

# USW@Work

A Regular Publication of the United Steelworkers

Volume 17/1

A Powerful Voice for Workers



## SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON CORPORATE GREED



## Hoping 2022 is a Much Better Year for All of Us



**BILL PIENTA**  
SOAR President

Happy New Year to everyone. I hope you are healthy and will remain that way for 2022. I thought I'd start off the New Year by sharing with you some information that will help put in perspective just how tough it is for most working Americans and retirees.

Workers are quitting their jobs, going on strike or attempting to organize at near-record levels. So, I decided to do a little research to find out why they may be so unhappy. Here is what I found:

### As of December 2021

- ▶ The average weekly wage is \$1,034.41;
- ▶ The average weekly health care premium contribution was \$107.46 (\$5,588/year); and,
- ▶ The average weekly cost for child care was \$160.67 (\$8,355/year).

That leaves most families with \$766.28 before taxes are deducted. Then, they get to pay income taxes, utility bills, pay their mortgages or rent, buy groceries and contribute to their 401K plan as most workers do not have pension plans.

Additionally, I have not included the cost for more than one child or any amount to cover medical deductibles or co-pays. And remember, these are just averages.

### Now for Retirees

The good news is that beginning in January, Social Security recipients will receive a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) that will increase the average monthly benefit to about \$1,657, an average increase of \$92 per month.

The bad news is our Medicare part B premium will increase to \$170.10 per month.

The average cost of Part D (Rx) coverage will be \$33 per month; and, if you have a Medicare Advantage plan, your costs will average \$19 per month. Prices vary on these plans from \$0 to over \$100 per month.

Subtract these deductions, and the average Social Security recipient receives \$1,434.90 per month. I have not included the medical co-pays and deductibles that further reduce this amount.

Needless to say, there are many struggles that we, as union retirees, are fortunate to be able to face together.

*I am looking forward to another year standing with you to build a better future for us all. Hope to see you active and involved this year.*

## SOAR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SCHEDULED



The SOAR International Conference is scheduled for August 5-6, 2022 at the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, NV. Chapters large enough to send delegates will be notified by mail.

For those chapters planning on submitting resolutions to the conference, all resolutions must be received in the SOAR office in Pittsburgh, no later than June 1, 2022.



**JULIE STEIN**  
SOAR Director

## “Build Back Better” Will Benefit All

In November, USW International President, Tom Conway, wrote about the many ways Americans could benefit from the House-passed version of President Biden’s Build Back Better Act. (BBB) (See page 4 of this publication.)

Most Americans, particularly those who are poor and middle class, are on shakier ground as our nation struggles to emerge from the global health and economic pandemic of the last two years.

Recognizing there are no easy answers, the broad agenda of BBB includes something for everyone.

We believe every American deserves the right to retire with dignity, and that is why we’ve always defended Social Security and Medicare, as well as the pensions our members have fought for and won at the bargaining table. However, skyrocketing medical expenses have forced many older workers to delay retirement rather than start dipping into their savings unnecessarily.

### BBB will Help Seniors Manage These Costs by:

- ▶ expanding Medicare to include coverage for hearing aids and other auditory care for the first time;
- ▶ capping the cost of insulin at \$35 per month;
- ▶ limiting out-of-pocket prescription drug costs to \$2,000 per year; and,
- ▶ earmarking \$150 billion for in-home and community care over the next decade.

### Additionally, BBB looks to lift working families, and prepare America for the next generation by:

- ▶ investing in universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year olds;
- ▶ capping childcare costs at 7 percent of income for most parents;
- ▶ ensuring 4 weeks of paid parental, sick or caregiver leave;
- ▶ expanding the Child Tax Credit that has helped cut child poverty in half; and,
- ▶ making the largest federal investment ever in clean energy to combat the climate crisis.

Conway stated, “The Build Back Better Act represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to invest in America’s middle class, providing access to badly needed resources like quality child- and eldercare, affordable health care and safer, more resilient workplaces.”

Meanwhile, in December, Politico reported that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce put out a multi-pronged campaign pressuring several Democratic Senators to reject the legislation altogether. Their campaign, which included TV, print and radio ads as well as tele-town halls, targeted Senators Joe Manchin (WV), Kyrsten Sinema (AZ), Mark Kelly (AZ) and Catherine Cortez Masto (NV).

“We shouldn’t be surprised that big corporations are doing everything they can to block this legislation that would help millions of American families,” said Robert Roach, Jr., President of the Alliance for Retired Americans. “But it’s worth fighting for, and we must redouble our efforts to get this package over the finish line.”

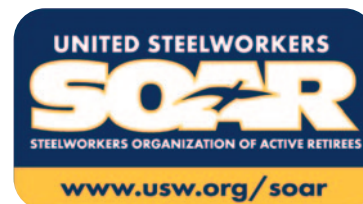
With Democrats holding a one-seat advantage in the Senate, they need all 50 members to pass legislation. Contact your Senators today! Legislators from both parties need to hear why this bill is important to our union and our families.

**Sources:**

- <https://retiredamericans.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Friday-Alert-12-17-21.pdf>
- <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/12/16/chamber-ad-manchin-build-back-better-525129>

*Join with us, as we continue  
the fight to protect  
and enhance the quality  
of life of our retirees and  
working families.*

*We are stronger together!*




[facebook.com/groups/uswsoar](https://facebook.com/groups/uswsoar)

**SOAR in ACTION**

## USW@Work

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Tom Conway

# The **LOUD** and **CLEAR** Call for Medicare Expansion

Growing up, Tom Hay helped to raise hogs and crops on the family farm, never thinking to protect his ears from the din of tractors, combines and other machinery.

And while his United Steelworkers (USW) contract provided safety controls and protective measures during his decades at Titan Tire, he wasn't surprised when hearing tests revealed his ears aren't as sharp as they used to be.

Right now, Congress is on the cusp of helping millions of Americans like Hay live better lives. In addition to enhancing access to prekindergarten and battling climate change, among many other overdue improvements, Build Back Better legislation would expand Medicare to cover hearing aids and other auditory care for the first time.

Hay knows that just like a strong heart and powerful lungs, robust hearing is essential for seniors' health, safety and fulfillment.

They need to hear honking horns warning them that they've stepped into oncoming traffic. They need to hear the sirens of police cars and ambulances that zoom up behind them in traffic. And they need to hear the alarms alerting them to fires, intruders and other dangers at home.

Yet even though about half of Americans 60 and older struggle with hearing loss—and

even though voters overwhelmingly support Medicare coverage for auditory services—the nation has long relegated hearing care to the back burner.

As a result, many seniors delay getting hearing aids or forgo them altogether because of the expense, which can run to thousands of dollars. Numerous retirees shared these sorts of stories with Hay while he served as president of USW Local 164, the union representing workers at Titan Tire in Des Moines, Iowa.

"They go get a hearing test and realize they can't hear anything," Hay recalled. "Then, when they find out what it's going to cost, it's like, 'Oh, my gosh, I don't know where the money is going to come from.' They about fall over."

Today's hearing aids provide more help than ever before, and that's all the more reason to get them to those in need.

They're compact and highly sophisticated, delivering superior sound quality along with Bluetooth capability that connects users with their electronic devices. Vendors even offer remote support.

The demand for hearing tests and assistive devices is so great that some chapters of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), including Chapter 31-9 in Southeast Chicago, negotiate special rates with local providers.

"It's a quality of life issue," said Bill Alexander, the chapter president. "You don't even know when people are telling you they love you, if you can't hear."

While he's pleased to be able to make these services more readily available to SOAR members, Alexander believes all seniors, wherever they live, need access to affordable, high-quality hearing care.

Because Medicare covers other essential health needs during retirement, Alexander explained, it only makes sense for the program to cover hearing care as well. He's eager for Congress to heed



Tom Hay



Bill Alexander



Americans’ call and pass the Build Back Better legislation, currently under consideration in the House. (See Editor’s Note below.)

“If Medicare will give us a blood pressure monitor, why can’t it give us a hearing aid?” asked Alexander, who retired from Acme Steel and Iron and predicts that he’ll need hearing aids one day. “It’s just as important. I know high blood pressure is a silent killer. But I don’t know what life would be like not being able to hear.”

People with hearing loss are more likely to experience depression, loneliness and isolation. They’re at increased risk of dementia and falls.

And untreated hearing loss is also a potential barrier to care in medical facilities, especially in conjunction with COVID-19 mask protocols that make one-on-one communication in hospitals and similar settings more difficult. Caregivers can have difficulty assessing and treating patients who are hard of hearing, and impairments rob seniors of the right to actively participate in their care.

“There’s a lot of times they don’t hear you, and they don’t respond,” Chris Sova, a licensed practical nurse, said of some of the patients at Bay County Medical Care Center in Essexville, Mich. “There’s just that breakdown.”

Sova hopes that expanding Medicare to cover seniors’ auditory care will spark a broader, nationwide conversation about hearing health.

“It’s not just about the elderly,” explained Sova, president of USW Local 15301, which represents workers at the Bay County facility. “Hearing loss doesn’t magically happen in old age. It gradually occurs over years and years. It’s something that could be prevented.

By “opening the door” through Medicare, he continued, “maybe we can get more preventive care as well.”

Hay, who retired in November and is a new member of SOAR Chapter 11UR3, knows that Medicare expansion would have a real impact on his retirement.

As his hearing continues to decline, he wants to be able to follow the chatter at his grandchildren’s sporting events and enjoy their school concerts and other activities. He’s earned that after a lifetime of hard work.

“If I had to ask somebody what they said all the time, it would be kind of embarrassing,” he explained. “You get to the point where you’re not going to ask and just pretend you know what is going on.”

**President’s Perspective Blog Post:**  
<https://www.usw.org/blog/2021/the-loud-and-clear-call-for-medicare-expansion>

*Editor’s Note: The U.S. House of Rep. passed their version of the BBB Act on November 19, 2021. The U.S. Senate is expected to vote on a revised version, as part of a reconciliation bill, sometime in January.*

# Blink and you might have missed it.

**High-income individuals earning \$50,000 per hour stopped paying Social Security taxes in the first week of 2022.**

Incredibly, those making \$50 million a year hit the payroll tax cap (set at \$147,000 in 2022) on their first day of work in the new year. Unlike the wealthy, the vast majority of workers in America will pay Social Security taxes on all of their earnings all year long.

Here at the National Committee, we are fighting to pass the “Social Security 2100: A Sacred Trust Act” that would require high-income earners to pay their fair share into Social Security, which would go a long way to strengthen the Social Security Trust Fund.

It’s time to raise the Social Security earnings cap to not only bring in more revenue into Social Security but to also help level the playing field. As you know, for too long, workers and retirees have shouldered an unfair burden of taxes, while policies in Washington continue to favor the wealthiest among us. And so, the rich keep getting richer, while lower- and middle-income individuals, like us, continue to fall further and further behind.



**HAPPY NEW YEAR!**  
 STAY HEALTHY. STAY ACTIVE. STAY SAFE.

# SOAR in ACTION

**Huntington, W.V.** — Bob Adkins is the Recording Secretary for SOAR Chapter 23-4 along with being the office secretary for USW Local 40. Local 40 has been on an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) Strike since October 1, 2021, after Special Metals decided not to negotiate in good faith.

Bob has continued to perform his duties as Local 40's office secretary without receiving his salary due to the strike.

This is SOAR in action, not only helping with retirees' needs but also helping out the chapter's local union sponsor. SOAR Chapter 23-4 and many of its members have made monetary and food donations to provide support for their local Brothers and Sisters during this strike.

On October 1, more than 400 members of Local 40 went out on an ULP Strike against their employer Special Metals. These

skilled workers showed up throughout the pandemic, ensuring continued production of critical supplies needed for national defense, aerospace and energy production.



In return for their hard work, Special Metals, a prized piece of massive global conglomerate Berkshire Hathaway (whose CEO is multi-billionaire Warren Buffet), sought to cut workers' wages and benefits and take away critical seniority and safety protections.

This Huntington, W.V., nickel alloys facility is the largest of its type in the world. While all industries were impacted by the pandemic, business at this site picked up and is going strong.

These essential workers deserve a fair contract that honors their skill, sacrifice and seniority!

**We won't let the company's unfair labor practices break our solidarity! SOAR in Action!**

## IN SOLIDARITY!



**Bettendorf, Iowa** — Members of SOAR Chapter 11-4 joined with USW Local 105 on their "Community Support Fair Contract Tour" to draw attention to their upcoming contract, which expires May 15, 2022; and mainly to show solidarity amongst the community businesses that supported them during their previous contract negotiations (2019) by putting up SOLIDARITY signs in their places of business. Since July of last year, the local has held monthly tour events leading up to their 2022 negotiations.

**"They supported us then, and now it is our turn to support them!" In Solidarity!**



# ALL SIGNS POINT TO A ROBUST YEAR for American Manufacturing

**If the manufacturing job growth across America in 2021 is any indication of what portends for factory workers in 2022 it will be welcome news for employees who have in the past endured layoffs and slowdowns because of marketplace constraints and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.**

The manufacturing sector gained 349,000 new jobs in 2021 and shows no signs of slowing down. Manufacturing industries will likely regain the additional 219,000 jobs lost at the beginning of the pandemic in February of 2020 and add thousands more additional workers this year.



As our SOAR brothers and sisters know, the American steel industry can often be cyclical. When the domestic industry is depressed, layoffs occur, plants are idled, and employees can often lose benefits and deal with stagnant wages. This was the case just a few years ago.

But when the industry is thriving as it is today, workers reap the benefits of job security, improved working conditions, pay increases and generous profit-sharing compensation. Many American steel mills whose workers are represented by the United Steelworkers are hiring at a brisk pace, especially U.S. Steel and Cleveland-Cliffs facilities in the Region area of Indiana.

With the price of steel hovering around a whopping \$1,800 per ton, America's steel companies are not only investing in equipment upgrades at their existing mills, they also have announced plans to open several new mills across America. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, steel prices were trading between \$500 and \$800 per ton.

These increased profits have filtered down to active USW members in the form of healthy profit-sharing checks and job security with the opportunity to work many over-time hours if desired.

These trends should continue through 2022 as the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package signed by President Biden will likely keep America's steel mills and other manufacturing factories running at an increased capacity.

The impending transition to electric vehicles will also boost further steel production as General Motors and Ford are investing billions of dollars into the new technology. Ford has already announced it is doubling production of its electric F-150 pickup truck to meet consumer demand.

The USW will also be involved in more new technology with a steel facility at Sparrows Point in Baltimore that will manufacture foundations needed to anchor wind turbines to the ocean floor.



It's no secret that China wants to dominate global industries, including traditional sectors like steel to emerging industries like electric vehicles and wind turbines. Trade actions, like the Section 232 tariffs on imported steel, have proved effective in countering China. The Biden administration should implement all the necessary tools to keep America's factories and the steel industry on a level playing field where both workers and manufacturing companies continue to thrive.

A China Competitiveness Bill was passed in a bipartisan vote in the United States Senate last year that included nearly \$250 billion to be spent over the next five years for research and development in vital technologies such as semiconductor production and clean energy. Similar legislation stalled in the U.S. House of Representatives, but the overall effort has the support of the White House.



Getting a China Competitiveness package through Congress in 2022 should be a top priority for lawmakers and we urge you to contact your U.S. House Representative and let them know how important this legislation is to your fellow American workers. You can contact your House member by calling their district office or dialing the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to their Washington office.

All signs point to a robust year for American manufacturing and factory workers, but you can be sure the Chinese government will do all it can to stifle American ingenuity. With manufacturing and factory production improving each month, it is time to remind our foreign competition that nobody can compete with the work ethic of the American worker.

*Jeffrey Bonior is a staff writer for the Alliance for American Manufacturing.*

## SOAR Activist Recognized for Community Service: *Nancy McCurrach*

Congratulations to Nancy McCurrach, member of SOAR Chapter 3-14 in British Columbia, on receiving the 2021 Labour Community Service Award from the New Westminster & District Labour Council in December.

The awards were presented during the 28th Annual Labour Appreciation night, hosted by United Way British Columbia, the Vancouver and District Labour Council, Fraser Valley Labour Council and the New Westminster & District Labour Council.

“Nancy may be retired, but we’re not seeing the evidence,” said Janet Andrews, Secretary-Treasurer of the New Westminster and District Labour Council.

McCurrach’s award recognized her efforts as an elected city councillor in Port Coquitlam, B.C., to shepherd two resolutions on menstrual equity at the city. The resolutions will see menstrual products provided for free in Port Coquitlam civic facilities to address period poverty.

The resolutions have also been forwarded to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities for even broader consideration across Canada.

Years ago, when McCurrach was a student at the University of British Columbia, she remembers having to

choose between getting a bus pass or buying menstrual products. Ever since, she has been an advocate for policy change to reduce the stigma around menstrual products and menstruation.

McCurrach became active with her union, the Telecommunications Workers Union (TWU, now USW Local 1944), when she spoke up about having to work during Christmas as a regular part-time employee. She had four kids under age seven at the time. She had noticed that those with less seniority got time off during the holiday. She attended her first union meeting and was successful in upholding seniority rights for part-time employees.

Now retired, McCurrach was elected as a city councillor for the City of Port Coquitlam in 2018, where she is proud to be a labour-endorsed politician.

In 2017, McCurrach’s community volunteer work was recognized with the top Jefferson Award for Community



Service. McCurrach founded Tri-Cities Refugee Welcome Wagon, a group of friends and co-workers who helped Syrian and Turkish refugees resettling in Port Coquitlam.

McCurrach was selected as the USW’s overall Jefferson Awards Foundation Champion volunteer for 2017.

A community volunteer for 25 years, McCurrach continues to be an inspiration for women in leadership, for mental health and wellness.

“By engaging the community, unions can demonstrate how their efforts benefit everyone, not just union members,” said McCurrach.

**SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON CORPORATE GREED**

The USW Bat Light has been busy shining a spotlight on corporate greed again... this time at Dow, the chemical company that’s trying to take away retirement security from our union siblings who have deferred wages for these negotiated benefits. Proposed changes would shift the risks and liabilities of retirement from the company onto its workers, USW members and members of other unions, without protections and guarantees that there will be sufficient funding when they are ready to retire. These union members have worked hard towards a secure retirement. Dow is wrong for trying to take that from them.

For a full explanation of what’s happening, you can read more, here: <https://www.usw.org/.../dow-dupont-council-pledges...>

PROTECT OUR RETIREMENT SECURITY

UNITED STEELWORKERS  
**USW**



# Pandemic Takes Terrible Toll on the Elderly and Working Poor

By Doug MacPherson

Vice President and Canadian National SOAR Coordinator

**The COVID-19 pandemic has been cruel to the elderly in Canada and throughout the world. Of the over 10,000 deaths in Ontario from COVID-19, 57 percent have been among the elderly, many in long-term care (LTC) facilities and mostly in for-profit care homes.**

These statistics should concern us all and we must demand that society take serious action to prevent this from happening ever again. It's time for the federal government to take ownership of the LTC sector, establish clear, enforceable rules around hours and standards of care including frequent unannounced inspections, with real consequences for those who do not comply.

Unfortunately, in Ontario, the Progressive Conservative government, being self-proclaimed defenders of free enterprise, are reluctant to act to end for-profit long-term care homes, or take serious action to reform pay and working conditions of personal support workers (PSWs) in the LTC sector, or impose serious reform upon the sector and continues to prioritize private, for-profit care over not-for-profit or municipal, community-owned long-term care homes.

Governments of all political stripes have, correctly, poured money into the economy as they fought the COVID-19 pandemic, to the tune of billions of dollars. Some will argue that the piper needs to be paid. Typically, governments faced with this reality have addressed it by cutting back, reducing social programs or services, or other cuts or by raising taxes on those who can least afford it. We cannot allow that to happen, as the burden will fall on the working poor and elderly who have already paid unequally through the pandemic.

As devastating as the toll has been on the elderly, we must make every effort to have a fair and just recovery of the economy.

Inflation in Canada has taken off with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for December 2021 showing a 4.7 percent increase year-over-year. That does not look good for those of us on fixed incomes. At the same time, executive compensation in 2020 has increased by over 17 percent.

Income inequality has grown during the pandemic with those least able to afford it being hardest hit both monetarily and in terms of health outcomes. A recent study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has shown that the top-100 Canadian executives had their second-best pay year in history. Indeed, by lunch time on Jan. 4, 2022, they had earned what the average worker will earn all year long.

So, what do we need to do to ensure we avoid the mistakes of the past and create a society based on fairness and equity?

Enough is enough, as stated earlier. The super-rich have benefitted though the pandemic with huge increases in profits and compensation, while at the same time benefitting from Canada's tax regime, that allows for many tax-avoidance schemes and use of off-shore tax havens. It is time to have the piper paid by those who can most afford to pay.

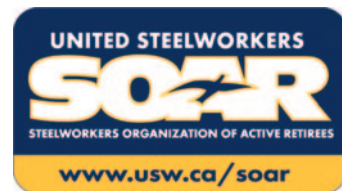
Elections are good times to have healthy robust debates about policy decisions that will guide us as a nation going forward.

Federally, the New Democratic and Conservative parties put forward their platforms and vision for the future during the 2021 election. Interestingly, both the NDP and the Conservatives have proposed some form of tax reform, but it will come as no surprise that the most aggressive proposals come from the New Democrats and included a 1 percent wealth tax on assets over \$10 million; and the highest-income Canadians (those making more than \$216,511 per year) would see the marginal tax rate increase by two percentage points to 35 percent.

Corporate tax rates would be adjusted back to 2010 levels, or 18 percent. It is important to note that most of the super-rich pay no income tax as they generally have little or no income, but their increased wealth comes from growth in their assets, upon which they borrow for actual expenses and shelter from income tax. Much of these increases in asset wealth and increased profits are then sheltered in off-shore tax havens. It is imperative that a wealth tax be introduced by the governing party.

The Canadian federal election in September resulted in basically the same party breakdown as before the election, with the Liberals having the most seats but not a clear majority, requiring that party to seek opposition-party support to pass legislation. The NDP under Leader Jagmeet Singh, gained one seat and with a minority government, the party will have leverage over some legislation.

We must call upon the finance minister to immediately implement a wealth tax as outlined above to help pay for Canada's fair recovery.



Source:

<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/another-year-paradise>



# SOAR EYES ON WASHINGTON

By Jay McMurren, SOAR Legislative Director

Throughout the 2020 presidential campaign, the centerpiece of candidate Joe Biden’s platform was a pledge to pass a massive bipartisan bill on investing in the nation’s crumbling and outdated infrastructure. Thanks to some last-minute arm twisting and old fashion compromise, President Biden was able to deliver on that promise late last year.



Jay McMurren

The 1.2 trillion-dollar package includes \$73 billion to update our aging power grid; \$66 billion to modernize passenger and freight rail systems; \$65 billion to expand broadband access to rural America; \$39 billion for public transportation, and \$15 billion to develop a network for charging electric vehicles. Other

areas addressed by the act are environmental remediation projects, updating water systems, airport modernization, roadway safety and port and waterway improvements.

The U.S. Senate first passed the bill on August 10 by a 69 to 30 vote. Amazingly, 19 Republicans joined all 50

Democrats in support of the legislation. One Republican Senator did not vote. To gain passage, the President and Progressives in the upper chamber compromised on language that would have expanded Medicare coverage to cover hearing, dental and vision benefits. Democrats opted to include those benefits in the President’s social spending bill, which the majority party planned to pass using the budget reconciliation process.

On November 5, the U.S. House voted to approve the package by a 228 to 206 margin. In the lower chamber, 13 Republicans crossed over to support the act. Six Democrats voted against it. The legislation was sent to the White House for the President’s signature, and he signed it into law on November 15. The legislation marks the country’s largest infrastructure investment since the Eisenhower Administration’s push to create the nation’s freeway system.

As mentioned, Biden compromised on some important pieces of his social agenda to get the infrastructure bill passed. Legislators agreed to include Medicare, child tax credit, child care and paid family medical leave in the budget reconciliation bill. That process was squashed when Democratic Senators Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona announced their opposition to the spending package. With Democrats holding a one-seat advantage in the Senate, they need all 50 members to pass legislation. Manchin said his opposition to the Child Tax Credit is concern that parents will use the money to buy drugs. He further stated that his opposition to paid family-medical language is based on his belief that people will abuse the benefit by taking time off in the fall to go hunting.

The Steelworkers Union and SOAR strongly support President Biden’s Build Back Better agenda and encourage members to contact their Senators to support the reconciliation bill. USW and SOAR members in West Virginia and Arizona are especially urged to call Sinema and Manchin to ask that they support the spending bill. The package includes many issues of importance to working families and the U.S. economy. It’s time to pass the bill and get America moving forward again.

***SOAR will stay the course and keep our eyes on Washington, as we continue the fight to protect and enhance the quality of life of our retirees and working families.***





## “No Surprises Act” Law Enables Patients to Dispute Unexpected Medical Bills

By Robert Roach, Jr.

**Thanks to a new law called the “No Surprises Act” (NSA) Americans will no longer be stuck paying thousands of dollars in surprise medical bills.**

Before this law went into effect on January 1, when a patient with health insurance received care from an out-of-network hospital, doctor, or other provider they did not choose, they could be held responsible for all or part of the bill.

Surprise billings occurred in about 1 in 5 emergency room visits and also for in-network hospitalizations for non-emergency care. These bills are expensive — averaging more than \$1,200 for anesthesiologists and \$2,600 for surgical assistant fees.

The problem affected millions of Americans, with more than half saying that they had received at least one surprise medical bill. In fact, the federal government estimates the NSA will apply to about 10 million out-of-network surprise medical bills a year.

The new law requires private health plans to cover out-of-network claims and apply in-network cost-sharing, and prohibits doctors, hospitals, and other covered providers from billing patients more than the in-network cost-sharing amount for surprise medical bills.

The No Surprises Act is a welcome change and long overdue. No one should receive a surprise medical bill or face financial ruin because they were unknowingly treated by an out-of-network provider during emergency care. It is bad enough to have a health setback, without returning to an astronomical bill when you come home.



*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](http://www.retiredamericans.org).*

## Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Legacy for Unions



**On Monday, January 17, we celebrated the birth of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the work he did for underrepresented communities in the United States. Dr. King would have turned 93 this year, and while nearly everyone can speak to his legacy regarding the Civil Rights Movement, fewer recall his advocacy for unions.**



The day before he was murdered just over 53 years ago in Memphis, Dr. King delivered his famous “I Have Been to the Mountaintop” speech, declaring that “the issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants,” highlighting the necessity for the right to collectively bargain and join a union.

Dr. King was in Memphis in support of striking African-American sanitation workers, many of whom worked 60-hour weeks but still needed to collect welfare to survive due to their low wages.

“Martin Luther King, Jr. understood the importance of unions. He saw the connection between civil rights and union rights, and used his voice to elevate those issues in a way that still influences conversations today,” said Robert Roach, Jr., President of the Alliance.

Whether observed through volunteering, learning about King’s life, or simply taking a moment to contemplate his legacy, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is an important holiday that should not be forgotten.



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