

# MiARA Newsletter

August 2021

## Building Back Better Senate Passes President Biden's Infrastructure Plan

*MiARA 1st Vice-President Jay McMurran provided information for this article.*

Throughout the 2020 campaign, President Biden promised to pass bipartisan legislation to make major investments in the country's aging infrastructure. Now, just one year later, he is making good on that pledge. On August 10, 2021 the U.S. Senate passed a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure plan by a 69 to 30 margin in a bi-partisan vote that saw 19 Republican senators joining with the Democratic majority.

In the next five years, the Investment and Jobs Act will put \$550 billion toward improving and modernizing America's infrastructure needs, including repairing the nation's roads and bridges. These funds will be added to funds already earmarked for similar projects. The legislation represents the largest investment in infrastructure in U.S. history, and is expected to create many well-paying jobs.

### In this Issue

1	Building Back Better Senate Passes President Biden's Infrastructure Plan
2	Retirees Applaud Biden Call to Lower Prescription Costs
3	2021 Labor Day Parade Cancelled
4	MiARA Mourns the Recent Deaths of Three Staunch Allies and Leaders
5	Alliance Congratulates New AFL-CIO Officers
6	Budget Resolution Good News for Retirees
7	MiARA In-Person Meetings Remain On Hold

The bill includes \$110 billion to repair roads and bridges. It earmarks \$65 billion for passenger and freight railway modernization. Another \$39 billion is targeted to update and expand transit systems, with \$7.5 billion slotted to create a national network to charge electric vehicles.

Efforts to rebuild the country's electrical grid and expand broadband internet access will each receive \$65 billion. Finally, the plan allocates \$55 billion for water infrastructure, with \$15 billion slated to replace lead or decaying pipes, a need underscored by the Flint water tragedy.

Michigan AFL-CIO President Ron Bieber called the infrastructure bill a major victory for workers, saying that the act will create thousands of good union jobs for skilled trade and construction workers, and trigger new demand for products and services created by union workers in other sectors across the state.

The infrastructure bill includes strong new "Buy American" provisions. "Steel, paper, rubber, and construction equipment have been battered by unfair imports in recent years," said Bieber. "These industries will gain a new lease on life and create still more high-paying manufacturing jobs." He noted that unlike tax cuts for the rich who use their savings to invest overseas and buy back stocks, workers spend additional income in their communities, resulting in more jobs in retail, restaurants, entertainment, travel, and tourism.

Economists call this a multiplier effect. More private sector jobs result in more revenue from sales and income taxes. Governments can then invest in education and other social services, creating still more jobs. Everyone wins when we "Build Back Better".

## **Retirees Applaud Biden Call to Lower Prescription Costs**

### ***Medicare Drug Price Negotiations Can Provide Dental, Hearing and Vision Benefits for Seniors***

Richard Fiesta, executive director of the national Alliance for Retired Americans lauded remarks given by President Biden in an August 12<sup>th</sup> speech about the high cost of prescription drugs.

President Biden called on lawmakers to enact bills to reduce drug prices, including allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices and imposing penalties on drug companies that hike prices faster than inflation.

“The Alliance for Retired Americans applauds President Biden’s call for congress to take action to lower drug prices by allowing Medicare to negotiate a better deal with the wealthy pharmaceutical corporations,” Fiesta said.

“We also strongly support capping the amount that Medicare beneficiaries must spend out of pocket each year,” said Fiesta.

According to Fiesta, Americans pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs and older Americans bear the brunt of it. “Our recent poll of voters age 65 and above found that 87% of seniors – Republicans, Democrats and independents – overwhelmingly support allowing Medicare to negotiate lower prices,” said Fiesta

“The only reason that this commonsense policy does not exist today is because the drug corporations want to protect their monopoly power,” Fiesta said. “They have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to keep drug prices high.”

“Like President Biden, the 4.4 million members of the Alliance are calling on Congress to put patients ahead of profits. Our grassroots activists are in this fight for the long-run and committed to helping President Biden make Medicare drug price negotiation a reality,” Fiesta pledged.

## **2021 Labor Day Parade Cancelled over Covid Concerns**

Daryl Newman, president of the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO announced that the annual Labor Day parade down Woodward avenue will be cancelled this year because of concerns about covid-19.

“While we desire to celebrate the victories of Michigan’s labor movement over the past year, the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO and our affiliated unions have always prioritized the safety of our workers. The decision to cancel this year’s Labor Day march as we continue to navigate the covid-19 pandemic stands as a testament to that mission.” Newman said.

According to the website for the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University. “For more than one hundred years, Michigan workers have participated in Labor Day parades and other celebrations. One of the first Michigan labor parades took place on July 4, 1865, when more than four thousand union members—on their way to a picnic—marched down Detroit’s Woodward Avenue, carrying banners, tools, and other symbols of their trades. By the turn of the twentieth century, similar demonstrations were held in urban centers across the state.”

“Since the end of World War II, the Detroit Labor Day Parade has been the largest labor parade in Michigan. As early as 1915, it drew crowds that lined the streets. By 1956 a variety of labor organizations including the Laundry Workers International Union attended the event while tens of thousands of people watched.” (Source: <http://www.reuther.wayne.edu>)

The parade remains a popular Detroit tradition. “This is the second year that we’ve had to cancel the parade due to covid” said Dick Long, MiARA president. “We’ll miss seeing our union brothers and sisters, both current and retired. Let’s stay home, stay safe, and do what we need to do to beat this virus, so we can all get together and show our union solidarity in 2022.”

## **MiARA Mourns the Recent Deaths of Three Staunch Allies and Leaders**

*"The guardian angels of life sometimes fly so high as to be beyond our sight, but they are always looking down upon us."*

- Jean Paul Richter

### **RIP Richard Trumka**



Union members and retirees across the nation and throughout the world lost a legend on August 5, 2021, with the passing of AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, a relentless champion of worker's rights, workplace safety, worker-centered trade, democracy and so much more.

Richard Trumka devoted his life to working people, from his early days as president of the United Mine Workers of America to his unparalleled leadership as the voice of America's labor movement.

The 4.4 million members of the Alliance for Retired Americans are united in mourning the loss of President Trumka.

"Richard Trumka was a legendary labor leader, and he was also my friend. Working people had no more committed advocate, and he will be greatly missed but never forgotten," said Robert Roach, Jr., President of the national Alliance for Retired Americans.

Mr. Trumka was the founding Secretary-Treasurer for the Alliance and he helped build a retiree movement that will be an important part of his legacy. He established a Retirement Security Working Group at the AFL-CIO devoted to protecting the pensions that have been promised to millions of workers and retirees.

"Richard Trumka fought to make sure all workers have a voice on the job, a fair wage, and a secure retirement — a mission we will continue to fulfill in his memory," said President Roach.

A statement by the AFL-CIO pledged that "Standing on Rich's shoulders, we will pour everything we have into building an economy, society and democracy that lifts up every working family and community."

### **RIP Carl Levin**



Union members and retirees have lost a great friend and leader with the death of Senator Carl Levin on July 29, 2021, at the age of 87.

Senator Levin was known to be a savvy politician. He was Michigan's longest-serving Senator from 1979 until his retirement in 2015.

Senator Levin grew up in Detroit and spent time working as a taxi driver and on the assembly line at the Chrysler DeSoto plant in Highland Park before earning a bachelor's degree at Swarthmore College and a J.D. from Harvard Law School.

(Continued on p. 4)

## **MiARA Mourns (Continued)**

Dick Long, MiARA president and former president of UAW Local 653 expressed his sorrow at the loss of Senator Levin. "I knew Carl from the Oakland County Dems meetings, and as years went by, we became friends. He was a real supporter of everyone. But I think he had a special place in his heart for the labor movement," said Dick.

Dick had been reminiscing about Senator Levin prior to hearing of his passing. "A few weeks ago, I received an email from my regional director, Frank Stuglin. They were setting up a history room in the region office and wanted any relevant pictures or memorabilia from my tenure as a local union president and time as a UAW staffer," said Dick.

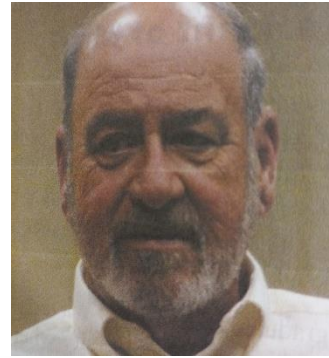
"My wife gave me a large envelope which contained a few pictures of Carl Levin at Local 653 events, general membership meetings, retiree luncheons and our annual picnics."

Dick remembered one time when the local's retirees were voting and grilling food in the parking lot. "Along comes Carl dressed in a suit and tie. The first thing he said was, 'how do I get a hotdog.' I got a couple and we sat at a picnic table and chatted. He handed me his business card and on the back was his direct line. He told me that if I ever think he can help on an issue, call him."

"Carl went to the senate and I joined the International staff. In 1998, I was promoted to Administrative Assistant to the President in charge of the UAW political department. One of the first calls I received was from Carl congratulating me," said Dick. "Carl advised me to just be sure to always take care of our union members and I would do just fine."

"Carl set the bar high in representing the people of Michigan, he was always there for us," said Dick. "He will be truly missed."

## **RIP Alford "Al" LaBrecque**



Our friend and brother Al LaBrecque passed away peacefully surrounded by his family on August 18, 2021, in Alpena.

When it came to solidarity and working for the union, none could outdistance Al. He was exposed to union principles as a youngster which prepared him for years of dedicated union service. Al was a proud member of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) where he held a variety of leadership roles.

Of course, Al had a life beyond the union too. He was a true community activist. He served as a football coach for 28 years at four schools, including 10 years as a junior high coach, nine years as a high school junior varsity coach and nine years at the varsity level. Al received multiple honors for coaching, but the most outstanding was his induction into the Michigan High School Football Hall of Fame.

Family was paramount to Al. He was married to Michelle for close to 40 years. Michelle and Al were proud of their six children, stepdaughter and eight grandchildren.

Al was almost always in attendance at MiARA meetings. He was never shy about stating his opinion and offering suggestions. Al always made you think, and many times helped change the way you came to see a particular issue.

(Continued on page 5)



## **MiARA Mourns (Continued)**

Retirement did not slow Al down. If anything, his commitment to the labor movement increased. This is best exemplified by Al's personal slogan which prefaced all his union publications:

*"Just because we're retired, we're NEVER out of the arena."*

Al, your family, your union brothers and sisters, and your fellow MiARA retirees all greatly miss you and your sage advice. Solidarity.

*The MiARA offers up its most sincere condolences to the families, friends, colleagues, and other loved ones of these fallen leaders. May you find comfort in their memory and may they rest in peace.*

*"Pray for the dead and  
fight like hell for the living."*

*- Mary Harris "Mother" Jones*



## **National Alliance Congratulates Newly Elected AFL-CIO Officers**

*Robert Roach, Jr., president of the national Alliance for Retired Americans issued the following statement on the AFL-CIO Executive Council's recent election of Liz Shuler as President and Fred Redmond to succeed Ms. Shuler as Secretary-Treasurer.*

On behalf of retirees across the country, I want to congratulate Liz Shuler on her election as President of the AFL-CIO and United Steelworkers (USW) International Vice President Fred Redmond on his election as Secretary-Treasurer. Both of their elections are historic and well deserved.

President Shuler has done an outstanding job as Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO, and Alliance members have benefitted from her serving as our Executive Vice President. We worked together on the AFL-CIO's Retirement Security Working Group, where she was a driving force in successfully battling to shore up failing multiemployer pension funds.

Secretary-Treasurer Redmond has also made retirement security a focus for his career at USW and has served as the chair of the AFL-CIO's Older and Retired Workers Committee. He fought to protect USW member's health care and pensions and has made sure that retiree issues receive the attention they deserve.

Richard Trumka's untimely death on August 5th has left us with big shoes to fill. But with President Shuler and Secretary-Treasurer Redmond leading the way, I am confident that the labor movement will work to ensure that retired union members, and all Americans have the secure retirement they have earned after a lifetime of hard work.

## **Senate Budget Resolution Good News for Retirees**

“The Senate budget resolution released on August 9, 2021, is welcome news. It will make a positive and tangible difference in the lives of older Americans and should be passed promptly,” said Richard Fiesta, executive director of the national Alliance of Retired Americans.

“Allowing Medicare to bring the wealthy drug corporations to the negotiating table to lower drug prices is common sense and desperately needed. Drug price negotiation works, as the Department of Veterans Affairs shows and it can save billions of dollars,” Fiesta added.

“Americans pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. It is time for action. Older Americans bear the brunt of these outrageous prices,” said Fiesta, citing a study that found some 25 percent of seniors are not taking at least one prescription their doctor prescribed due to cost.

Drug corporations have used their power to increase prices and pad their bottom line at the expense of consumers and the government, said Fiesta.

Additionally, a provision adding dental, vision and hearing benefits for all Medicare beneficiaries will keep seniors healthier and help families make ends meet.

And, according to Fiesta, the budget resolution would allow more older Americans and people with disabilities to receive care safely at home, rather than entering an institution. This will help to boost the caregiving workforce, which provides these critical services every day.

The Alliance is urging swift passage of this package by both the Senate and the House, Fiesta said. Doing so will make a positive and tangible difference in the lives of all older Americans and should be passed promptly.

## **MiARA In-Person Meetings Remain on Hold due to Covid**

MiARA in-person meetings remain on hold due to once-again increasing cases of corona and the Delta variant. Venues where MiARA has held prior meetings are currently under lockdown and not accepting reservations for meetings of large groups.

The MiARA officers and executive board above all else, want members to be safe. Senior citizens are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill from the virus. MiARA plans to return to general meetings as soon as venues reopen and we can join together without fear of getting sick.

Please do your part to stem the spread of covid and the evolution of new strains of the virus by getting the vaccine if you are eligible and have not yet done so. If you have already had your shot, ask your health care provider when and how you may get a booster poke.



\*\*\*\*\*

### **MiARA Executive Board**

**Dick Long, President (UAW)**

**Henry Lykes, Executive Vice-President (AFSCME)**

**Jay McMurran, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President (USW)**

**Charlie Robinson, Treasurer (AFT MICHIGAN)**

**Judy Foster, Secretary (MEA)**

### **Board Members from State Sustaining Organizations**

**Warren Danford (UAW)**

**Arthur Kroll (USW)**

**Jack Schneider (MEA)**

**Bob Sisler (AFL-CIO)**

**Newsletter Editor: Jack Schneider**

**Copy Editor: Krista Schneider**

\*\*\*\*\*