



Testimony

of

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The United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing,
Energy, Allied Industrial and Service
Workers International Union (USW)**

for the

U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

Hearing on

**Beyond the 9 to 5: Dismantling Barriers and Building Economic
Resilience for Older Workers**

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Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Braun, members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Dave McLimans, I am a Vietnam Veteran and fifty-four-year union member. I first held my union card after my tour of duty with the U.S. Army ended in 1969, becoming a steelworker member at Budd Company, Trailer Division. I became a shop steward in '72 and eventually local union President.

That plant closed in 1987 and the company tried to walk away from us. It was a sad state of affairs - former employees, management and union personnel hanging by a thread - but we had rights, and the union. We fought for what we were owed, what we had a right to, as outlined in our union contract. We recouped five weeks back pay for my brothers and sisters, and we fought successfully, to recover the pension and benefits that were promised on paper. That pension still pays retirees like myself to this day because of our union and our work.

I still had many working years ahead of me and in 1988 I began my career again at Lukens Steel in Coatesville. Five company name changes later, the steel mill is now owned by Cleveland Cliffs. I retired from working in the melt shop in 2013 when I was 67. Some people wondered why I didn't retire earlier but I enjoyed the physical activity and since I'm an Agent Orange Diabetic it is good for me to move around.

The good thing about a union is that we can negotiate with the company on ways to support workers throughout their working careers and ensure a safe working environment. The union helps set the terms so that we can focus on doing our job and doing it right.

When I retired, my participation in the union did not end. Coatsville had one of the first chapters of the Steelworker Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) – formed in 1985 SOAR is integral to our union's mission. SOAR helps educate retirees on their pensions, or retiree healthcare options available in our contracts. SOAR also educates members on federal policies which impact retiree's pocket book like changes to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

For example, the federal government and states together spent a total of \$116 billion on Medicaid home and community-based services in 2020, serving

millions of elderly adults and people with disabilities.¹ This is why SOAR and the USW educates on the debt ceiling and the need for no cuts to programs which aid retirees like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. I didn't serve my country, work and pay taxes for forty-four years just to let my voice fade away or see younger generations lose benefits I fought for my whole life.

We also supported the American Rescue Plan and the Special Financial Assistance program for multi-employer pensions, also known as the Butch Lewis Act. Over one million retirees faced dramatic cuts to their benefits for no fault of their own.

The Butch Lewis program was a small amount of aid during COVID pandemic with a huge benefit. Congress approved close to four trillion in loans and loan guarantees to businesses and individuals, which is a helpful comparison when reflecting on the estimated \$94 billion (\$0.094 trillion) cost to preserve a pension system benefiting 10 million participants. It would also have cost the government more if we let these plans collapse.

Our SOAR chapter has regular meetings, in which we go over the issues of the day and schedule speakers for each meeting. For example, we had Bill Pearce the Executive Director from Brandywine Valley Active Aging who explained all the services available in the region. We are a part of the community, a place to gather and learn.

Finally, our SOAR chapter is a source of institutional knowledge. I can't tell you the number of times, I've helped a former member with ways to access their pension, or their benefits, or a place to go for help.

I encourage this committee to uplift older workers and union retiree organizations like SOAR in their work. We urge Senators to support community groups like ours and finally as you look to the future – I urge you to not cut or change benefits for Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. We are the richest democracy on earth, we can afford to allow workers to retire with dignity.

Thank you for your time and look forward to answering any questions you may have.

¹ <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/press-release/combined-federal-and-state-spending-on-medicare-home-and-community-based-services-hcbs-totaled-116-billion-in-fy-2020-serving-millions-of-elderly-adults-and-people-with-disabilities/#:~:text=The%20federal%20government%20and%20the,a%20new%20KFF%20analysis%20finds.>