

OSARC MONTHLY MEETING
5/8/2024 12:30pm-2:30pm
MINUTES

OSARC Board: Joan Borovoy, Chair; Mark Lewis, Acting Vice-Chair; Susan O'Brien, Secretary; Colleen Cox, Consultant; Judith Lovell, Volunteer; Jay Warshofsky, COMRO Rep
OSA Staff providing support: Rob Spencer, Media Director; Megan Wofsy, Asst to the Chairperson

Presentation: Steve Regenstreif, Chair of the National Democratic Seniors Coordinating Council and member of the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Mr. Regenstreif discussed the roles of both the DNC and the Seniors Coordinating Council, covering the electoral landscape from the point of view of retirees and union members.

In 2013, Regenstreif retired as director of the Retiree Department of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). AFSCME, the nation's largest public employee union, began organizing public sector retirees in 1980 and now is the largest organization of public sector retirees in America. Since 1983, while Steve was director, AFSCME retiree membership grew from 18,000 dues-paying members to 250,000 retirees in 250 state and local groups. In the last 15 years, the AFSCME Retirees added more than 10,000 new members each year.

With AFSCME since 1973, Regenstreif held various positions including Assistant to then Secretary-Treasurer William Lucy, Assistant Director of the AFSCME Organizing Department and assistant to the late National President, Jerry Wurf. From 1978 to 1981, he worked in New York and played a leading role in the permanent affiliation of the 220,000 member Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), representing New York State employees, which brought AFSCME membership to over a million. He was Director of the national Retiree Program from 1983 until his retirement. He was also a delegate to the 1995, 2005, and 2015 White House Conferences on Aging, the 1998 White House Conference on Social Security and the 2006 National Summit on Retirement Savings. In 2017, he was re-elected to a third term as Chair of the National Democratic Seniors Coordinating Council. As a result of holding this position, he is a member of the Democratic National Committee.

Democratic National Committee's Senior Council works on senior issues and organizes to give older voters a voice in the DNC and the state Democratic parties. The DNC Senior Council, one of 12 caucuses within the DNC that represent the diversity of Democratic party membership and the positions held by the DNC. The Senior Council is a way to acknowledge long-time Democratic voters. In 2020, this broad coalition resulted in the most votes ever cast for a Democratic candidate. In 2022 and 2023, Democrats also showed excellent results in the midterms and various judicial races. In 2022, among Latino voters over 65, many votes were gained from previously Republican and Independent voters.

The DNC Senior Council is committed to: protecting Social Security, abortion rights (consistently one of the most powerful issues among retirees), Medicare negotiations to lower drug prices (80% approve), retaining the cap on insulin prices (supported by 88% of voters) and gun control (76% of voters in battleground states support gun control.)

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA): Passed in 2022, the IRA is a 10-year plan signed into law by President Biden with support from the DNC Senior Council and includes tax incentives, deductions and credits for clean energy and manufacturing. It is considered one of the largest investments in the American economy, energy security and climate ever passed. The IRA has also made health insurance more affordable, lowered prescription drug costs and reduced the number uninsured in the US. Through 2023, the IRA accomplished:

- approximately \$249B in new clean energy manufacturing investments by the private sector
- Creation of more than 170,000 jobs through 2023 and is projected to add an additional 1.5M jobs over the next 10 years
- Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 1B tons in 2030
- Electric bill savings of \$27-38B, for American families from 2022 to 2030
- Almost \$15M people are saving an average of \$800/year on their health insurance premiums
- Millions of seniors on Medicare are paying less out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs

- The Internal Revenue Service is strengthening enforcement against wealthy tax cheats while improving service for the average taxpayer

No Republicans voted for the Inflation Reduction Act.

2024 Elections: In 2020, 74% of voters over 65 turned out to vote. Twenty-two percent of all voter turnout was comprised of seniors. President Biden received 60% of the votes of union retirees. Early voting and voting by mail has helped with senior voter turnout. Both Democratic and Republican pollsters attribute Trump's loss to senior votes. In five important states that Trump won in 2016, 8% fewer voted for Trump in 2020. Americans want more freedoms, equality and the country to grow economically. The DNC Senior Council believes seniors want democracy, the right to an abortion, gun control and reduced drug prices. In the first quarter of 2024, President Biden raised \$87M in grassroots contributions.

The 2024 DNC platform for seniors includes:

- an increase in Social Security costs, an increase in minimum Social Security payments and an increase for the oldest recipients.
- Continued price negotiations for prescriptions
- Cap on out-of-pocket drug costs to go into effect in 2025
- Expansion of Medicare to cover dental and hearing costs

Council of Municipal Retiree Organizations (COMRO) Report: by Bob Pfefferman

Representatives from the AFL-CIO affiliated NYS Alliance for Retired Americans reported that Senators Schumer and Gillibrand have a 100% voting record with their organization. They noted that most politicians don't understand that Social Security is self-funding. The group is also involved in environmental justice and encourages union retiree groups to create environmental justice committees.

Healthcare update:

The application for IRMAA reimbursement applications is now available on the website of OLR at www.nyc.gov/olr. If you were required by Medicare to pay more for your Medicare Part B than the \$174/month normally paid by seniors, the City of New York will reimburse you for the extra amount as well as the basic premium. However, you must complete the application and submit it along with the required documentation, as requested by OLR. This is a totally separate activity than reimbursement for the regular \$174/month cost of Medicare Part B. That reimbursement automatically comes to you, typically in April of each year.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 12 at 12:30pm. Our speaker will discuss financial planning.

Minutes are sent out by mail to those people for whom we have no email addresses. We will also be sending or emailing out a survey asking your ideas for meeting topics for next year. Please respond with any ideas you would like to suggest.