 505-239-4735, BoRoo1212@aol.com
District 7

On August 12, I had the privilege of attending the SOAR Chapter 34-2 Awards and Scholarship luncheon down in Granite City, Illinois. This is an annual affair where awards are given out to friends of labor and this year, a $2000 scholarship was given to a local student. As you can see from this photo, they had a terrific turnout.

After the luncheon, chapter President, Jeff Raines (photo left) and Vice President Dennis Barker and his wife, Pam, entertained my wife Elaine and I by taking us on a tour of the area.

One stop was at the Arlington Wetlands restoration project where Jeff explained that some members of the chapter spent several days of removing invasive species and restoring the area to its native state.

This is a very active chapter. Most recently, they have been helping the United Mine Workers in their struggle to maintain their health care and pension benefits.

Charlie Averill, SOAR Secretary/Treasurer

Chapter 30-18 Holds Reunion

Retirees of the Northern Indiana Public Service Company came together on September 8 to celebrate their 15 years as a chapter.

Since the company service territory consists of the northern third of Indiana, having any function to include our chapter members is very difficult, so this annual event is very important to us.

Everyone was given at least one door prize and every door prize was made in the U.S.

Chapter President, Dorine Godinez and all of the reunion committee members did a great job in organizing this year’s event.

Charlie Averill
News from Canada

Mississauga, Ontario -- August 23, 2013. Canada’s newest SOAR chapter officers were elected and sworn in today. Peel-Halton Area formed this SOAR chapter to reach out to retiring members in the Mississauga, Brampton and Oakville area of Ontario. Left to right in photo are: Larry Rewakowsky, trustee; Mansell Gullis, president; Eugene Feltham, vice president; Doug MacPherson, national coordinator; Terrie Wheeler Gullis, trustee; Lennox Briggs, secretary/treasurer and Curtis Tibbetts, trustee.

Doug MacPherson, Canadian Coordinator

SOAR Director, Jim Centner has been elected to the Senior Coordinating Council’s Executive Board of the DNC. The term is for 4 years.

Surprise, Surprise

SOAR Chapter 38-1 in Spokane Valley, Washington, got an amazing phone call early last month from the USW local 338. The president, Dan Wilson, asked whom to write a check for $1,000 to from the local. I was shocked and asked what it was for and he replied “anything you want to do that requires funds”. The local members were thankful for all the efforts we had done during our careers and thankful for all we continue to do that supports labor. We will be brainstorming ideas to swell our membership. Thank you local 338! We use their hall to meet in five times a year and we are always thankful for the coffee being on and the donuts they buy for us.

Cathy Gunderson, SOAR 38-1 president

Our “Champion of Social Security”

On the 78th anniversary of Social Security, Congressman Raul Grijalva (Right) presented SOAR Chapter President and Arizona Alliance for Retired Americans Southern Arizona Chapter President Tino Torres with the “Champion of Social Security” award. Tino was recognized for his lifelong work in union activism and current work to protect, preserve, and strengthen Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

Tory Anderson, Executive Director, Arizona Alliance for Retired Americans
District 13 Does it Again

The charter presentation to newly formed chapter 13-PC-5 is made by Jim Lefton, Assistant to the Director, District 13. Accepting the charter is Lee Sullivan, Chapter President. This newly organized chapter is in Crossett, Arkansas.

Dan Henry, SOAR Coordinator

2014 in 214 Words

There’s a lot to the health care law. But it’s based on a few simple principles, which we’ve described below in a mere 214 words. Follow the links for more details.

• If you have health coverage you like, you can keep it. Children under 26 can stay on a parent’s health insurance plan.

• If you don’t have coverage, you can use the new Health Insurance Marketplace to buy a private insurance plan.

• Pre-existing conditions are covered. So are many preventive services and 10 essential health benefits.

• Depending on your family size and income, you may get lower costs on monthly premiums and out-of-pocket costs.

• You may also qualify for free or low-cost coverage from Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Many states are expanding Medicaid to cover more people in 2014.

• If you don’t have coverage in 2014 you’ll have to pay a fee. In 2014 it’s $95 per adult ($47.50 per child) or 1% of income, whichever is higher. The family max is $285.

• If you have coverage and want to explore Marketplace plans, you can. But if you have an offer of insurance from an employer, you may not be able to get lower costs on Marketplace insurance based on your income. It depends on whether the insurance you’re offered is considered affordable and meets minimum standards.

• Medicare isn’t part of the Marketplace. If you have Medicare, keep it.

• Marketplace open enrollment starts October 1, 2013. It closes March 31, 2014.

source: Healthcare.gov