UNITED STEELWORKERS SOAR STEELWORKERS ORGANIZATION OF ACTIVE RETIREES

CONNECTION

WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER

A Defining Moment

In 1935, President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act (SSA), which significantly reduced poverty among disabled Americans and nearly eradicated it among senior citizens for generations to come. Nearly 90 years later, the SSA is arguably the most popular legislative accomplishment in American history.

At the time, the SSA was a trailblazing effort because it completely changed the realities of work in America. Americans could actually retire, and those who were unable to work because of a workplace injury or disability became eligible for unemployment and health insurance.

Today, America again faces a unique generational crisis where the population of seniors will double by 2050, while the number of people older than 85 will almost triple. Retired Americans are at a particular risk because, unlike most industrialized nations, the United States does not provide a publicly-funded long-term-care benefit for older adults.

The changing nature of our society, whereby most families cannot survive on just one income, has made it largely unsustainable for working-age Americans to take care of their elders as they have in previous generations. Additionally, the median salary for home-care workers is approximately $17,200 per year, making it extremely difficult for the profession to attract a well-trained and sustainable workforce.

Many experts fear that failing to address this collision of factors "threatens to strain an already limited workforce of caregivers; complicate the retirements of millions of people; and force many children, particularly daughters, out of the labor market to care for their parents." (washingtonpost.com, 4/2/21)

President Biden has proposed that the American Jobs Plan should include a $400 billion investment in home- or community-based care for the elderly and people with disabilities. This would nearly double what is spent annually on home care for vulnerable populations, which would help expand access to more Americans, raise the wages of caregivers, and potentially drive down costs as a result of increased competition.

Our union strongly supports the President's proposed investments in home- and community-based care, and other efforts to adequately meet the care needs of retirees and Americans with disabilities.

The goal of ensuring retirement security has broad support across our union. In fact, a survey that was circulated in 2019/2020 found that retirement security ranked among the top three most important concerns of USW members and retirees, with 86 percent of respondents saying it was "very important." Healthcare came in 1st in with 87 percent, and workers' rights was 3rd with 81 percent.

When our nation faced the generational crisis of the 1920's and 30's, we didn't choose to abandon our fellow Americans who were most vulnerable. Rather, we created Social Security. **We face a similar crossroads today, and we must not be afraid to act boldly.**

Julie Stein, SOAR Director

Changes in Leadership Provide Opportunities to Build Lines of Communication and to Grow SOAR

Recent USW local union election results show a number of new officers have been elected to lead their locals. Also, due to incumbents deciding to retire, there will be at least two new District Directors and a National Director of Canada after the International Officer elections are held this fall. These changes provide obstacles as well as opportunities for SOAR.

After being in isolation due to COVID-19, we in SOAR are just beginning to hold in-person meetings and reorganize our chapters. The time is now to reach out to your local union leadership to develop or reacquaint a working relationship with them. We must take this opportunity to explain the three-fold purpose of SOAR. We must also explain how the locals can help build our membership by making sure they are aware of the USW resolution passed to pay the first-year membership in SOAR for all retirees. As union members get closer to retirement (age 45 or older), we can encourage them, including spouses, to join our SOAR chapters, as well.

To further strengthen the relationship between the chapters and their locals, SOAR leaders and members can attend their local union meetings, when possible, and make sure the membership knows that we stand ready to help them when needed. Whether through Rapid Response, volunteering with the Community Service Committee or assuring the local union that we are anxious to help them if they need turnout for rallies and manning of the picket lines during negotiations. There are many ways for chapter members to be involved and stay connected to the union.

Further, to establish a good line of communication between the SOAR chapters and their locals, the local unions are encouraged to select a representative to serve in an advisory capacity to the SOAR chapter. And, SOAR chapters are encouraged to select a designee to serve in an advisory capacity to the local union.

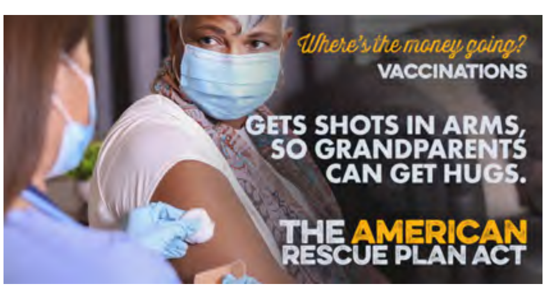
We also need better communication among ourselves. District SOAR board members should develop a system of regular contact with their chapter presidents (leaders) and coordinators. If you don't have a coordinator in your sub-district or area and are interested in serving as one, talk to your SOAR District Board Member. (Directors appoint coordinators in their respective districts. Board members will notify them of any potential new coordinators for their consideration.)

Finally, SOAR board members should develop a relationship with their new director and establish a plan to get active in their districts. There are many opportunities for SOAR to become involved at the district level. Still, if we are not aware of any organizing drives, strikes, rallies or demonstrations, we cannot participate. That's why a good communication is needed between SOAR and our union leadership throughout.

We in SOAR need to take advantage of the resources provided by our districts and local unions so that we may continue the fight to improve the lives of workers and retirees TOGETHER.

Bill Pienta, SOAR President

Where's the Money Going?



It's clear that there is no way for our country to get back on track until the virus is under control. The American Rescue Plan directly confronts the COVID-19 pandemic, making our country safer and healthier. This includes facilitating further testing, contact tracing and personal protective equipment, as well as vaccine procurement, supplies and distribution and more. Get more FACTS on the American Rescue Plan here: http://usw.to/rescue

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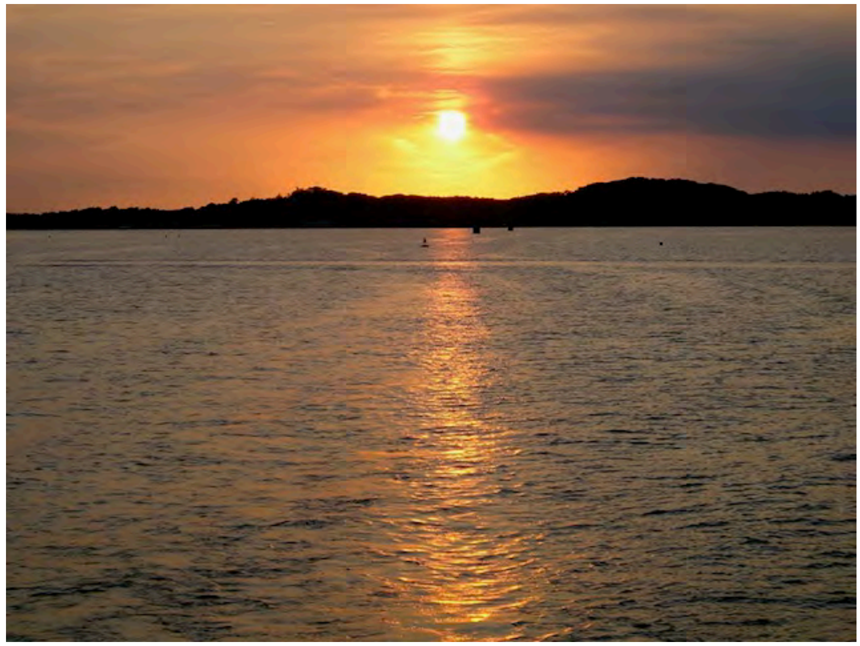
Ole Charlie Sez:

Articles and Photos Requested

- The next deadline for the SOAR in Action magazine will be July 9, and articles should be emailed to the SOAR Director Julie Stein at jstein@usw.org
- The deadline for the next publication of the SOAR Chapter Connection newsletter is July 25 and items should be emailed to Charlie Averill at soar3@icloud.com

Light at the End of the Tunnel or Just a Mirage



Is the pandemic really coming to an end, or not? I hear conflicting reports. I don't even think my idol, Dr. Fauchi, can answer that question with a simple "yes" or "no." Cases are down which is fantastic. And mask wearing and social distancing policies have been revised, and even lifted. That's good too. But, about the mask wearing...to mask or not to mask, that is the question. Even though I have been vaccinated, where can I go maskless? The grocery store? What about restaurants? How about church? Such a dilemma. I play it safe and always have my homemade mask dangling from my wrist, just in case. I will not miss that fashion statement at all!

I must say I am happy, and thankful, cases of COVID-19 are dwindling. However, I'm kind of sorry to see activities starting up again. For over a year, I have gotten used to having no obligations. The squares on my kitchen calendar were empty for fifteen months. Now the little reminders of meetings and events are creeping into many of the squares. Gone are the months with nothing to do but plan what to have for supper and when to do laundry. Does this mean, that after over a year, I will have to retire my comfy, knit pants and trusty tee shirt to the rag bag? Now I have to put on real clothes, do my hair, and wear lipstick? And go to a SOAR meeting. Sigh.

Elaine Averill

Frequently Asked Questions About the Social Security Trust Funds

Q. What are the Social Security Trust Funds?

A. The Social Security Trust Funds are the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) and the Disability Insurance (DI) Trust Funds. These funds are accounts managed by the Department of the Treasury. They serve two purposes: (1) they provide an accounting mechanism for tracking all income to and disbursements from the trust funds, and (2) they hold the accumulated asset reserves. These accumulated reserves provide automatic spending authority to pay benefits. The Social Security Act limits trust fund expenditures to benefits and administrative costs.

Benefits to retired workers and their families, and to families of deceased workers, are paid from the OASI Trust Fund. Benefits to disabled workers and their families are paid from the DI Trust Fund. Benefit payments accounted for more than 98 percent of the total cost of the combined OASI and DI funds in calendar year 2019.

A Board of Trustees oversees the financial operations of the trust funds. The Board reports annually to Congress on the financial status of the trust funds.

Q. How are the trust funds invested?

A. By law, income to the trust funds must be invested, on a daily basis, in securities guaranteed as to both principal and interest by the Federal government. All securities held by the trust funds are "special issues" of the United States Treasury. Such securities are available only to the trust funds.

In the past, the trust funds have held marketable Treasury securities, which are available to the general public. Unlike marketable securities, special issues can be redeemed at any time at face value. Marketable securities are subject to the forces of the open market and may suffer a loss, or enjoy a gain, if sold before maturity. Investment in special issues gives the trust funds the same flexibility as holding cash.

Data on trust fund investments provide a breakdown by interest rate and trust fund for any month after 1989.

Q. What interest rate do the trust funds' invested assets earn?

A. The rate of interest on special issues is determined by a formula enacted in 1960. The rate is determined at the end of each month and applies to new investments in the following month.

The numeric average of the 12 monthly interest rates for 2019 was 2.219 percent. The annual effective interest rate (the average rate of return on all investments over a one-year period) for the OASI and DI Trust Funds, combined, was 2.812 percent in 2019. This higher effective rate resulted because the funds hold special-issue bonds acquired in past years when interest rates were higher.

Q. What happens to the taxes that go into the trust funds?

A. Tax income is deposited on a daily basis and is invested in "special-issue" securities. The cash exchanged for the securities goes into the general fund of the Treasury and is indistinguishable from other cash in the general fund.

Q. If all the income is invested, how do benefits get paid each month?

A. Money to cover program cost (mainly benefit payments) from the trust funds comes from the redemption or sale of securities held by the trust funds. When "special-issue" securities are redeemed, interest is paid. In fact, the principal amount of special issues redeemed, plus the corresponding interest, is just enough to cover the required cost.

Continued on page 6

More Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What were the amounts of securities bought and sold during recent years?
A. The amount bought in 2019 was $1,234 billion, while the amount sold was $1,232 billion. See investment transactions for more detail and earlier years.

Q. Why do some people describe the "special issue" securities held by the trust funds as worthless IOUs? What is SSA's reaction to this criticism?
A. Money flowing into the trust funds is invested in U. S. Government securities. Because the government spends this borrowed cash, some people see the trust fund asset reserves as an accumulation of securities that the government will be unable to make good on in the future. Without legislation to restore long-range solvency of the trust funds, redemption of long-term securities prior to maturity would be necessary.

Far from being "worthless IOUs," the investments held by the trust funds are backed by the full faith and credit of the U. S. Government. The government has always repaid Social Security, with interest. The special-issue securities are, therefore, just as safe as U.S. Savings Bonds or other financial instruments of the Federal government.

Many options are being considered to restore long-range trust fund solvency. These options are being considered now, well in advance of the year the trust fund reserves are likely to be depleted. It is thus likely that legislation will be enacted to restore long-term solvency, making it unlikely that the trust funds' securities will need to be redeemed on a large scale prior to maturity.

Q. Can the Social Security Trust Funds remain solvent without making changes to the program?
A. In the annual Trustees Report, projections are made under three alternative sets of economic, demographic, and programmatic assumptions. Under one of these sets (labeled "Low Cost") the trust funds remain solvent for the next 75 years. Under the other two sets (the "Intermediate" and "High Cost"), the trust fund reserves become depleted within the next 20 years. The intermediate assumptions reflect the Trustees' best estimate of future experience.

Some benefits could be paid even if the trust fund reserves are depleted. For example, under the intermediate assumptions, annual income to the trust funds is projected to equal about seventy-nine percent of program cost once the trust fund reserves become depleted. If no legislation has been enacted to restore long-term solvency by that time, about three-quarters of scheduled benefits could be paid in each year thereafter.

The Trustees believe that extensive public discussion and analysis of the long-range financing problems of the Social Security program are essential in developing broad support for changes to restore the long-range balance of the program.

Q. Were the asset reserves of the Social Security Trust Funds depleted in the past?
A. The reserves of the larger trust fund (OASI), from which retirement benefits are paid, were nearly depleted in 1982. No beneficiary was shortchanged because Congress enacted temporary emergency legislation that permitted borrowing from other Federal trust funds and then later enacted legislation to strengthen OASI Trust Fund financing. The borrowed amounts were repaid with interest within four years.

Source: Social Security Administration website: www.ssa.gov

"Let's Get On With This"

President Joe Biden's administration has managed to implement a $1.9 trillion stimulus package to help offset the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the anticipated crowning achievement of his brief tenure in the White House rests on the passage of a robust infrastructure package.

Infrastructure spending is one of the few areas where both Democrats and Republicans agree.

The debate between the political parties lies in the amount of revenue that should be spent on a broad-range infrastructure package that is long-overdue in America.

The Alliance for American Manufacturing believes it is time to tackle a wide-range of infrastructure improvements that will not only repair and rebuild roads and bridges, but will also upgrade schools, expand access to high-speed broadband, address clean energy research, provide electric vehicle charging stations and modernize America's water systems, electrical grids, airports, seaports and other government facilities essential to returning the United States to world dominance in public services.

The Biden administration has sent the GOP a $1.7 trillion proposal, which slashed $600 billion from the President's original plan. The Republican members of Congress initially put out a $568 billion infrastructure framework but are expected to up the ante to $1 billion.

The final number of dollars to be invested is likely to become a compromise between the Biden team and Republican lawmakers, but AAM believes the President should stick to his "Build Back Better" plan and fight for the largest investment he can get.

President Biden's infrastructure plan, if fully implemented, is estimated to create nearly 18 million quality jobs in manufacturing and construction, many of them filled by union workers.

A larger investment in infrastructure is the best policy for the United Steelworkers. If the Republican administration of Donald Trump was comfortable with the nearly $2 billion dollar tax cuts for corporations and wealthy Americans, it certainly is time to support the hard-working USW members by investing in America's steel mills and aluminum manufacturers that will be supplying so much product to rebuild our infrastructure.

As U.S. Steel President and CEO Dave Burritt said: "Let's get on with this."

Jeff Bonior, Jeff *is a staff writer for the Alliance for American Manufacturing*

One Thing Most Of Us Can Agree On

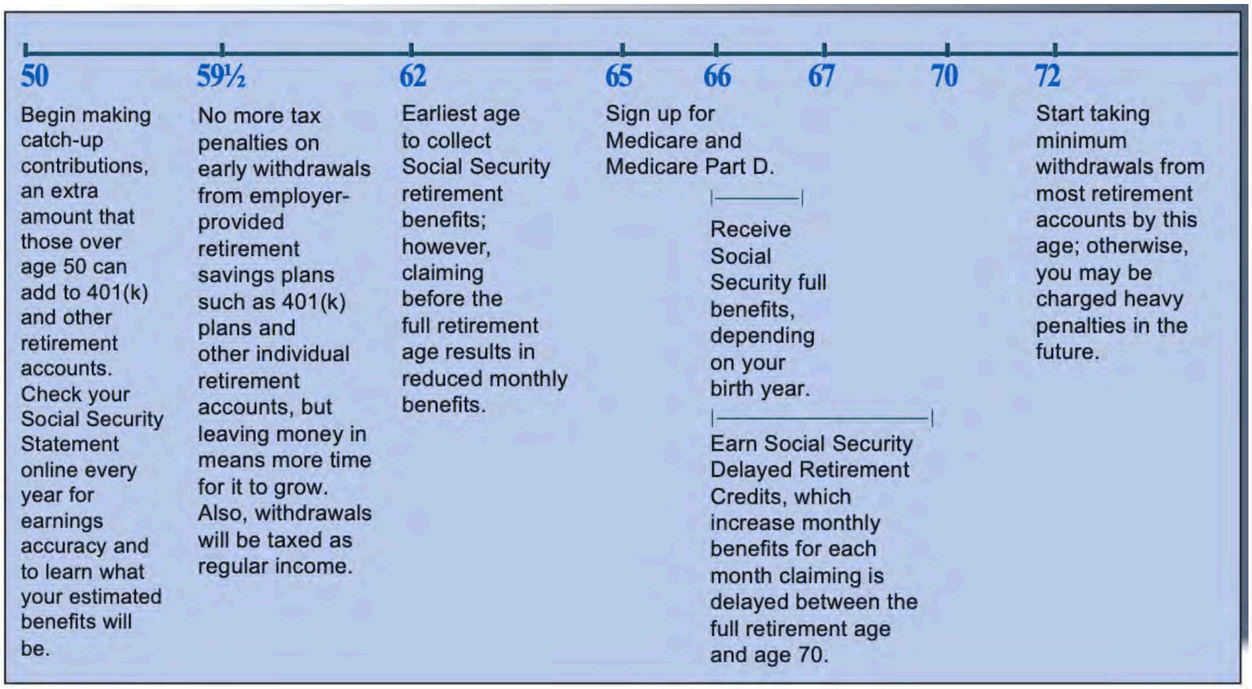
When something needs repair around the house and home, the best thing to do is make the repair before more and more begins to go wrong. Let's see what the Congress will do about the country's infrastructure.

Charlie

Retirement Toolkit

The toolkit includes a list of publications and interactive tools to help in your planning, plus information on how to contact the respective agency with your specific questions. It is important to start early and be well informed so you can make timely decisions and, if necessary, make changes while you still have time before retirement. The timeline below can help you plan for the kind of retirement you want.

Timeline for Retirement Planning



Choosing when to begin receiving Social Security benefits is an important part of deciding when to retire. If you choose to start receiving benefits when you reach full retirement age, you will receive your full benefit. If you delay claiming benefits beyond full retirement age, you can earn credits that increase your monthly benefit by about eight percent for each year you delay claiming, up to age 70. If you start collecting Social Security benefits before you reach full retirement age, your benefits will be reduced by up to 30 percent, depending on when your benefits start.

Social Security's full retirement age depends on the year in which you were born. If you were born between 1943 and 1954, your full retirement age is 66. If you were born between 1955 and 1959, your full retirement age increases gradually until it reaches age 67 for those born in 1960 or later.

If you claim benefits before your full retirement age and continue to work, your income will be subject to the retirement earnings test and your benefits could be reduced if your earnings exceed a certain limit. However, once you reach full retirement age, your monthly benefit will be increased permanently to account for any months in which benefits were reduced. The retirement earnings test no longer applies after you attain your full retirement age and your benefit will not be reduced no matter how much you earn. Once you claim benefits, your benefits will be adjusted annually to reflect the increase, if any, in the cost-of-living.

Continued on page 9

Medicare Parts A & B

If you're already getting Social Security benefits, you'll automatically get Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) and Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance) starting the first day of the month you turn 65. If your 65th birthday is on the first day of the month, Part A and Part B will start the first day of the prior month. Medicare will mail you a Medicare card and general information before the date you become eligible.

People under 65 with certain disabilities who've been entitled to Social Security disability benefits for 24 months are enrolled in Medicare automatically. People of any age who have End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD), also qualify for Medicare, but must file an application to enroll.

In most cases, you usually don't pay a monthly premium for Part A coverage if you or your spouse paid Medicare taxes while working. However, Medicare Part B is a voluntary program that will normally require you to pay a monthly premium. If you don't want to keep Part B, you must follow the directions when you get your Medicare card to let Medicare know you don't want it. Otherwise, keep your card and you'll be charged the Part B premium.

If you aren't receiving Social Security benefits by age 65 and you want to enroll in Medicare, you should contact Social Security and sign up during your Initial Enrollment Period. In most cases, this is the seven-month period that starts three months before the month you turn 65, includes the month you turn 65, and ends three months after the month you turn 65.

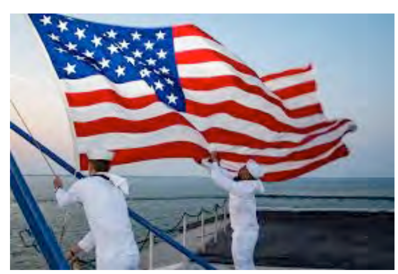
Important: In most cases, if you don't sign up for Medicare Part B when you're first eligible, you may have to pay a late enrollment penalty for as long as you have Medicare coverage.

If you're covered under a group health plan based on your or your spouse's current employment, you should contact your employer benefits administrator to see if it might be best to postpone Part B enrollment until you or your spouse retires. This decision will depend on how your insurance works with Medicare. Once your employment ends, you'll have an eight-month Special Enrollment Period in which to sign up for Part B. You won't have to pay a penalty if you sign up during this period.

Note: These eligibility rules are general and apply to people who are nearing their 65th birthday. Visit Medicare's website to learn about eligibility rules for other situations.

Source: Retirement Toolkit from Dept of Labor website: www.dol.gov

Memorial Day Tribute



"The Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees honor and remember the heroes who have selflessly given their courage and lives to serve our nation. We appreciate your patriotism and will not forget you."

Congress Must Finally Take on the Powerful Drug Corporations

by Robert Roach, Jr.

Americans continue to pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs, and the costs are going up every year. Seniors are bearing the brunt of this because they need more medicines to stay healthy. Even during the pandemic, drug corporations have raised their prices, and profits are soaring.

The Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act, H.R. 3, is one House bill that would provide critical protection against skyrocketing prices.

H.R. 3 repeals current law that prohibits the federal government from negotiating lower drug prices. It requires that the Secretary of Health and Human Services negotiate on up to 250 of the most expensive drugs, including insulin. The negotiated amount would be available to all payers, allowing workers covered by employer-sponsored plans to also benefit from the price reductions.

Another House bill that would protect us from exorbitant drug prices is the Pandemic Treatment Access and Affordability (PTAA) Act, H.R. 597.

American taxpayers spend tens of billions of dollars on research and development for vaccines and treatments for COVID-19, including $23 billion for manufacturing and purchasing. Despite this public investment, there is no guarantee that these taxpayer-funded drugs will be affordable, accessible, or available to all who need them.

H.R. 597 gives Congress the power to block drug corporations' monopoly control over prices. It assures access to COVID-19 drugs for all who need them, ensures affordability, provides greater transparency, and prevents price gouging in any future health emergencies.

Congress needs to take action to control the exponentially increasing prices of drugs by passing both of these bills. Then we can finally move forward on what has been a top Alliance for Retired Americans priority for two decades.

Robert Roach, Jr. is president of the Alliance for Retired Americans. He was previously General Secretary–Treasurer of the IAMAW. For more information, visit www.retiredamericans.org.

Relax before bedtime: Do something quiet and calming–take a bath, listen to classical music, read a book.

Elaine

America's Thirst

By Tom Conway
USW International President

Simon and Barbara Hale dropped a small fortune on bottled water, battled rust-stained laundry and endured slimy showers before discovering the water from their well didn't just taste, smell and feel awful but actually endangered their health.

The Vietnam veteran and his wife couldn't afford the huge expense of connecting to the local water system, however, so about a dozen volunteers from United Steelworkers (USW) Local 12160 dug a trench, tapped the main and ran a service line into the couple's home.

Domenic DeDomenicco and Simon Hale

"It's life-changing," Barbara Hale said of the free work by the USW members, all of whom work at South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority, noting she and her husband have clean, palatable water for the first time in years. "I just feel safe because we know there's no question about what's in it."

President Joe Biden's infrastructure program would deliver the same security to millions of other Americans thirsting for one of life's basic necessities.

Local 12160 Volunteers

Among many other projects in his $2 trillion American Jobs Plan, Biden proposed about $110 billion in long-overdue upgrades to the nation's patchwork of foundering water systems. The unprecedented investment will not only make life more convenient for consumers but protect their health and build stronger communities.

"It's definitely time for somebody to take action," said Local 12160 President Domenic DeDomenico, a water treatment operator at the authority who heard about the Hales' plight and mustered the crew of Steelworkers who saved the couple thousands of dollars in connection costs.

DeDomenico and his authority co-workers proudly supply about 430,000 people via 1,700 miles of pipes in 15 municipalities. They treat, test and monitor the supply around the clock, distributing, on average, more than 42 million gallons of "perfect" water every day. Many Americans long for that high level of quality and dependability right now.

In the authority's own service area, for example, are residents who still lack access to public mains as well as the financial resources to connect to them. "Can you do that for us?" some of the Hales' wistful neighbors asked the volunteers.

Across the country, ramshackle and disintegrating infrastructure delivers mere dribs and drabs of the clean, safe water Americans need every day. Some families drink foul-tasting, smelly well water, like the Hales did before a recent test revealed traces of oil and other contaminants that required an urgent switch to the public water system.

Others travel dozens of miles to collect potable water each day because they live in areas with low water tables or because sewage or other pollutants foul the same streams or pipes used to source drinking supplies. Because of water quality and related problems in McDowell County, W.Va., for example, one local food bank experiences greater demand for bottled water than any other item.

Some Americans live in low-density areas that no water authorities serve.

Yet residents in urban areas fare just as poorly. Lead and other contaminants taint the drinking water in many cities, where decades of neglect rendered aging systems vulnerable to breaks and security breaches.

The American Society of Civil Engineers recently gave the nation's water systems a C- grade, noting the combined 2.2 million miles of pipes are so old that they average a leak every two minutes and waste about six billion gallons of treated water every day. Without adequate funding, water authorities struggle to maintain their existing lines, let alone extend service to new customers.

Local 14614 President Ron Brady

"We're just replacing what they have because they're losing so much water," explained USW Local 14614 President Ron Brady, whose membership includes hundreds of construction workers in West Virginia.

Brady has seen communities' water supplies vanish when landslides knocked out precariously positioned pipes. He's witnessed water lines so old they're made of wood and function like barrel-shaped sluices.

And he knows residents whose well water stains their bathtubs and clothes and who yearn for public water partly so they can get the more affordable insurance that comes from having fire hydrants nearby. There's no reason to tolerate any of this.

The Senate recently passed a bipartisan bill earmarking $35 billion for water system improvements. But that's just a small fraction of what's needed.

Congressional approval of Biden's American Jobs Plan would provide the comprehensive funding necessary for top-to-bottom water infrastructure upgrades. That includes removing all lead-tainted pipes, replacing leaky mains, upgrading treatment plants and extending service to areas currently without it.

Upgrading water infrastructure would make Americans healthier while delivering a major boost to the economy.

Biden's plan would provide family-sustaining jobs to construction workers, including Brady's members, and ensure work for Americans who produce steel, aluminum, valves, pipes and other materials needed to construct and operate water systems. Modernization would prevent the water disruptions and quality problems that imperil billions in economic activity—at restaurants, hotels, factories and other businesses—every year.

And Biden's plan would promote a more equitable distribution of America's resources. Right now, the lack of access to safe water disproportionately affects the poor, the disabled and elderly Americans like Simon Hale, who broke both ankles in Vietnam, and his wife, who uses a wheelchair.

Using equipment provided by the water authority, DeDomenico and his co-workers needed only several hours to hook up the couple's water and drastically improve their quality of life. The crew even reseeded the Hales' lawn, removing all traces of construction work, before leaving.

"It was a pleasure, obviously," DeDomenico said of meeting Simon Hale. "He served our country."