

# USW@Work

A Regular Publication of the United Steelworkers

Volume 17/2

A Powerful Voice for Workers



## SOAR Leaders Attend Installation Ceremony of USW Officers & Executive Board



# SOAR EXECUTIVE BOARD

## Meets in Pittsburgh

After a two-year hiatus brought on by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the SOAR International Executive Board met February 28 – March 1, in Pittsburgh, Pa., to discuss the impact of the largescale shutdown and plot a course for rebuilding a strong future for the retiree organization.

SOAR President William Pienta kicked off the meeting by saying, “For more than 24 months, our board and SOAR chapters throughout the United States and Canada have been unable to meet.” He continued saying, “That absence has left a void that has negatively impacted our membership. It is my hope we will leave this meeting with a renewed commitment to rebuilding our program.”

Board members spent the next two days discussing the recruiting of new members, reporting on district SOAR activities and hearing information regarding important senior issues that will become party platforms during the 2022 midterm elections. SOAR Director Julie Stein introduced new staff members assigned to work with the SOAR program. She encouraged Board members to reach out to them as they developed plans to grow district SOAR chapters. She stated, “Our goals coming out of this meeting will be to work with local SOAR officers to increase membership in their chapters and enlist the assistance of local union presidents to establish SOAR chapters in each sub-district of our union.”

## USW Installation Ceremony

At the end of business on March 1, board members were treated to VIP seating at the USW Installation Ceremony to swear in recently elected international officers and executive board members.

After giving a moving acceptance speech, USW President Tom Conway thanked the SOAR board for attending the installation and recognized the work they do on behalf of the union and its members. He also reassured the Board members in attendance of the union’s continued commitment to its retired members. Conway stated, “You are the activists that built our union and fought for the benefits Steelworkers enjoy today. Your fight for retirement security and dignity is our fight, and we will always honor that commitment.”



Jay McMurrin

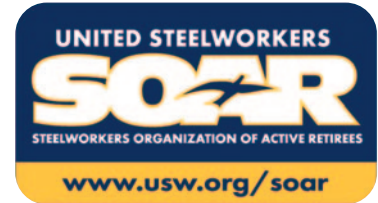
## USW Restructuring Leads to New Appointment

Pienta and Stein also announced a change to the executive board brought on by the recent restructuring of USW Districts 1, 2 and 7. Pienta reported that the retirement of Director Michael Bolton has led to the merger of the districts mentioned. Under the plan, as of March 1, Michigan became a part of District 1, which represents

Steelworkers in Ohio. The state of Wisconsin joined District 7, which includes Illinois and Indiana. As a result of that action, District 2’s seat on the SOAR executive board was eliminated. To honor his service and ensure continued involvement, Pienta reported that former District 2 representative Jay McMurrin, had been appointed Board Member Emeritus by USW President Tom Conway, also effective March 1. ***Congratulations, Jay!***



HAPPY SPRING!  
STAY HEALTHY. STAY ACTIVE. STAY SAFE.



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SOAR in ACTION

## USW@Work

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## Your Union, Your Voice



**BILL PIENTA**  
SOAR President

**Early this year, our union embarked upon another round of the Your Union, Your Voice campaign.**

We first launched Your Union, Your Voice in 2019 because we wanted to make sure USW members' and retirees' opinions were reflected at every level of our union's work.

We circulated a union-wide membership survey, and we held 170 town hall meetings. This provided a valuable opportunity for our district directors, other elected union leaders and staff to hear what was on our members' and retirees' minds.

The feedback you provided in your survey responses and at town halls helped shape our work throughout 2020, and continues to inform our efforts as we head into 2022.

Beginning in April, USW districts began holding town hall meetings in locations across the United States. These meetings have again been an opportunity for USW members, retirees and families to attend and be part of these important discussions.

Additionally, we launched another membership survey so we can know where our members and retirees stand on some of the biggest issues facing working Americans today.

If you haven't already responded to this survey, you can find it at [www.uswvoices.org](http://www.uswvoices.org).

Additionally, town hall meetings will be conducted into the month of June, and will be posted on this website, publicized through our social media channels and shared by USW districts.

Our common values like fair pay, safe workplaces, a secure retirement, and vibrant communities connect us as union members.

Please take the time to attend a town hall meeting, participate in this survey and share this information widely throughout your SOAR chapters and fellow USW retirees and families.

*Your voice is an essential part of this effort.*



## When in Need, Don't Overlook Your Governor



**JULIE STEIN**  
SOAR Director

The USW's *Election Connection* e-newsletter, which is circulated exclusively to actively-working USW members, recently concluded a 5-part series titled *Gubernatorial Elections: 36 in '22*.

The series ran from November 2021 through March 2022, and sought to educate readers about the unique powers of America's governors.

This conversation is especially relevant right now because, in 2022, 36 states accounting for nearly 80 percent of America's total population will elect their next governor.

Although the series focused on unpacking the many ways governors can help protect and expand workers' rights, it also spurred me to wonder what they can do for retirees like you. Additionally, it made me realize that retirees might be somewhat "trained" to pay closer attention to the federal government than governors, due to the fact that Congress passes laws that most directly impact Social Security and Medicare, which seniors rely upon every day.

However, after a simple internet search, I quickly found an almost-endless supply of examples where governors are taking swift action to aid their state's retirees.

In our next *SOAR in Action*, I plan on providing some concrete examples, since I only have limited space remaining here. So, for the sake of brevity, I thought I'd leave you with an example almost all seniors will identify with: your state's Department of Aging (DOA).

DOAs are the designated agency at the state level which develop and administer services that are tailored specifically to the needs of seniors; and, governors have the unique power of appointing who heads the DOA in their state.

The services we often rely upon don't just happen. State DOAs are essential in providing seniors with nutritious meals, transportation services, legal assistance, counseling, and so much more.

**You can find more information about your state's DOA by visiting <http://usw.to/doabystate>.**

**Lastly, you can also read the entire *Gubernatorial Elections: 36 in '22* by visiting [usw.to/2022govelections](http://usw.to/2022govelections).**



Tom Conway

# Safeguarding DEMOCRACY

The guard shack, razor-wire fences and gun-toting soldiers struck fear into Cynthia Overby when she traveled with an American university group behind the Iron Curtain in 1971.

Even worse was the utter despair she witnessed in people living under the weight of authoritarianism, a memory that inspired her lifelong commitment to safeguarding liberty at home.

Millions of Overby's union siblings join her in that battle every day. Union members stand on the front lines of democracy and guard America's freedoms with the same solidarity and collective power they wield in the workplace.

"Democracy is fragile," observed Overby, a member of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) Chapter 7-34-2 in Granite City, Ill., noting that Russia's attack

on Ukrainian democracy reminds her of the devastation and misery wrought by other repressive regimes.

"We saw statues of Stalin," she said of her visit to the Eastern Bloc many years ago. "We saw people living in poverty. We saw oppression, and people didn't smile. I've never forgotten that. I don't want to live that way."

Union members and retirees like Overby are accustomed to electing union leaders, voting on contracts and having a voice on the job, and that also makes them fierce advocates for government by the people.

They circulate petitions for pro-worker candidates, then make thousands of phone calls, send out thousands of postcards and knock on countless doors to get those people elected. They turn out the vote on Election Day, often offering to drive neighbors to the polls or serving as precinct election workers to ensure efficient, convenient balloting.

There's no denying that this advocacy protects Americans' freedoms.

According to a recent report by the Economic Policy Institute, the higher a state's union density, the less likely legislators have been to push through restrictive voting laws. On the other hand, the report found, more than 70 percent of states with low numbers of union members mounted at least one successful attack on voting rights between 2011 and 2019.

In addition, a 2020 study by Tova Wang, a visiting democracy fellow at Harvard's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, observed that unions increase voter turnout rates, both among members and "people around them." The study noted that "unions have often been referred to as 'schools of democracy'" because they nurture the collective decision-making and other experiences that "one needs to be an active and efficient participant in electoral politics."

Yet fighting for democracy involves more than voting. Union members, who take pride in contracts that fight discrimination and narrow wage disparities for women and workers of color, regularly wage battles for social justice and human dignity in state capitals and Washington, D.C.

Tireless advocacy by the USW and other unions—along with the work of retiree groups like Overby's SOAR chapter—led Congress to pass legislation last year saving the pensions of more than one million workers and retirees in failing multi-employer plans.

And the USW, SOAR and its many allies achieved another victory a few months ago, when President Joe Biden signed legislation that not only makes \$1.2 trillion in overdue investments to America's infrastructure but helps ensure that union workers supply the



Cynthia Overby



Ken Yatsko

materials, parts and components needed for those projects.

The Democratic process “touches your life constantly,” said Overby, noting she and other activists recently collaborated with Illinois state Rep. Katie Stuart to make hygiene products more accessible to underprivileged women.

Union members gather in huge numbers for rallies calling for affordable health care, workplace safety, stronger labor rights and Social Security protections. They march and walk picket lines to call out employers’ abuses. These actions generate solidarity and get decision-makers’ attention.

“If I come up to the plant gate alone, they’d laugh at me. Come with 600 people, and it’s a different story,” explained Ken Yatsko, president of SOAR Chapter 7-1 in Gary, Ind.

Yatsko spent decades as a union officer and activist, fighting for justice at his workplace and many others.

But never did he feel more energized than on the day several

years ago when he and hundreds of other union members and retirees marched five blocks to the U.S. Steel plant in Gary, delivering a message of strength and solidarity during the push for a fair contract. Yatsko walked at the head of the column, carrying a SOAR banner, and remembers seeing plant security startled by the size of the crowd.

“That was one of the greatest moments of my union life,” he said.

Union members will never stop fighting to improve average Americans’ lives and defend their freedoms.

Overby’s SOAR chapter, for example, holds an annual scholarship contest for local high school students.

To be considered this year, applicants must write essays on voting rights, a topic intended to help the youths grasp a pivotal issue affecting America’s future.

After retiring, Yatsko told his wife he planned to take a break from political activism and union activity. But only a short time later, he was back at it.

“If we don’t do these things, we’re going to lose our voice,” he said. “We have to keep up the fight and stick together.”



## Former SOAR Director Re-elected to Democratic Seniors Position

**Retired Director Jim Centner has been re-elected to his third four-year term to the Executive Board of the National Democratic Committee, Seniors Coordinating Council.**

The Council, an official body of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), was created in 1997. It was designed to give older Democrats a voice within the DNC, to make use of their expertise on issues such as Social Security and Medicare. It also acknowledges their life-long dedication to the Democratic Party ideals and to mobilize older voters in election campaigns.

Centner is “excited to continue his advocacy on behalf of the USW and older Americans.” He looks forward to serving another term and will work hard in maintaining a strong voice for seniors in the Democratic Party and assuring that our issues are being addressed.

“SOAR and the United Steelworkers are proud to have Jim continuing his role with the DNC. His continued involvement provides the USW with a seat at the table and provides a sound and passionate voice for working families and retirees.” said SOAR International President, Bill Pienta. “We appreciate all his hard work and effort.”

In February, members of SOAR Chapter 4-18, in Philipsburg, New Jersey, were honored to receive their official charter by the United Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR). The newly-formed chapter, the first in the state of New Jersey, will be home to retirees from USW Local 10-00729 (10-729), a local representing lab technicians, chemical operators and maintenance workers employed at Avantor Performance Materials (JT Baker).



## District 4 Gets a First New SOAR Chapter in New Jersey

Al Polk, District 4 SOAR executive board member, reported that Local 10-729 President Tim Sutter and USW staff representative Joe Arico were instrumental in bringing the chapter to their retirees and local USW shop. Each year the local hosts a retiree luncheon and invites all retirees and current members to attend. At the 2021 luncheon, Sutter and Arico spoke about forming a chapter. Shortly after, the group quickly organized and filed their petition for charter. Today, they are 29 members strong, and still growing!

Serving as the chapter's first-ever president will be retiree Robin McFarland. McFarland, with 27 years in the plant, held many positions in the local. He served for 15 years as a shop steward, ten years as a trustee, and nine years as the financial

secretary. As part of the bargaining committee, he worked through six contracts!

Joining him as newly-elected officers for SOAR Chapter 4-18 are Rich

Cavotta who will serve as vice president. Cavotta, with 42 years in the plant, served as a shop steward for 20 years, was vice president of the local for one year, and served as president for eight years. Cavotta also worked on 12 negotiations and he was an active member of SOAR prior to the chapter being established.

Taking advantage of a recent bylaw change that opened SOAR membership to include active local union members, age 45 and older, James Hanisak who has served as Local 10-729 financial secretary for the past five years, will also serve the SOAR chapter in the same position. Hanisak, with 33 years in the plant, has served the local as a shop steward, nine years as a trustee, and 31 years on the grievance committee. He has negotiated eight contracts and two midterm contracts.

Jodey Elekes will serve the chapter as recording secretary. Elekes, also an active member of Local 10-729, with 18 years in the plant, has served 16 years as a shop steward. Jodey currently serves the local as recording secretary, a position she's held for the past four years, along with being the local's Women of Steel coordinator.

Serving as trustees are Paul Williams, Tim Sutter and Richard Dailey. Williams worked 39 years at the plant and served the local as a

shop steward and a trustee. He helped to negotiate two contracts and was president of the Quarter Century Club. Sutter with 34 years in the plant, is currently president of USW Local 10-729, a position he's held for the last three terms. Prior to his presidency, he served three terms as vice president. Sutter also served as a shop steward and grievance committee member, and has negotiated six contracts. Dailey with 29 years in the plant, has served as vice president, grievance committee chairman, shop steward and negotiating committee member. At this time, Dailey serves as a trustee to the local.

Local President Sutter stated, "We believe the SOAR chapter will help to keep our retirees connected to the union and also to bring us closer together." In summation of their many years of service to the local, he continued, "to have this vast amount of experience and knowledge present at our meetings is an inspiration to all!"

SOAR Chapter President McFarland stated, "The chapter intends to support the work of Local 10-729, while fighting against efforts to compromise vital senior programs, like Medicare and Social Security.

**SOAR welcomes our new members of Chapter 4-18. Together we will continue the fight for retired and working families. In solidarity!**



# **LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD** *for America's Steel Industry*

The community of United Steelworkers and our SOAR brothers and sisters are in lockstep agreement that the Section 232 tariffs on steel and aluminum implemented by the Trump administration in 2018 were the catalyst to today's thriving American steel industry. Idled steel mills restarted production, investment and upgrades were made to aging mills, laid-off steelworkers were called back to work and many USW members are now being treated to much-deserved profit-sharing stipends.

Yes, the 232 tariffs, which levied a 25 percent import tariff on steel dumped from foreign countries—most notably China—went a long way to leveling the playing field for American steelworkers.

But it was never thought these tariffs would remain a permanent obstacle for all of America's trading partners. We are certainly nowhere close to removing these import tariffs on bad actors like China.

The Biden administration has agreed to bilateral trade deals with our friendly allies to ease these financial restrictions, striking agreements with the United Kingdom, Japan and the European Union.

But fear not, the importing of steel will be closely monitored to protect the American steel industry. These new bilateral deals contain many safeguards including stipulations that the steel must be melted and poured in the country of origin. There will be strict audits of any Chinese company operating within one of our allies' borders.

And each of our friendly trading partners will be subject to steel quotas. If these quotas are exceeded, the foreign steelmakers will again face a tariff.

We at the Alliance for American Manufacturing strongly supported the Section 232 steel tariffs and agree with the Economic Policy Institute that they are responsible for the resurgence in the American steelmaking industry. We also welcome the return to normal trade relations with our close allies if strict monitoring and enforcement continue to produce a fair-trade policy.

"We welcome the Section 232 relief adjustment with the United Kingdom and note in particular the landmark auditing requirement for certain Chinese investment in British Steel," said Alliance for American Manufacturing President Scott Paul. "We also believe a significant pause is in order on further adjustments to Section 232 steel measures while the market absorbs recent changes made with respect to Japan, the European Union and now the United Kingdom. The question now is how the U.S.-E.U. global arrangement



will address carbon intensity and non-market production as those negotiations get underway.

"The Russian invasion of Ukraine should remind us all just how critical the domestic steel industry is to our national and economic security. Section 232 quotas and tariffs have permitted the American steel industry to recover, invest, hire and contribute robustly to our national defense."

The Alliance for American Manufacturing will continue to monitor these agreements and fight for our USW brothers and sisters, making sure America's trade agreements put workers first.

We make the best steel in the world here in the United States and our workforce deserves the most effective representation on the world stage. Here at AAM, we are dedicated to providing that voice.

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



*Editor's Note: The USW is an international union with members in Canada making steel that is just as high quality as in the U.S. In addition, Canada's steel and aluminum exports to the United States are fairly traded, and Canada has shown its willingness to cooperate with the United States to fight unfair trade.*

*There is no mention of Canada, our closest ally, in the above article. However, the U.S. and Canada entered into a bilateral trade agreement on May 20, 2019, to remedy the Section 232 tariffs previously imposed on Canadian steel and aluminum in 2018.*

*The position of the USW is that Canada should have been exempted from these tariffs from the outset.*

# SOAR in ACTION



Gary, IN — Leading by example, and in a show of solidarity, officers and leaders of USW Local Union 1014, have signed up to become members of the local's SOAR Chapter 31-14. This photo illustrates the importance of the recent change in SOAR's Articles of Association and Bylaws that allow active members, age 45 and older, to join SOAR. Shown left to right, front row: Jen Jenko, USW 2695 training coordinator; Alan Pinkowski, SOAR Chapter 31-14 president; Mark Sakon, LU 1014 training coordinator; and Chuck Burtolo, LU 1014 grievance committee member. Back row: Gus Atsas, LU 1014 president; Dennis Whittenton, LU 1014 Civil Rights Committee chairman; and Mike Lohse, LU 1014 financial secretary. Although not pictured, other local union leaders have joined as well. Thank you to Local 1014 for your strong support of SOAR, and we welcome new members of SOAR Chapter 31-14!

New Bedford, MS — On March 30, members of SOAR Chapter 4-16 participated at the rally, "Vote No on Proposition 22 MA." Holding the SOAR banner is John Rose and Donald Rei.

"Massachusetts Is Not For Sale" is a growing alliance of drivers, delivery workers, consumer advocates, civil rights organizations, immigrant, faith, labor, community organizing, racial and environmental justice groups who oppose the \$100M+ campaign by Big Tech companies to undermine MA law, as they recently did in California through Proposition 22, to avoid paying taxes and Social Security, shield themselves from liability to the public, and win special exemptions from labor and civil rights laws. Go to [www.NoProp22MA.com](http://www.NoProp22MA.com) to learn more.





# SOAR Board Member Honored with USW Cares Jefferson Award

The “USW Cares” program honors Steelworkers who are making a difference in their community with USW Cares Jefferson Awards through our union’s partnership with Multiplying Good (formerly known as the Jefferson Awards Foundation.) Every two years, one winner is chosen from each USW district, one from USW staff and a separate winner is chosen to honor the community service work of one of our SOAR members.

Joel Buchanan, a proudly retired member of Steelworker Local 2102, is the 2021 SOAR recipient. The local, which represents Steelworkers employed at Evraz Steel, formerly CF&I Steel and Oregon Steel, is located in Pueblo, CO. Joel, who served the membership of Local 2102 as its longtime financial secretary, retired in 2013.

Upon retirement, Buchanan signed up as a member of SOAR Chapter 38-3. His involvement in the chapter and commitment to retiree issues led to his election as vice president of 38-3 and appointment to the SOAR International Executive Board representing

District 12. The local, which was once involved in a seven-year labor dispute against CF&I, has a rich history in activism, and as a SOAR board member, Buchanan has made it his mission to ensure that the tradition is continued. With that in mind, he helped Chapter 38-3 establish a practice that has become one of the area’s most anticipated yearly events. Each year, during their annual Christmas dinner, the chapter encourages attendees to bring socks, gloves/mittens and wool hats for donation to Pueblo residents in need. Unfortunately, during the past two years, the dinner’s existence was threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unable to gather together, event organizers shifted gears and created a donation drive-thru at the local’s union hall, which proved to be successful and helped to collect over 750 donations for the two years they held the drive-thru event.

Joel received his Jefferson Award at SOAR’s recently held executive board meeting in Pittsburgh, Pa. In addition to a gold medallion and commemorative pin, Joel was given a \$500 grant to



**USW District 12 SOAR Executive Board Member Joel Buchanan receives his USW Cares Jefferson Award. From left to right: Julie Stein, SOAR Director; Joel Buchanan; Bill Pienta, SOAR President; and Connie Mabin, USW Director of New Media and USW Cares Jefferson Award Committee Member.**



**Buchanan’s charity of choice is the “I Will Project.” Pictured, Joel presents Jefferson Award grant check of \$500 to representatives of the “I Will Project” in Pueblo, Colorado.**

donate to the charity of his choice. Joel chose the “I Will Project,” an off-shoot of the Boys and Girls Clubs, which provide after-school programs for disadvantaged youth.

**On behalf of SOAR members across America, we congratulate Joel on this honor and thank him for his commitment to making his community a better place to live.**

## IN MEMORIAM



**William R. Sferra  
1937-2022**

### WILLIAM “BILL” R. SFERRA

*Led Displaced Youngstown Steelworkers with Dignity, Acclaimed for Officiating*

We are sad to report the passing of former Local 1814 President Bill Sferra, who represented more than 5,000 workers on September 19, 1977, remembered in the steel industry as Black Monday, when Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. notified thousands of workers that

Campbell Works would close, leading to tens of thousands of jobs disappearing from the Mahoning Valley, in Ohio.

In the wake of catastrophic job losses, Sferra led workers with respect and demanded dignity for the individuals and families impacted by the failures of their employers. He organized reunions on the 25th and 35th anniversaries of Black Monday, bringing steelworkers and community members together to commemorate and learn from our history.

In addition to supporting fellow workers through the darkest times our union has faced, Sferra reached acclaim as a deeply respected and sports official, one of only three (of 350) Youngstown area sports officials certified for football, basketball and baseball. Throughout his Ohio High School Athletic Association officiating career, he was selected to umpire and referee in dozens of state tournament games.

Sferra also worked as an assignor for several softball, baseball, football and baseball leagues for more than 30 years. In 2013, he was inducted into the Curbstone Coaches Hall of Fame for achievements as an athlete, administrator and advocate for local sports, leagues, athletes and officials.

We express our deepest condolences to his family and many friends. Sferra’s influence on our union can still be seen, and his service to Youngstown steelworkers will be long remembered.



**Collaborative efforts by the United Steelworkers District 6 (Ontario), the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW), and the McIntyre Powder Project have resulted in workers' compensation claims being granted for mine workers who were given inhalation "treatments" of finely ground aluminum dust known as McIntyre Powder.**

The government of Ontario, Canada, now formally recognizes Parkinson's related to McIntyre Powder inhalation as an occupational disease under Schedule 3 of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (WSIA) regulations.

It is the first time since 1994 that a new occupational disease has been added to the WSIA schedules, and it makes it easier for workers and widows or their survivors to receive compensation, benefits and supports.

Parkinson's is not the only health issue that the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) is compensating related to McIntyre Powder. The contribution of aluminum dust to the development of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD— which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis), is also recognized by the WSIB. Investigations are also currently underway concerning sarcoidosis and cardiovascular diseases (heart and stroke), and the role that McIntyre Powder or other mining exposures may have played in the development of those diseases.

SOAR members who may have been exposed to McIntyre Powder are strongly encouraged to read the information provided to assist you in answering your questions and making workers' compensation claims.

## Compensation Now Available for Mine Workers Exposed to McIntyre Powder and Their Next of Kin

### Frequently Asked Questions About McIntyre Powder and Compensation Claims

#### **Q: I didn't work at McIntyre Mine. Am I still eligible?**

Yes. McIntyre Powder was named after McIntyre Porcupine Mine where it was developed, but it was used in over 200 gold and uranium mines and factories across Ontario, Canada, the U.S., Mexico and worldwide between 1943-1979. In the U.S., it was used in at least 13 states. For a full list of industries that were licensed to use McIntyre Powder with their workers, visit the McIntyre Powder Project website: <https://www.mcintyrepowderproject.com/>

#### **Q: I was exposed to McIntyre Powder but not in Ontario. Do I qualify?**

The study that found a link between McIntyre Powder exposure and Parkinson's was done on Ontario miners. However, you can still apply for workers' compensation in the province or state where you worked and were exposed to McIntyre Powder. The Ontario study may provide important evidence to support your claim. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34591975/>

#### **Q: My family member was a miner, but he died. Can we still make a claim?**

Yes. The next of kin (usually the executor of the estate) can make a claim on behalf of the deceased worker, and for survivor benefits for eligible spouses or dependent children. You will likely need to provide a copy of the worker's will and death certificate.

#### **Q: My father was one of the affected workers, but he died many years ago and there are no medical records left. Do we have any options?**

Most provinces and states have an official registry for deaths, births, marriages, etc. You can apply for a medical certificate of death, which lists the causes of death and sometimes lists other health issues.

#### **Q: I previously made a compensation claim but it was denied. Can I reapply?**

Yes. You can contact your local workers' compensation program and ask them to reconsider your old claim in light of the new evidence linking McIntyre Powder to health issues.

#### **Q: Where can I read more information about McIntyre Powder history and the McIntyre Powder Project?**

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/104829112111037007>

#### **Q: Who do I contact if I have questions or want more information?**

Please contact Janice Martell, who is the founder of the McIntyre Powder Project and a member of USW Local 2020 in Sudbury, Ont., Canada. Send an email to: [minersinfo@yahoo.ca](mailto:minersinfo@yahoo.ca) or call [1-800-461-7120](tel:1-800-461-7120).



## Canadian SOAR Members Launch Campaign for Pharmacare

In keeping with resolution 9, Universal Pharmacare, adopted unanimously by the delegates to the Canadian SOAR conference and as recently unanimously decided by the Canadian SOAR board members and district coordinators: SOAR will work with other allies such as the Canadian Health Coalition to make a truly universal pharmacare a reality.

SOAR members are being asked to join with thousands of other Canadians in the struggle to establish the pharmacare program promised by the Canadian federal government.

A national, universal, single-payer public pharmacare program would advance Canada's public health care system, as envisaged by Tommy Douglas more than 50 years ago.

The government has, so far, failed to follow recommendations made by its own advisory council for a timeline that should have begun earlier this year with immediate universal coverage for a list of essential medicines. It would have only been the first step, but would have been a show of faith to Canadians that a fully-fledged pharmacare program is on its way.

SOAR members across Canada are being asked to contact their local members of Parliament (MPs)—either in writing, by phone or in person—to get their commitment to

make pharmacare a reality. We will provide draft letters for members to submit to editors of local and national newspapers and MPs to raise interest in this endeavour.

Retirees have struggled their way through COVID-19 and, if they are not covered by drug plans negotiated while they were working, can no longer afford the increasing cost of medications. Canadians pay 42 percent more per capita for prescription drugs than the average in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

If Canada was in line with every other OECD country—except the United States—universal pharmacare would provide better access to prescription drugs while saving up to 40 percent in drug costs per capita.

While the Liberal government did create the Canadian Drug Agency to manage the national drug formulary, it has not provided a substantial budget

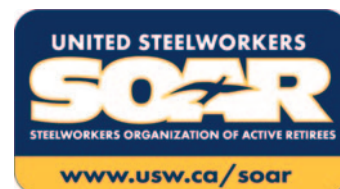
SOAR Chapter 19 in southern Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan NDP MLAs met in support of a national pharmacare program. From left to right: USW Local 5917 President Paul Chevrier, SK NDP MLA Meara Conway, SK NDP MLA Nicole Sarauer, Dennis Carrigan (SOAR Chapter 19 executive and International Board District 3), Ken Mair (SOAR Chapter 19 and International), SK NDP MLA Aleana Young, SK NDP MLA Trent Wotherspoon, Al Major (President of SOAR Chapter 19).

for the initiative. Again, this is not keeping the promise for a real, comprehensive national pharmacare program.

The USW position is that drug companies must no longer be able to control the ability of Canadians to access medications vital to their health. We ask SOAR members to urge the government to stand up for Canadians and their health care.

At the time of this writing, Canadians were awaiting the 2022 federal budget, in the hope that substantial funding would be devoted to implementing pharmacare.

More on this campaign to follow.



# Rubber Workers Exposed to Toxic Fumes and Benzene Now Stricken with Cancer

**Occupational exposure series: Once-thriving industry leaves hundreds of workers ill, battling for compensation**

*By Maia Foulis, Editor of Canadian Occupation Safety Magazine*

Once upon a time, Kitchener was nicknamed “Rubber Town” on account of the number of rubber factories in the city.

Thousands of employees worked at companies like Dominion Tire, Uniroyal, Canadian Consolidated Rubber and BFGoodrich. Now, few remain.



Gord Assman worked at BFGoodrich from 1979 until the plant was shut down in 2006. He became part of the company’s health and safety committee in the mid 90s.

Around six years ago, Assman became chapter president of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR)— though he had been involved with the organization before then.

It was during his time on the committee that Assman became acquainted with what eventually transpired to be an issue, not only at BFGoodrich but other rubber companies too: occupational exposures.

“We noticed that there were a lot of cancer deaths,” says Assman. Calls for donations were being frequently posted on the plant’s obituary board.

They thought that there might be something to it, and decided to further investigate. Eventually, the committee decided to run an intake clinic for rubber workers potentially suffering from workplace exposures. It took a year for the intake clinic to be organized and it was finally held in 2002.

“We realized that there were workers from other plants that could be affected in the region,” says Assman. “We decided to include everybody. It was a two-day clinic originally, but we kept on taking more claims as they came in.”

He estimates that more than 600 people showed up in the first two days, and overall they received around 800 claims.

“Everything from hearing loss to various cancers, and some repetitive strain injuries— but there was a significant amount of cancer claims.”

Many workers decided to start WSIB claim processes. “We had a very good WSIB committee at our plant [...] Four guys adjudicating the claims to the best of their ability. I’m not sure how many claims were accepted but expect that it wasn’t a very high percentage,” says Assman.

Even after the plant shut down in 2006, the WSIB committee spent months closing the claims. But after the plant closed, many of the claims eventually went dormant.

## Renewed Attention

Years later, after he had joined SOAR, Assman was contacted by a worker advisor who had been looking into some of the claims and taking some forward that had new evidence.

In 2018, some of the former workers’ stories were shared in the *Waterloo Region Record*. The media attention brought to the cluster by the articles reinvigorate advocates, workers and their families:

“That kind of propelled our cause to the forefront again,” says Assman. In 2019, another intake clinic was organized. 300 new claims got filed and reopened in about two years; Assman estimates that around 10 percent of those claims have been allowed so far.

In one of his articles for *The Record*, journalist Greg Mercer says that of the 404 WSIB claims initially filed between 2002 and 2017 by many of Kitchener’s former rubber workers, only 15 percent were accepted.

## Bladder Cancers

Similarly to many of the other clusters that we have reported on, workers were exposed to a range of potential and confirmed toxic substances.

Assman points out that when he worked at the company, some of the solvents the workers used contained benzene, “for a good period of time when I first started.”

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies benzene as a carcinogen to humans. The organization notes that benzene exposure has been linked to illnesses such as acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL), chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL), non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and multiple myeloma.

Workers were also exposed to fumes which emanated from mixing the rubber.

“And even though we had a fairly decent air makeup exchange units at the end, they definitely were not there at the beginning,” says Assman. “The fumes in the air affect people differently.”

Workers in different departments were exposed to different chemicals—the rubber mixing areas was an especially hazardous area, chemicals were milled to make different rubbers for various tire components.

Though many occupational diseases develop over time, workers may still feel the immediate effects of working with hazardous substances. Assman says that many workers experienced dermatitis or rashes from being in contact with the materials.

“There was one rubber that had some kind of odor in it. We never did find out why. All rubber stinks, but this was just real strong, and a lot of people complained about getting headaches from it.”

During the original intake clinic in 2002, some progress was made regarding disease recognition. “We got the WSIB to recognize that bladder cancer was prevalent in the rubber industry,” says Assman.

But bladder cancer is far from being the only disease affecting former workers. Over time, workers also developed respiratory issues.

Assman notes that there seem to be a lot of oral cancers that just aren’t on the radar yet. “The trouble is not everybody that gets cancer puts in a WSIB claim. That’s a huge problem, doctors just don’t think of it I guess.”

## Better Conditions

Working conditions at BFGoodrich evolved over time as more and more Canadian companies integrated safer work practices. Conditions for rubber workers in the early days were gruelling.

When he was 18, Assman worked at a King Street plant—the original BFGoodrich tire plant before it moved to a new facility in 1962.

Assman says that when he was working at the King Street plant, he wasn’t given a locker to change into work clothes. He would wear the same clothes in and out of work, covered in whatever kind of dust came from the rubber.

Thankfully, the new plant was modern and had better exhaust. But, he says, “when I started in ’79, there weren’t any air makeup units. I can’t remember exactly when they came in, probably seven or eight years after I started there.”

And workers were provided protective gear. “When I first started, there we had hearing protection that was available but not mandatory,” he says. “But as time went on, hearing protection was offered and mandatory – there were some areas that didn’t exceed the noise threshold.”

Respirators were provided as necessary.

“Working conditions, I think, improved as time went on. I think we had a first-rate health and safety committee that would push for improvements continuously,” says Assman. But “most of the time, there was a lot of pushback from the company—they definitely wanted to use the easiest, quickest, cheapest way of addressing things. It wasn’t always the best.”

This article originally appeared in *Canadian Occupational Safety*, Jan. 19, 2022.

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# SOAR Chapter 3-14 Just Won't Give Up! An Inspiration to All!

**Several years ago, SOAR Chapter 3-14 in Vancouver, undertook a lobbying campaign to end hospital parking fees. Evidence has shown that the cost of parking at hospitals is a huge burden on patients and visitors, both financially and emotionally.** There is a particularly heavy impact on seniors and those on a fixed income who tend to be hospitalized for longer periods of time than younger patients.

Hospital visits generally come as a surprise to people, and with parking costs at close to \$20-30/day it isn’t something that most people figure into their budgets.

These were some of the arguments made to politicians by Chapter 3-14 to end parking fees at hospitals. Freedom of Information requests made by hospitalpayparking.ca revealed that the privatization of parking administration has resulted in higher costs for visitors and

hospital staff. There is clear evidence of increased profits for companies such as Impark, which is contracted to manage the parking lots. This includes being allowed to retain 100 percent of all collected fines and charges for time violations, while returning between 0.24 percent and 0.43 percent of the hospitals operating budget!

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments of all stripes began implementing policies to attempt to stop the spread of this disease. The B.C. government implemented a free parking policy at hospitals across the province as one of these measures.

The chapter’s Political Action Committee has kept up the fight to make this permanent, building alliances with other seniors’ groups and organizations, adopting resolutions, raising awareness and building support among

a much larger audience.

With the decreasing case count of COVID-19, the government of B.C. has reinstated parking charges at hospitals across the province, albeit with some exceptions for certain treatments and illnesses. The Chapter 3-14 PAC has shifted into high gear pushing to have resolutions adopted by USW locals. Union retiree organizations and other civic-minded organizations need to pressure the B.C. government to rescind these regressive changes and make hospital parking free again!



**Never missing an opportunity, Kay Noonan, President of SOAR Chapter 3-14, lobbies B.C. Health Minister Adrian Dix on the costs of hospital parking.**



# SOAR EYES ON WASHINGTON

By Jay McMurrin, SOAR Legislative Director

**February 23, 2022. That’s the day the nation’s millionaires and billionaires reached the Social Security \$148,800 payroll tax cap.** While nine out of ten Americans will continue to pay into the fund for the remainder of the year, the big money guys are already done. Many people think that it isn’t fair and are calling on Congress to raise the cap to \$400,000 annually or to get rid of it entirely. The “Scrap the Cap” movement has activists across the country, including SOAR and the AFL-CIO’s senior program, the Alliance for Retired Americans, backing the measure and insisting that the U.S. House and Senate act on it before the midterm election in November.



Jay McMurrin

While folks on the right argue that Social Security is broke and offer few solutions to fix it, the truth is that the plan has enough funding to pay full benefits at current levels until 2034.

At that point, the fund would start paying out 78 percent of today’s benefits. Democrats, who are also pushing legislation to expand and improve the program, recognize that while the future is secure, the time to act is now!

By eliminating the payroll cap and taxing all income, Social Security solvency would be extended another 75 years. That means the fund will be around to pay another

generation of Americans that are not even born yet, their monthly old age and disability payments. SOAR President Bill Pienta said, “Scrap the Cap is a common sense and fair approach to securing the Social Security program for years to come. Additionally, it will allow for increasing monthly benefits for retirees, surviving spouses and the disabled. Many of them have not seen a base increase in decades.”

Scrap the Cap language is included in legislation sponsored by U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (D-CT) and is supported by the American Labor Movement. At this writing, the Social Security 2100 Act (HR-5723) has the support of 201 members of the House, which means that if an additional 14 members sign on, the measure could be brought up for immediate floor action.

Unions fought hard to help create the current Social Security program. And, for the past 86 years, we have been fighting to sustain it. Now is not the time to let up! Please join our fight to make Social Security stronger for generations to come. Please call your Senators and Representatives and urge them to support the Social Security 2100 Act (HR-5723). Remember, just 14 more cosponsors, and we can force an immediate vote on the bill. Help us make labor history — **CALL TODAY!**

***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.***

## 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.

All SOAR Chapter resolutions, to be considered by the International Conference, must be received in the SOAR office in Pittsburgh, no later than June 1, 2022.



## Join the Alliance Virtually at Our National Meeting in July

By Robert Roach, Jr.

**As the need to lower prescription drug prices and expand our earned Social Security benefits grows, it is time to consider the importance of the midterm 2022 elections.**

One way that the Alliance for Retired Americans is preparing for November is by conducting our quadrennial National Membership Meeting on July 27-28, 2022. This meeting will be conducted virtually.

During the meeting, we will elect our president and secretary-treasurer. Our community members will elect an executive vice-president and six members of the executive board.

Convention attendees will have time to network online with activists from across the country, share experiences, and gain helpful tips. Delegates registered to attend may offer or second a resolution for consideration. Workshops

will include opportunities to develop your social media skills.

We will also hear about the political landscape throughout the country. Retirees will learn the information they need to fight for retirement security and help fellow Americans retire with dignity.



**Please save the date and register for the event at [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org).**

**We can't wait to see you at this important event.**

*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).*

**“One of the most sincere signs of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.”**

– Bryant McGill

Recently, while the SOAR Intl. Executive Board was holding their meeting in Pittsburgh, we had the privilege of joining them for a conversation about our union’s Rapid Response program. One of the key takeaways from that discussion for the USW Rapid Response department was that we need to do a better job at meeting our retirees where they are “at” when we communicate issues we need engagement on.

Let’s face it, union activists often have the tendency to talk mostly to one another or to those who have grievances or problems. Those not active in the union, and not actively using their representatives — the majority of members — may only hear from the union when the contract is due to

expire. That’s why setting up a one-on-one communication system in your local union means that the union will have contact with every member.

But, that doesn’t necessarily work for our retirees. What we heard from SOAR is that this communication is difficult for them because our retirees are outside of the workplace and their issues are much different. Although our SOAR activists fight for all working people, their priorities are no longer in contract bargaining and inside workplace issues. They are centered more around retirement security and health care concerns.

Rapid Response is and always will be about one-on-one communication.



Amber Miller

Meeting our activists where they are “at” and appreciating and listening to their issues and concerns is enormously important to keeping everyone engaged, whether that be inside or outside of the workplace. Our department is committing going forward to help create specific materials for our SOAR activists that can be used for issue-based education and training to help build their networks.

We appreciate each and every one of our wonderful retirees, what they bring to the table, and what we can learn from them to continue building legislative activism. If any of our SOAR folks have suggestions or ideas that they would like to see Rapid Response develop for specific, issue-based education or retiree-related engagement, please e-mail Rapid Response Director, Amber Miller at [amiller@usw.org](mailto:amiller@usw.org).





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