

USW@Work

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A Powerful Voice for Workers

Illinois Labor Group Honors USW Leaders **FORGED in STEEL**

Several current and former USW leaders were inducted into the Illinois Labor History Society Hall of Honor during the society's annual awards presentation on Dec. 8 in Chicago.

The event's theme this year was "Forged in Steel," as the society chose to honor a group entirely made up of USW leaders. The event was held at the Operating Engineers Local 399 Hall in Chicago.

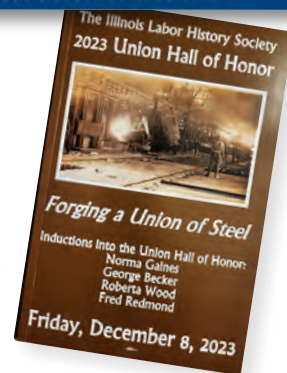
Honorees included AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond, late International President George Becker, a native of Granite City, Ill., and longtime labor activists and members of SOAR, Norma Gaines of Granite City and Roberta Wood of Chicago.

Redmond, a Chicago native, served as USW International Vice President prior to his election as the top financial officer of the AFL-CIO.

Gaines, an active member of SOAR Chapter 34-2 in the Granite City area, said she was "awestruck" to be recognized alongside labor giants such as Redmond, Becker and Wood, and pointed out that Redmond's status as the highest-ranking Black labor leader in U.S. history is evidence of the progress the movement has made since she began her career at the Granite City mill in 1977.

"Now we have a woman in charge of the AFL-CIO and a Black man as the secretary-treasurer. Who would

continued on page 5



◀ Norma Gaines, Honoree; Debby Pope; Dave Dowling, retired USW Sub-district Director; and Don Villar.

▼ Julia Berkowitz, Illinois Labor History Society; Roberta Wood, Honoree; and Don Villar.

▲ Don Villar, Secretary-Treasurer, Chicago Federation of Labor; Fred Redmond, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer and Honoree; Keith Richardson, President of the American Postal Workers Union Local 1, in Chicago; and Debby Pope, Illinois Labor History Society.

▶ Don Villar and Greg Becker, accepting the award on behalf of his father, the late USW Int'l President George Becker.





BILL PIENTA
SOAR President

It's a New Year, and Something to Think About

I hope everyone enjoyed a healthy and happy holiday season and is well-rested and ready to begin another year of activism and involvement in your community and your union through SOAR.

During the extremely cold weather days we have been experiencing here recently in Western New York, I have spent a lot more time indoors thinking, and I would like to share some of those thoughts with you.

A recent report revealed how successful members of Congress were, for those of them who were willing to report it, regarding their success or failure in picking winning stocks. The report also reflected how fortunate they were in the timing of selling stocks before the stock took a significant drop. The report seems to reflect that many members of Congress were much more active in buying or selling stock successfully than they were concerned about passing legislation that would help working people.

Recently, an investment firm sold 264 houses in the Las Vegas area to another company in one day. This sale was part of a larger sale of 1,900 single-family

homes in the Sun Belt area. Investment groups have been buying up homes nationwide for a few years now. A recent study showed this could lead to higher rental prices and fewer available homes.

Exxon Mobile has reported a decline in revenue for the last half of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. Public records indicate this is true. For those last six months of 2023, Exxon only made around \$98,000,000 per day! I wonder why gas prices have not come down.

General Motors took a strike from the UAW, claiming the demands were too much. Within days of reaching an agreement with the UAW, GM reported to its shareholders that the company would begin to buy back \$10,000,000,000, a BILLION worth of stock and would increase its stock dividend by 33 percent.

SOAR will be involved in this year's electoral process and will attempt to make sure only candidates who support our issues are supported by us.

I wish you all a happy and healthy New Year!

Sources:

- <https://unusualwhales.com>
- <https://investor.exxonmobil.com/earnings/financial-results>
- <https://fortune.com/2023/11/29/gm-stock-buyback-10-billion-electric-cars/>

It's up to US
to keep his
dream ALIVE!

Martin Luther King, Jr.
January 15, 1929 - April 4, 1968





JULIE STEIN
SOAR Director

2024 Election Presents Important Decision for SOAR Members, All Retirees

Last year, unions, including the USW, made significant progress toward electing pro-worker, pro-retiree allies in key gubernatorial, legislative and judicial offices nationwide.

While we can't possibly list every victory from the last year, I feel it is necessary to highlight a few of the biggest:

- ▶ Union-backed candidates were victorious in four special elections in Pennsylvania, which helped secure a new pro-union, pro-retiree majority in the state's House of Representatives.
- ▶ Michigan's newly-elected, pro-union governor and legislature—the state's first in nearly 40 years—acted to restore workers' collective bargaining rights by repealing the state's so-called right-to-work law and **putting an end to the unfair pension tax.**
- ▶ Wisconsin voters turned out in droves to secure a 4-3 pro-union state Supreme Court majority.
- ▶ Minnesota's pro-worker, pro-retiree legislature and governor, Tim Walz, passed a state budget (HF3028/SF3035) that was hailed as the "most significant worker protection bill in state history."
- ▶ In Ohio, voters defeated Issue 1, which would have raised the threshold for voters to amend the constitution to a supermajority of 60 percent and enacted stricter requirements for getting amendments on the ballot.
- ▶ Labor-backed candidates maintained control of Virginia's State Senate while reclaiming a pro-worker majority in the general assembly for the first time since 2021.
- ▶ Our close friend, Governor Andy Beshear of Kentucky, won reelection; and,
- ▶ In Pennsylvania and Indiana, we proudly backed close allies who were victorious in their campaigns for local and state offices.

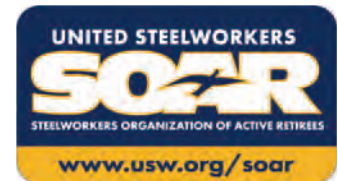
This year presents union members and retirees with another historic opportunity to build upon these victories.

In addition to the critically important presidential election, voters will weigh the decision of who controls Congress, with all 435 U.S. House of Representatives up for election, along with 34 U.S. Senate seats.

Control over 86 legislative chambers will also be decided by voters in 44 states, 11 of whom will choose their next governor.

Eighty-two state supreme court and 216 intermediate appellate court seats will also appear on voters' ballots this November.

While much attention will be given to the presidential campaign, we must keep in mind that state and federal lawmakers also make decisions which impact our ability to access health care, afford the medications we are prescribed, the availability of various health care services in our communities, and so much more.



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A former staff representative out of USW District 4, Frank Hotchkiss, and his wife Ruth, now members of SOAR, made changes to their home that have made an everlasting difference in their community.

Frank & Ruth's House



Frank Hotchkiss at the reception table during a weatherization event for Somali immigrants.

By Ike Gittlen

You wouldn't take notice of their modest Cape Cod outside Buffalo, New York. But, this house has a story that includes this Steelworker couple's interest in climate and energy issues. Through self-education on energy efficiency, they took their home energy costs to nearly nothing. Using this knowledge, they developed a small non-profit to help the lower-income folks in Buffalo do the same. It's a testament to what we can do to address climate change while taking back control of our home energy bills.

Back in the 2000s, Frank was interested in how someone could reduce their home energy costs. By the 2010s, the Hotchkiss's had set up a small non-profit that spent the fall months helping low-income people around Buffalo winterize their homes. It was an

In preparation for a weatherization event, bags of materials are lined up on pews at a local church to be distributed to class participants.



all-volunteer effort from union allies, students and community activists. All the funds they begged from politicians, companies, and through grant programs went into materials. They didn't just repair homes. They taught classes to people on how they could fix their homes themselves. The non-profit supplied the materials—a “workers-to-workers” approach to conserving energy. Frank, Ruth and their band of weatherizers helped an estimated 1,000 families over its ten-year run. When government programs finally began providing these services, they hung up their caulk guns.

After retiring in 2015, the Hotchkiss's set a goal of doing the maximum to lower their home energy costs. Frank is adamant that there “isn't a silver bullet to fix everything, no one thing will solve the climate crisis, but we can do one thing at a time.” They began by insulating their house walls, replacing the old doors and windows with energy-efficient ones, and replacing electrical outlets, foundation leaks and basement windows.

Moving up the cost scale, they installed an energy-efficient two-stage furnace and air conditioning unit. Then, a standing seam metal roof, roof-mounted solar panels, a solar system to heat their pool and a tankless whole home water heater. The solar panels began to generate excess energy, which was sold back to the electric utility company. Overall, Ruth says they went from a monthly energy bill in the hundreds to an average of

less than \$100 per month, pointing out that none of this has required them to change their lifestyles. They have upped the thermometer during winter, with no impact on their utility bills. That's a win-win for the family budget and the climate fight!

To help make their energy investments cost-effective, the Hotchkiss's have taken advantage of government programs that provided tax breaks and subsidies. One of their “missions” these days is to promote the non-profit website **DSIRE** (<https://www.dsireusa.org>), which includes a list of federal and state programs available, state by state. They also take every opportunity to promote energy efficiency information. Frank would love the schools to teach a class on how to make a home energy efficient, with the idea that kids would take the information back to their parents and spur more energy efficiency activity. Ultimately, the Hotchkiss's would like to see every home in America become an energy “generator” as a massive boost to dealing with climate issues. Not a bad goal for two working people now aged 76.

What Frank and Ruth are doing is a win in a third way. New manufacturing and technical jobs are being created to supply the increasing demand for energy-efficient products. They are now looking at a home energy storage unit, a battery that can hold onto the excess energy it produces and have it

~ If you like this commentary, you may join “**Ike's Work in Progress**” blog for free, where he enjoys sharing his passion for “Working Families, Union Activism and the World Around Us.” Let's see what we can build together.

Go to: <https://likegittlen.substack.com/>



A volunteer instructor explains the importance of energy efficiency to watching participants at a local weatherization event.

available during power outages. A battery manufacturer in Pittsburgh that currently makes industrial storage batteries sees a vast market in these home storage devices. Employing hundreds of people. To the extent we

make these products here in the U.S., it becomes a triple win for home budgets, climate sustainability, and our economy.

The point here is that the move toward a more sustainable planet has

vast benefits for working people. While some want to dwell on the difficulties and disruptions, the rest of us can participate in moving in the right direction and personally benefit from taking action. Frank and Ruth recommend people start with a whole-house energy audit. We should be actively exploring what each of us can do. In the process, we will know more, live smarter, and overcome the fear of change that now dominates the climate debate.

Illinois Labor Group Honors USW Leaders **FORGED in STEEL**

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have ever thought that would happen?" she said. "I was very proud to be up there on stage with those folks."

Gaines said that she has known Redmond since he was a young USW activist.

"I am so grateful to have walked in their steps," she said of Redmond, Becker, Wood and other leaders who fought for the rights of women and people of color.

District 7 Director Mike Millsap served as the keynote speaker at the event, and former International Secretary-Treasurer Jim English provided a video introduction honoring Becker, who served as USW president from 1993 to 2001 and also served as a vice president of the AFL-CIO. Becker's son Greg represented his father, a Granite City native, at the event.

Gaines, the daughter of two Steelworkers, said that in her early days as one of the few women working in the Granite City mill, she and other women had to fight even for the most basic rights, such as having access to their own restrooms and locker rooms.

"We developed a sisterhood and tried to make life in the mill a little bit better for us as well as the men, even if they didn't look at it that way," Gaines said. "For all of us, every day was a brand new world, every day was a challenge, but we persevered."

Part of that same sisterhood was Wood, who was a founding co-chair of the union's District 31 Women's Caucus in northern Illinois and northwest Indiana, and who helped to inspire Gaines likewise to become a founding co-chair of the union's District 34 Women's Caucus in southern Illinois.

"I can't think of a bigger honor than to be honored by a labor history society," Wood said. "The labor movement is the essence of the working class. We're living labor history, and even more, our future is part of labor history, too."



The Illinois Labor History Society Union Hall of Honor celebrated USW leaders, "Forged in Steel," in Chicago on December 8, 2023. Pictured are the award recipients and the evening's keynote speaker. From left, Greg Becker accepting on behalf of his father, the late USW International President George Becker; Norma Gaines, Honoree; AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond, Honoree; USW District 7 Director Michael Millsap, Keynote speaker; and Roberta Wood, Honoree.

Both Wood and Gaines have a lifelong history of engaging union members and other activists in the fight for labor and human rights. Wood said she appreciated the connections that the pair, and other women Steelworkers, forged in their early days. "You have bonds that last your whole life," Wood said. "You have so much emotional understanding of each other."

Gaines said she didn't necessarily consider herself a trailblazer at the start of her career, just a worker who "loved the job."

"You don't realize you are until after the fact," she said.

Wood, an active member of SOAR Chapter 31-9 in the Chicago area, said the current surge in union organizing and activism in the United States reminded her of the activism that reshaped the labor movement during the 1970s.

"We have a whole different kind of movement now," Wood said, "focused on the rank and file, fighting for people and solidarity."

~ The Union Hall of Honor of the Illinois Labor History Society (ILHS) recognizes activists, both past and present, who have stood up for working people, in order to gain union recognition, fair wages, safe and healthy workplace environments, and strong and just communities. The inductees are nominated by the Executive Board of the ILHS.

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS of SOAR in Trail, B.C.

By Rick Lewis
SOAR Chapter 3-12 President

The most-recent quarterly meeting of SOAR Chapter 3-12 in Trail, British Columbia, was an enjoyable and well-timed affair. It was not only an opportunity for members to conduct regular business, but also to kick off the Christmas/holiday season and to celebrate our chapter's 25th anniversary.

The meeting/celebration, held as always at our local Royal Canadian Legion hall, featured a wonderful breakfast cooked by the Legion's Ladies' Auxiliary. Draws were held for gift cards and other prizes that were donated to the chapter.

A guest speaker from United Way spoke about the agency's programs and services that are available to seniors and others in the community. Representatives of other organizations that provide assistance to retirees and seniors also were on hand to provide information to members.

The occasion demonstrated how our chapter remains resilient and active, even as we continue to confront COVID and other challenges, including the passing of members and executives.

Chapter 3-12 members will gather again for our next quarterly meeting on the first Thursday in March, when a guest speaker will be on hand to answer questions and provide valuable information on income tax issues.



SOAR Chapter 3-12 member Gale Andrews and chapter President Rick Lewis were among those celebrating the chapter's 25th anniversary in December, in Trail, B.C.



SOAR Chapter 3-12 President Rick Lewis, left, member Deborah Hodgins (Lewis), and chapter Vice-President Steve Dewell, were among those celebrating the chapter's 25th anniversary in December, in Trail, B.C.

SOAR Members Give Back in Northern Ontario

By Kevin Conley
SOAR Chapter 6-02 Financial Secretary

SOAR Chapter 6-02 members in Northern Ontario are continuing to find new ways of supporting local charities and some of the most-vulnerable members of our communities.

Most recently, members purchased Girl Guide cookies to support this worthy group, then we donated the cookies to the Elgin Street Mission, a local charity providing meals and other services to people in need in the Sudbury area. Our chapter also donated turkeys

to the Mission for its annual community Thanksgiving Dinner.

During the holiday season, Chapter 2 made eight donations to local groups, including support to the long-running CTV Lions Club Children's Telethon which provides gifts to thousands of children in communities throughout northeastern Ontario.

Our members also donated to a United Way initiative, Keeping Seniors Warm, which provides vulnerable older residents with winter gear to keep them warm during the colder months.

Finally, we also entered a classic car in the annual Valley East Days Classic Car Show, with all entry fees from the show donated to the Pregnancy Care Centre and Infant Food Bank which provides necessities to hundreds of families in the Sudbury area.

Chapter 6-02 members are continually demonstrating SOAR's commitment to give back to our communities.



Charitable Donations a Staple of Chapter 10 Christmas Lunch

Some 60 members and guests were on hand Dec. 5, 2023, for the SOAR Chapter 10 annual Christmas lunch at the Steelworkers Centre in Hamilton, Ont.

Everyone enjoyed a lunch of meat pies, salads and many desserts and, as always, members brought donations of unwrapped toys and non-perishable food for distribution by St. Mathew's House, the charity of choice for Chapter 10. Our chapter chose St. Mathew's house due to the many good works it provides in our community, especially for seniors.

At every Chapter 10 meeting there is a raffle, with prizes ranging from SOAR shirts, hats or gift cards for groceries, restaurants or coffee shops, with all proceeds put towards our year-end donations. This year, with other donations from our members, we raised over \$2,000 for St. Mathew's House and \$200 for United Way.

This year, Bob Sutton's daughter (who turned 45 on Dec. 2 and joined SOAR on Dec. 3) came to the luncheon with Ally, her five-year-old daughter. Ally had won a \$75 gift card after raising the most money for charity among her classmates. After watching a news story with her mother about people living in poverty, she unselfishly decided she wanted to spend her gift card on toys for underprivileged kids. Ally's mother took her shopping to purchase the toys, which they brought to the SOAR Christmas lunch to be added to our donations.

The executive of Chapter 10 had planned ahead and brought plastic take-out containers and bags for any leftover food from the lunch. Volunteers packed up leftover meat pies, salads, pickles, cheese and desserts, as well as soft drinks and cutlery. They loaded everything into a van and made deliveries to several tent encampments, where they met many nice people who were homeless for various reasons, most through no fault of their own. We all recognize that many people today are only a few missed pay-cheques away from being homeless themselves.

Not only was it a great holiday lunch, but with all the donations collected, it was a very rewarding experience for all who attended.



Pictured are the SOAR volunteers with the dishes of food to be delivered to the homeless, and with young, "Next-Gen" Ally in the foreground.



Members Jack Denny, Margo Kells and Sandra Pold at the reception table during the 2023 Christmas party hosted by SOAR Chapter 6-17 in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.



Some of the 94 members and guests who enjoyed the 2023 Christmas party hosted by SOAR Chapter 6-17.

Christmas Party a Holiday Tradition

Shortly after its inception, SOAR Chapter 6-17 in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., began having a Christmas party for its members and guests. This annual tradition has continued ever since, save for 2020 and 2021, the dreaded COVID years. On Dec. 6, 2023, 94 members and guests (hopefully future chapter members!) gathered at Grand Gardens North banquet hall for a traditional Christmas turkey dinner, socializing and dancing to the music of Flathead Ford, a band specializing in our music—from the '50s, '60s and '70s.

For many years, the party was organized by members Don and Val Barill and Jack and Sherry Denny, who set a template for those who have since taken over. Special thanks to Nancy Sagle and Sandra Pold and their minions for all their work. And a special note to remember the late Helen Calvelli, the chapter secretary who died in July, who ensured that the hall was booked well in advance.



Nancy Sagle and Sandra Pold at the SOAR Chapter 6-17 Christmas party.

MILLIONS OF CANADIANS Struggling to Afford Basic Needs

By Lena Sutton

Canadian National Co-ordinator

As I write this article, I reflect on the number of homeless people across Canada and the impacts of the rising cost of living.

Millions of Canadians—one in four—are struggling to afford the cost of basic needs, a Salvation Army survey of more than 1,500 people across the country indicates. The survey results, released in December 2023, also show nearly 60 percent of Canadians are extremely concerned about the rising cost of living and inflation.

A main cause of the rising cost of living is shelter, and 44 percent of Canadians are concerned with their ability to afford a home or pay rent. Home prices increased by 16 percent from November 2022 to November 2023, interest rates and rent rose significantly, while incomes remained stagnant for many.

Homeless Hub, a research group run by York University in Toronto, has reported that between 150,000 and 300,000 people are experiencing homelessness in Canada, with many living on the streets or in tent encampments. The latest data from Statistics Canada shows that, as of in 2021, 16.6 percent of Canadians aged 65 and older were homeless, with 14.1 percent classified as hidden homeless, who live with friends or relatives.

In St. John's, in Newfoundland and Labrador, Michael Keough, a 37-year-old homeless man, was jailed for stealing food. Keough had been denied income support because he had no official address. Then someone stole his tent and he had nowhere to live. He stole food, then waited for police to arrest him and take him to jail. He declined bail, opting to stay in a notorious, 164-year-old, mould- and rodent-infested penitentiary, where he would at least have a bed and daily meals.

The tragedy of homelessness in St. John's was further exposed by a six-year-old boy, Jackson Price, who one



day asked his mother why there were so many tents erected alongside a busy road in the city. When his mother explained that it

was a homeless encampment, Jackson asked, “Mommy, can we make sandwiches someday to deliver to the homeless?”

As Jackson and his family began bringing food to homeless people in their community, their efforts attracted media attention and soon expanded, thanks to public support. Jackson said he did it simply “because I wanted to help.”

Sadly, homeless encampments are commonplace across Canada, including in my city of Hamilton, Ont. On Thanksgiving last fall, I visited one such encampment, bringing food donated by a local church whose members include two members of our SOAR Chapter 10.

While visiting this encampment I met and got to know a young homeless woman, Nicole. She told me she had left a domestic violence situation, lost her home and her job, and gave up her children for their safety. She said she still sees her children, but is struggling to find a job because she has no permanent address.

I left the tent encampment that night crying, thinking about how we live in one of the best and wealthiest countries in the world, yet our governments have failed so many people like Nicole and Michael Keough.

All levels of government have failed in their duty to ensure there is affordable housing available to all Canadians. Instead, across our country the cost of renting even a one-bedroom apartment is out of reach for people on low incomes.

Our federal, provincial and municipal governments have made a lot of promises, but have not delivered on affordable housing, social and rent-geared-to-income housing, seniors' housing, or on the health care and social-support services that are so desperately needed for Canadians struggling with mental health and addiction issues.

If six-year-old Jackson Price can recognize the problem, and act on it, why can't our political leaders?

In Canada, only the New Democratic Party actually has a strategic plan to address homelessness and affordable housing. This is a key reason why I believe retirees must support and help elect New Democrats, at all levels of government. The NDP is not perfect, but it's the only party committed to working in our best interests and not those of CEOs and big business.

SOAR in ACTION



Bettendorf, IA—SOAR Chapter 11-4 held its Annual Chili Supper at the USW Local 105 Hall on December 9, 2023. The raised funds will be donated to Family Resources—Quad Cities in Bettendorf and the Vietnam Veterans Chapter 669 in Moline, IL. Pictured from left, Cassandra Dixon, Vera Kelly and Margaret Default. Thanks to all who participated!

On January 4, a group photo was taken at the chapter's monthly meeting with a check for over \$600 raised during the chapter's annual chili supper to be delivered to Family Resources—Quad Cities and Vietnam Veterans Chapter 669.



Pittsburgh, PA—Members of SOAR 20-15, Greater Pittsburgh Steelworker Retirees, and members of the Pittsburgh Labor Chorus singing in the holiday season at I. W. Abel Plaza.

SOAR members were still singing when they sat down for their holiday luncheon on December 2. They rang in the season at I. W. Abel Plaza, one of three affordable senior housing complexes in Pittsburgh where the USW is on the board of the Elderly Housing Development and Operations Corporation. It was not just Jingle Bells and dashing through the snow. Joined by the Pittsburgh Labor Chorus, retired steelworkers substituted union lyrics for holiday tunes. For example, to the tune of O Come All Ye Faithful, retirees sang, "O come to all ye readers, don't read the Post-Gazette. Rip up that paper and unsubscribe today." The region's largest newspaper workers have been on strike for over a year.

SOAR members wanted to spread holiday cheer at the union senior housing facility. Still, they worried they couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. The chapter contacted the Pittsburgh Labor Chorus, who agreed to add their voices. In addition to "Silent Night," retirees sang "Solidarity Forever" and other labor songs. I.W. Abel residents, many of whom are retired USW and other union members, joined in with some, including their grandchildren, in the celebration. Santa SOAR members delivered each I.W. Abel resident a SOAR water bottle stuffed with candy. As they left, steelworker retirees vowed to come back and sign up I.W. Abel residents into SOAR.



Pueblo, CO—SOAR Chapter 38-3 delivers items collected from their annual sock drive during the chapter's annual holiday luncheon to the Cooperative Care and Share Center in Pueblo. Betty Spinuzzi, Trustee, is pictured on the left, and Joel Buchanan, Vice President, on the right. In the middle are two Care and Share Center volunteers accepting the 146 pairs of new socks to be distributed to the Pueblo homeless and those in need. Thanks to all who helped and donated!



Newport News, VA—SOAR Chapter 35-1 held their annual Christmas celebration at the Jefferson Cultural Club on December 9, 2023. Pictured from left is special guest Congressman Bobby Scott, SOAR Chapter 35-1 President Linda Kindred decked out in holiday attire with USW Local 8888 President Charles Spivey.



White Bear Lake, MN—The American Cancer Society Relay for Life of White Bear Lake Area was held July 28–29, 2023 on the track at White Bear Lake Area High School – South Campus. According to the Relay for Life website, event participants raised \$156,952 for the cause! Pictured, members of SOAR Chapter 33-7 walked for the Cure for Cancer. From left, Gerry Parzino, Keith Grover, Nan Duchene, Tom Remily and Gary Evenson.

Minneapolis, MN—SOAR Chapter 33-7, the Twin Cities SOAR Retirees, held its first-ever food drive and made its first-time drop off to Anoka County Brotherhood Council—ACBC Food Shelf in Anoka, MN, on November 1, 2023. Pictured from left, Gary Evenson and Gerry Parzino.



Minneapolis, MN—SOAR Chapter 33-7 held its second food drive and made its second delivery to the ABC Food Shelf in Anoka after its monthly meeting on January 3, 2024. Pictured, Gerry Parzino and Gary Evenson. Thanks to all who donated!



Dave McCall

GAMBLING with AMERICANS' FUTURES

Vikki Marshall helped to connect unemployed Arizonans with food and shelter during the Reagan-era economic crisis and sometimes found herself on the phone late at night trying to talk a desperate person out of suicide.

These experiences as a social worker and union activist in the 1980s left her keenly aware of the tenuous lives many Americans lead and turned her into a life-long fighter for the opportunities and resources essential to building more resilient families.

But while Marshall spent decades working alongside other union members to foster economic security, Republicans in Congress did the opposite. They repeatedly attempted to gut Social Security and gamble with Americans' futures.

It happened again last November. Extremists in the U.S. House demanded \$183 million in cuts to the Social Security Administration, along with needless cuts to other vital programs and agencies, to avert a government shutdown.

Democrats defeated the right-wingers once again, preserving the programs and keeping the government running. But Marshall, a longtime member of United Steelworkers (USW), knows the GOP will continue targeting Social Security and torpedo the program if they ever have enough votes to get away with it.

"It isn't their money to play with," fumed Marshall, 80, now president of Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) Chapter 39-8 in Tucson, Ariz.

"It's our survival. It's ours. We earned it," she said, noting Americans support Social Security while working and, in return, receive payments during retirement or in cases of disability. "I'm very grateful. I have a pension in addition to my Social Security. A lot of my friends and neighbors do not."

Millions of retirees rely entirely on Social Security and would fall into poverty without it. And even though Americans overwhelmingly oppose cuts to the hugely

popular program, Republicans cannot keep their hands off of it.

Over the years, they tried to privatize Social Security and bet Americans' futures in the stock market. They plotted to increase the retirement age and hollow out benefits for people already paying into the system, potentially forcing Americans to postpone retirement, scrape by during their golden years, or work until death. Republican Sen. Mike Lee of Utah, for example, was once caught on camera saying he wanted to "phase out" Social Security and "pull it up by the roots and get rid of it."

And Republicans used the spending bill debates in recent months to launch yet another assault on working families. This time, they mounted a back-door attack on retirees, demanding \$183 million in cuts to the Social Security Administration (SSA) that would wreck operation of the program, force the agency to close offices and make recipients wait longer for benefits.

These kinds of delays exact enormous tolls. A study by the Government Accountability Office found that 48,000 Americans with disabilities filed for bankruptcy between 2014 and 2019 while waiting for their Social Security claims to be adjudicated and that nearly 110,000 applicants died between 2008 and 2019 without ever receiving final decisions on their cases.

The SSA needs more money to serve the public, not less.

"Don't slice it. Just collect it," Marshall said, noting "millionaires aren't paying their fair share" into Social Security right now.



Vikki Marshall—screenshot via Zoom.



Photo by Getty Images

Americans pay Social Security taxes on only the first \$160,200 of their annual income. While working people contribute with every paycheck, millionaires and billionaires—including many uber-rich Republicans in Congress—finished paying into the program in February this year.

“So many of them are well-to-do, to start with, and they do not see the need to fund Social Security,” Marshall said of congressional Republicans who want to cut the program and are out of touch with retirees who struggle to pay rent or make mortgage payments.

“Because it isn’t their house, they don’t care. Do they have no conscience?” she added, pointing out that the radicals’ callousness contrasts sharply with the way she and other union members live their own lives.

When she was a USW-represented social worker and activist with the Union Services group in southern Arizona, Marshall took a deep interest in her clients. She still recalls giving bread and other “basics” to the unemployed and celebrating with families who overcame struggles to buy homes, put kids through college and achieve other milestones.

Later, as a member of the Pima County Community College Governing Board, Marshall enrolled herself in classes just to get a better idea of how to help students and faculty members succeed.

And she has spent decades campaigning for pro-worker officials, including President Joe Biden, who has vowed to protect and strengthen Social Security. He also wants to increase funding for the SSA to ensure Americans receive ready access to the benefits they earned.

“He gets it. He understands,” said Marshall, who views Social Security not only as the nation’s inviolable contract with working families but as a way of building shared prosperity and ensuring all Americans have dignified retirements.

“I’m from a small farming community in Iowa on the Mississippi River. We didn’t have a lot. What we had we were prepared to share,” she explained. “We have to take care of each other. We have to do the right thing.”

District 13 Gets a New SOAR Chapter



On April 3, 2023, SOAR members in the Norco, Louisiana area, were honored to have their SOAR chapter (SOAR Chapter 13-5) officially chartered by the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees. The new chapter will be home to retirees from USW Local Union 750, a local representing Steelworkers employed at Shell Oil Products U.S.

Ruben Garza, District 13 SOAR Executive Board Member, reported that USW staff representative Marty Poche, LU 750 President Eric Roy, LU 750 Recording Secretary Wade Spears and a group of retirees, Carmine Frangella, Steve Hernandez, Wilton Ledet and Armond Thomatis, were instrumental in laying the foundation for this new chapter, which already has approximately 40 members and growing. Wilton Ledet is serving as the chapter’s first-ever president.

Chapter 13-5 plans to hold monthly meetings and support the work of USW LU 750 while fighting against efforts to compromise vital programs like Medicare and Social Security. The chapter also intends to be active in the community. This past August, the chapter held its first volunteer day at Matthew 23:35 Food Pantry in Destrehan, LA, and has committed to volunteering at the food pantry on the third Tuesday of each month.

SOAR welcomes our new members from Chapter 13-5. Together we will continue the “good” fight for retired and working families. In solidarity!

Pictured above are some of SOAR Chapter 13-5 members and officers proudly displaying their new charter and SOAR flag. Front row from left: Steve Hernandez, Vice President; Bud Becnel; Carmine Frangella, Secretary-Treasurer; Jean Schexnaydre and Jay Alleman. Back row: Johnnie Bonds; Robert Rivas; Wade Spears, Trustee; Jesse Dunn and Armond Thomatis, Trustee. Not pictured, Wilton Ledet, President.



Gail Richardson, a proud third-generation steelworker and member of USW Local 1010, was hired at the 3 Cold Strip, Plant Two, Inland Steel Company in East Chicago, IN, on October 7, 1969. Richardson has withstood four buyouts and is currently employed by Cleveland Cliffs, Inc., but she is still working at the same facility 54 years later. And over those years, she has taken on plenty of opportunities to add to her activist resumé.



SOAR Activist Gail Richardson was recognized as the Women of Steel delegate for having the most years of union activism in attendance at the 2023 USW International Women's Conference held in Pittsburgh, PA, October 22-26. Pictured from left, USW Int'l. Vice President Roxanne Brown, Gail Richardson and USW Women of Steel Director Randie Pearson.

SOAR Activist Receives Recognition *for Long-time Union Activism*

Also a SOAR Chapter 31-1 member, Gail attended labor studies classes at Indiana University Northwest in a program dedicated to swing shift workers. There, she became a member of the Advisory Board for Swing Shift. This position allowed her to interview potential college professors for instructing the program. She was also a student at Local 1010's Bernard Klineman JobLink Learning Center in East Chicago, IN, associated with The Institute for Career Development (ICD).

As one of the few women initially working in the facility, Richardson was the first woman elected union steward at 3 Cold Strip and served from 1998 to 2002. She was also the first woman to hold several jobs in the facility that men previously held and were intimidating to the other women.

In addition, Gail was trained and qualified to hold multiple positions in the plant: feeder helper, stocker, operator helper, weigher, inspector, process analyst, and safety advocate. She was awarded the position of Lab Leader at the Chemical Lab.

Richardson was also one of three women who became pipe cover insulators and asbestos abatement qualified.

In 2005, by action taken by the delegates at the USW International Convention, Resolution No. 6 was passed to further our union's commitment to encouraging activism and leadership development of union sisters and creating Women's Committees at every local level. Gail was one of the initial four women to establish the Women of Steel committee at Local 1010. Later, she served as the WOS Chairperson for a number of years. During that period, Gail obtained the support of District Director Mike Millsap and held an annual banquet with guest speakers for all Women of Steel in District 7 to promote the program further until the COVID-19 outbreak.

Gail also served her local on several union committees: The Joint Safety Committee, the Civil and Human Rights Committee, and the Rapid Response Committee.

Over the years, an activist at heart, Richardson participated in the

Bridgestone Firestone Stone rallies. Some other activities she has taken part in helping to champion were support for the miners in Alabama, the Democratic Committee in Philadelphia, the Women's March in Chicago, Breast Cancer Awareness in Indiana, and the annual commemorations of the Memorial Day Massacre in South Chicago, IN, when ten union workers were murdered, in 1937, by Chicago police for rallying at Republic Steel. At election time, Gail was a key volunteer in keeping the 100 phone lines filled at the Local 1010 hall to make calls in support of Barack Obama, who was elected our 44th U.S. President and served two terms.

Gail has truly blazed her way in labor history through diligent, reliable activism. Last fall, at the USW International Women's Conference held in Pittsburgh, PA, Richardson was recognized as the WOS delegate for having the most years of union activism in attendance. We honor her commitment and perseverance to help keep our union strong. Thank you, Gail, for being a faithful servant to our union and to SOAR.

Select Committee on the CCP Unveils its Policy Proposal for Winning the Competition with China

In December of 2023, the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) released a list of its economic and technology strategy recommendations to counter Beijing's "pattern of aggression and economic manipulation."

Many of these recommendations were put forth by Alliance for American Manufacturing President Scott Paul in testimony before the committee in February of last year.

During the newly formed committee's first hearing, Paul urged Congress to screen outbound investment in China, revoke China's Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status and reform the de minimis threshold which currently allows any product of less than \$800 to enter the United States duty-free.

"The Select Committee has issued a game-changing set of recommendations on economic and technology policy that reflect broad, bipartisan support for resetting the U.S.-China trade relationship and strengthening American manufacturing," said Paul. "The Alliance for American Manufacturing urged the committee at its very first hearing to pursue a great number of these changes.

"We hope the committee's commendable efforts ultimately blossom into laws passed by Congress and signed by the president. We look forward to working with Chairman Gallagher, Ranking Member Krishnamoorthi and the committee members on the core policy recommendations while also working to better address our concerns on Section 232 and trade agreements."

The Section 232 tariffs, initiated by the Trump administration, are widely regarded as the reason for the resurgence of America's floundering steel industry. Idle steel mills across the United States were brought back online and many members of the United Steelworkers union (USW) began to receive quarterly profit-sharing bonus pay.

"We oppose any efforts to dilute Section 232 national security trade actions or initiate a fast-track free trade agreement with Japan with its history of currency interventions and other market distortions that skew markets such as autos," said Paul. "We will urge the House of Representatives to set aside those aspects of the committee's report.

"Several of the trade policy recommendations, including renewing Section 421, reforming the de minimis loophole, enacting the Leveling the Playing Field Act 2.0, requiring country of origin online labeling and supporting Trade Adjustment Assistance deserve special recognition."

While we at AAM don't agree with 100 percent of the committee's recommendations, the majority of the policy changes are spot-on and would create long-overdue and significant change in the U.S.-China relationship.

"To be judged a success, the Select Committee on China must advance actionable outcomes that improve conditions for American workers and businesses that face Chinese import competition," Paul wrote in January 2023 just after the committee formed.

Now, more than one year later, we at AAM are optimistic for meaningful changes in 2024.

Jeff Bonior is a staff writer at the Alliance for American Manufacturing.



House Select Committee on the CCP Chairman Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.). Photo courtesy Select Committee on the CCP



Photo by Getty Images



SOAR EYES ON WASHINGTON

By Jay McMurren, SOAR Legislative Director

We Must **KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING** In 2024

2023 was a record year for Organized Labor in America. It kicked off in March when Michigan legislators acted to repeal the state Right to Work law. In doing that, the state became the first in 60 years to repeal RTW.



Jay McMurren

Next, a series of high-profile strikes were called, with workers hitting the picket lines demanding increased pay, improved benefits, better working conditions, and an end to job-killing outsourcing. Writers, actors,

car makers, and casino workers held out for fair pay and treatment.

Remarkably, all of the strikers maintained solidarity and helped their unions win historic labor agreements.

At the same time, workers were winning big organizing drives in places like Starbucks, Amazon, and Blue Bird Bus in Fort Valley, GA.

Finally, Labor got a big shot in the arm when Gallup released the results of a poll showing that Unions had reached their highest approval rating (71 percent) in over five decades.

That is one hell of a track record, and we must keep the momentum going. The best way we can do that in 2024 is to get involved in your union's political action program. Let's face it: We could not have had such a success if we didn't have laws giving us the right to join a union and requiring our employer to bargain in good faith.

The 2024 election cycle officially began in January as Iowa held the first in-the-nation caucuses. For the next

ten months, we must stay current on the issues and where each candidate stands in relation to them. Our goal must be to elect candidates who support us and will work with us to grow a secure future. So, what are the issues?

Jobs! A secure future begins with a good-paying job. Today, outsourcing, artificial intelligence, and unfair trade threaten the livelihoods of thousands of American workers. We need politicians who understand those issues and will work with us to ensure U.S. workers benefit from good policies.

A secure future also includes earning a fair wage for our labor. We accomplish that with a livable minimum wage and strong labor laws that give us the right to join a union and to engage in collective bargaining. Even in union shops, workers benefit when states have a strong minimum wage. Our employers are forced to offer better pay to attract skilled workers. And without the right to bargain, we are reduced to "at-will employees," forced to accept whatever compensation our boss throws at us. Unions raise the boats of all workers, even those in non-union settings.

We need real safety and health protections on the job. What good is a great-paying job if we are not alive or healthy enough to enjoy it? Our safety standards and the agencies that enforce them are under constant threat. We must elect representatives who will develop and implement real workplace safety standards. And we need them to fund those programs fully.

A secure future includes looking out for retirees by protecting and enhancing vital programs like Social Security and Medicare. These programs were once known as the "third rail" of American politics. Politicians who had the nerve to talk about cutting those

programs often saw their careers end abruptly. Today, right-wing plots to cut our earned benefits have become so commonplace that some folks don't even pay attention to them. But make no mistake about it. Social Security and Medicare are under the gun. The right is on record, saying that it is.

Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) said, "One thing you probably haven't ever heard from a politician: It will be my objective to phase out Social Security. To pull it up by the roots and get rid of it."

Sen. John Thune (R-SD) is on record declaring that "Social Security and Medicare benefits must be slashed."

After weeks of criticism about the measure, Sen. Rick Scott (R) revised his plan to end all federal programs after five years to exclude Social Security and Medicare (SS&M). Before this change, if passed, it meant in five years, SS&M would end and could only be reinstated if Congress voted to reauthorize them. Think about that. We've seen the way Congress works on budget and debt ceiling. Do we want our hard-earned benefits subjected to that circus?

Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) has a proposal to sunset SS&M programs yearly, calling Social Security a legal "Ponzi scheme" and suggests that it be turned over to Wall Street.

Finally, the Republican Study Committee, which comprises a majority of GOP House members, released a formal budget that included a plan to raise the age of eligibility for those programs. It also called for withholding benefits for those who retired early or had reached a certain income.

The issues are many, and they are critically important. Don't let others decide your future. Get involved and help elect candidates who will go to work and fight for you!



Lower Insulin Prices, Out-of-Pocket Cost Caps for Medicare Beneficiaries Kick off 2024

but Pharmaceutical Corporations Expected to Raise Prices on Over 500 Drugs

By Robert Roach, Jr.

Medicare beneficiaries will see a wide array of cost-saving benefits in the new year. Thanks to the Biden Administration, this year seniors will continue to pay no

more than the monthly cap of \$35 for insulin, and vaccines under Part D will be free.

Going forward, if a beneficiary's drug costs are high enough to reach the catastrophic coverage phase, they will not have to pay coinsurance or make copayments. This effectively caps out-of-pocket expenses at \$3,250 in 2024.

Another major change this year is the Part D Low-Income Subsidy program, Extra Help, which will now cover more drug costs for those who earn less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

These 2024 benefits are only a few of the annually unrolling policies that are aimed at limiting Medicare costs under the Inflation Reduction Act that President Biden signed in 2022. Last year, drug companies were forced to participate in price negotiations with Medicare, which will lead to lower prices, and in 2025, the annual Part D out-of-pocket cap will be lowered to \$2,000.

Beginning with insulin, seniors are finally seeing the affordable prices they deserve for life-saving medications. These changes are important steps toward curbing drug corporation greed.

However, some of the largest American pharmaceutical companies plan to raise prices on over 500 drugs starting in January according to data analyzed by health care research firm 3 Axis Advisors.



January has consistently been the month with the most drug price increases, so in all likelihood more will be announced in the coming weeks. The median price increase remains around five percent.

The price increases coincide with President Biden's policies aimed at reigning in pharmaceutical price gouging, including allowing Medicare to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies to lower prices beginning in 2026.

The administration has also combatted major price hikes by requiring that drug companies pay rebates to Medicaid when prices rise faster than the inflation rate.

President Biden has taken strong action and many drug prices are going down but more is needed. Patient needs must come before corporate profits.

Robert Roach, Jr. is president of the Alliance for Retired Americans. He was previously the General Secretary-Treasurer of the IAMAW.

For more information, visit www.retiredamericans.org.

Our Voice, Our Ballot, Our Future

AFL-CIO's Martin Luther King Jr. Day Conference

By Robert Roach, Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day was Monday, January 15, and the AFL-CIO held the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Civil and Human Rights Conference in Montgomery, Alabama from January 12-14. The conference's theme was "Our Voice, Our Ballot, Our Future," and each day focused on part of the theme.

The event reaffirmed the bond between labor and the civil rights movement, honoring Dr. King's vision on the importance of collective action—at the voting booth, in the community and in the workplace.

The first day's "Our Voice" program opened with remarks on advocacy and

collective action from AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler and AFL-CIO Secretary Treasurer Fred Redmond. The second day, "Our Ballot," featuring former U.S. Senator Doug Jones (AL), focused on voter mobilization and legislative and electoral issues.

The conference concluded with an awards gala focused on "Our Future."

Other speakers at the virtual event included labor and social justice leaders from across the country: acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su, Senator Laphonza Butler (CA), Illinois House Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch, Montgomery Mayor Steven Reed, Rhode Island Senator Sandra Cano, Alabama State Rep. Laura Hall, Mi Familia Vota President/



Two SOAR members attended the MLK Conference in Montgomery, AL, in January. From left: USW District 7 SOAR Exec. Board member Dorine Godinez, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond, and USW District 7 SOAR Rapid Response Coordinator Lillie Harris.

CEO Héctor Sánchez Barba, Bishop Leah Daughtry and SAG-AFTRA National Executive Director Duncan Crabtree-Ireland.

Dr. King's contributions to our civil rights and the labor movement cannot be overstated. We are invoking his legacy this year by continuing to work to protect democracy and voting rights, issues that were especially close to his heart.



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