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OSARC newsletter

In This Issue

- 2 - Drug Premium Snafu
- Help Wanted
- 3 - NYCARA Report
- 4 - Merit Council Dinner
- COMRO Report
- Rich Get Richer
- 5 - Round Robin
- 7 - AFL-CIO on Healthcare
- Public Library Screens
Black History
- Gov. Wants Repeal of
Law He Just Signed
- 8 - Scam Stoppers
- Drug Rider Info
- 9 - Travels With Sallie
- Museums in Fashion



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Bloomberg Signals New Push For Pension & Health Concessions

In the December *Newsletter*, our lead article exposed the concerted ideological attack nationally from corporations and their political allies on pensions and health care benefits, first in the private sector and, now, in the public sector as well. We framed the story with the Transport Workers Union's recent strike. Since then, TWU members narrowly rejected their proposed contract – which preserved new hire pension parity – in large measure because of a recurring give back on healthcare contributions.



The mayor's "blueprint" for the city's future features labor give backs.
(Photo: Edward Reed)

Now, in his State of the City address, Mayor Bloomberg has indicated he intends to push for labor concessions on both fronts in upcoming negotiations with municipal unions. Once again invoking a looming "crisis," Bloomberg said, "we must rein in health care and pension costs that have spiraled out of control. Today, nearly all private sector employees contribute to their health care and the few companies that continue to offer "defined benefit" pension plans are moving to "defined contribution" plans...moving forward we will work with [labor leaders] to reach agreements that include a provision that is familiar to most people: employee contributions for health care. At the same time, we will work...on innovative pension modifications for future workers..."

[continued on page 9]

REMINDER – YOUR 2006 DUES ARE DUE

A reminder that it is time to renew your membership for 2006. If you do not renew or join by the end of February, you will not receive the next issue of the *Newsletter*. The list of renewed members on the back of this issue is complete as of January 30, 2006. If you mailed your dues very recently, we may not have received them as of the publication date. If you have not mailed them yet, please take a moment now to remit them in a check payable to OSARC, along with the membership renewal form enclosed with this issue.

Next Organization of Staff Analysts Retirees Club Meeting

Wednesday • February 8, 2006 • 12:30–2:30 pm

OSA Office • 220 East 23rd Street • Suite 707

TAXES FOR RETIREES

Guest Speaker: Lenora Hoffman, Tax Aide Program, AARP

OSARC Officers 2005-2006

Co-Chair.....	Madeline Taylor
Co-Chair.....	Shirley Gray
Co-Vice-Chair.....	Dan Morgan
Co-Vice-Chair.....	Ana T. Vives
Treasurer.....	Dan Morgan
Secretary.....	Gilberte Ambroise



Newsletter Editor.....Rob Spencer
Photos.....Jean Anmuth, Rob Spencer

We'll Be Seeing You in All the Old Familiar Places

Fifty (50) members and friends attended the January, 2006 OSARC meeting:

Hakimah Al-Zahra, Gilberte Ambroise, Jean Anmuth, Elizabeth Borden, Ida Chin, Vincent DiGesu, Gloria D'Jaha, Bea Eisenberg, Mary Flannelly, Edna Fraylon, Manny Friedman, Tom Gorse, Eli Gottlieb, Shirley Gray, Al Gundersheimer, Phyllis Hailstock, Betty Henderson, Paul Henry, Mary Hillman, Barbara Hunt, Roslyn Jones, Jane Kronholtz, Richard Kucera, Kaye Lee, Nilsa Rios Mangual, John Mazzarella, John McAusland, Jim Mckeon, Dan Morgan, Carl Prisco, Fred Ranzoni, Claus Reinisch, Edna Riley, Allan Rose, Nancy Russell, Marc Sawyer, Michael Schady, Samira Shahid, Tomi Smith, Michael Spector, Joe Sperling, Louis Starkey, Trudy Stone, Sallie Stroman, Madeline Taylor, Hattie Thomas, Ana Vives, Richard Walters, Margaret Williams, Isza Williams-Darlington.

There were several new members at the meeting, two of whom we can identify – **Mary Flannelly** (DOT), and **Edna Fraylon** (HRA). Welcome Mary and Edna.

We hope to see *you* at our next meeting.



Mary Flannelly, Gilberte Ambroise, Michael Schady, Dan Morgan, Tom Smith, Hattie Thomas, etc. line up for food.

Condolences

The union has been informed of the death of Sandra Hartman, who retired from the NYPD as a Staff Analyst in 2002. The *Newsletter* extends its sincere condolences to sister Hartman's family and friends.

Mark Your Calendars, Give Us Your Ideas, Run For Office

This year's annual gala luncheon is set for June 14th at a location to be announced. Mark your calendars and look for the reservation coupon in the mailing with the April *Newsletter*.

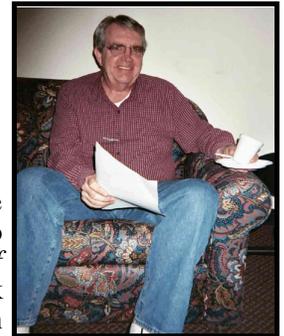
The annual trip on April 12th is fast approaching. Come to the February meeting to discuss potential destinations.

Finally, officer elections are an annual affair in late spring and committees always need volunteers, especially the travel committee. Members are encouraged to contact Mary Hillman at 718.462.6485 if you can commit a modest amount of time to help run OSARC.



OSARC Trip Planned To "Slaves of New York" Exhibit

As we reported in the last issue of the *Newsletter*, OSARC intends to take a group tour of the *Slaves of New York* exhibition at the New York Historical Society some time in March. If you are interested in joining the tour, please come to the February OSARC meeting or call Mary Hillman at 718.462.6485 and let her know of your interest.



John Mazzarella

Medicare-Eligible Drug Rider Premium Snafu

As if there was not already enough confusion over the implementation of the Medicare Part D enhanced drug riders as of January 1, 2006, the City's Health Benefits Program has inadvertently added a new complication with an error in the January drug rider premiums subtracted from Medicare-eligible retirees' pension checks.

As of the January pension check, OSA's Medicare-eligible retirees with drug riders were supposed to see the full Medicare Part D enhanced plan premiums deducted from their check. So, if you are in HIP VIP or GHI Senior Care, \$72.03 and \$80.39 were supposed to be deducted respectively. Other plans had other deduction amounts.

Unfortunately, the Health Benefits Program deducted the full pre-2006 drug rider premium from the January pension checks instead of the post-January 1 amount. The City caught the error too late to stop the deductions in the January checks.

So, if you are in HIP VIP a deduction for \$127.80 will appear and if you are in GHI Senior Care \$184.53 will appear and so forth.

Health Benefits assures the union that reimbursement checks for the overcharge are already in process and will be out to you shortly. The City tells us that the February pension checks will see the correct deductions.

Remember that the OSA Welfare Fund will be reimbursing \$50 of the monthly City-approved drug rider premium for Medicare-eligibles in a lump sum at the end of the year.

NYCARA Report

The New York City chapter of the AFL-CIO affiliated Alliance for Retired Americans (NYCARA) met January 25. Lou Albano, who attended for OSARC, reports that NYCARA chair Stuart Leibowitz provided an overview of the Transport Workers Union's now-rejected contract with the MTA, noting that TWU president Roger Toussaint had secured an agreement protecting future employee pensions and salaries and improving healthcare benefits for retirees, while at the same time giving back a 1.5% contribution toward healthcare costs for both active and future workers.

Leibowitz reported that AFL-CIO head John Sweeney has now come out in favor of universal healthcare. He urged NYCARA to help coordinate actions in support of this goal. [see "AFL-CIO Pushes Universal Coverage" in this issue.]

George Altomare spoke about the pervasive corporate media bias against working people and their unions. Altomare presented a motion, which NYCARA passed after discussion, criticizing a recent ABC News program, *Stupid In America*, hosted by John Stossel, which turned into an hour-long attack on public education and teachers' unions using the United Federation of Teachers and its members as scapegoats for the failings of New York's educational system. The resolution says "NYCARA members express their outrage at 20/20's distorted, unfair reporting." A rally and petition drive were planned.

Altomare also noted that the right has an extensive network of think tanks that provides analysis and planning for the right's assault on working people (benefit cuts, privatization and outsourcing, etc.) There is a parallel need, he argued, for greater coordination by unions and groups representing the disadvantaged in American society.

Molly Krakowski, director of the Joint Public Affairs Committee for Older Adults, reported on the confusion surrounding the implementation of the Medicare Part D drug benefit with an apparent administrative breakdown

in information sharing among drug benefit providers, Medicare and local pharmacists. The states have been forced to step into the breach with funds to ensure residents receive needed drugs in the absence of coverage they had signed up for. The states are now concerned with whether the federal government will be reimbursing them for these outlays.

Social Security privatization, Krakowski said, will likely be back on the table after the 2006 Congressional elections. In addition, Congressional budget efforts are moving toward



Mary Hillman & Ana Vives have provided extraordinary service to OSARC, month after month shopping for the food for the monthly meetings. Your help is needed. Call Mary at (718)462-6485 to volunteer.

tax cuts for the wealthy and substantial cuts in social benefits. She urged members to contact Congressional reps in opposition to these actions.

Nancy Yost, NYCARA's political chair, reported on the *Medicare Prescription Drug Savings and Choice Act of 2005*, which was introduced as H.R.752 and S.345. The bills would create at least one standard drug-coverage plan administered directly by Medicare rather than private health providers and require negotiated prices for drugs in all plans. The NY State Alliance for Retired Americans (www.nysara.org) and the NY State-wide Senior Action Council (www.nysenior.org) are pushing for the legislation. They can be reached at 518-783-6231 and 518-436-1006 respectively. New York area legislators supporting the legislation as of early January were Carolyn McCarthy, Joseph Crowley, Jerry Nadler, Anthony Weiner, Major Owens, Carolyn Maloney, Charles Rangel, Jose Serrano, and Eliot Engel.

Not yet on board are Senators Schumer and Clinton and Reps. Timothy Bishop, Steve Israel, Peter King, Gary Ackerman, Greg Meeks, Edolphus Towns, Nydia Velasquez, Vito Fosella and Nita Lowey. Contact Senators Clinton and Schumer and your representative and urge their support.

Also discussed was the *United States National Health Insurance Act* (H.R.676) introduced by Rep. Conyers, Kucinich, Christensen and McDermott. The bill would establish a single payer health care system in the US as a publicly financed and privately delivered system expanding and improving the existing Medicare program to all US residents. All residents would receive a US National Health Insurance Card upon enrollment. All medically necessary services would be covered, ranging from primary care, inpatient treatment, outpatient services, and mental health to prescription drugs, emergency care, dentistry, vision, chiropractic and substance abuse treatment. There would be no co-pays or deductibles and private health insurers would be barred from providing duplicate coverage. Patients would have their choice of physician, hospital, and other providers. The program would negotiate reimbursement rates for physicians, other healthcare providers and prescription drugs.

The plan would convert the U.S. to a non-profit health care system over a 15 year period. Funding would come from existing federal and state funding sources, a 3.3% payroll tax on employers and a 5% health tax on the top 5% of earners. Repealing the Bush tax cut and a small tax on stock and bond transfers would also go into the funding mix.

The bill has been endorsed by New York-area Reps. Nadler, Weiner, Towns, Owens, Velasquez, Maloney, Rangel, and Engel. Remaining members of Congress in our area have not yet signed on – Timothy Bishop, Steve Israel, Peter King, Gary Ackerman, Greg Meeks, Vito Fosella and Nita Lowey. Contact your representative to thank them for their sponsorship or to ask them for support.



Samira Shahid

COMRO Report

OSARCers at the January meeting welcomed back Jim McKeon, one of three OSARC reps to the Council of Municipal Retiree Organizations (COMRO) who has recovered from a recent serious illness.



Jim McKeon

McKeon reported that Larry Kaplan, the former chair of COMRO, discussed healthcare and the fact that only 1 million Medicare Part D eligibles have voluntarily signed up for the prescription drug program as of January 1, 2006. Kaplan argued we still very much need universal healthcare in the United States, although it is not possible federally with the present administration. Kaplan suggested it may be possible to implement universal coverage state-by-state.

In Canada, single payer universal coverage was introduced in some of the provinces and spread over a period of time to all provinces as a federalized program.

Healthcare costs in the United States are staggering and continuing to rise, said McKeon. The cost for healthcare benefits to GM for current and retired workers adds up to \$1500 per car, while Toyota in Japan pays about \$97 per person for healthcare because the country has universal coverage. McKeon pointed out the advantage Toyota therefore holds in global competition in car sales.

He reported that the City of New York pays about \$3 billion a year for health coverage, including over \$1 billion for retirees. He said that retiree organizations must be extremely vigilant on this issue as pressures are mounting on the unions in the pension and healthcare arena. He noted the Transport Workers Union in their recent negotiations had been successful in preventing lower starting pay or increased pension contributions from new workers but had compromised on health costs.

Since retirees are not at the bargaining table, he reminded OSARCers that retirees must work with the active union leadership to protect retiree healthcare and other benefits.

McKeon reported that DC37's Retiree Association had voted to hire a professional lobbyist. Their association has 24,000 members and a large treasury. Individuals who ever served in a DC37-represented title are eligible for membership. They meet on the second Tuesday of every month at DC37, 125 Barclay Street, at 10am. Dues in the DC37 Association are \$24 a year.



Ida Chin

Finally, Jim noted that COMRO debated proposals to push the City's pension funds to invest in affordable housing.

Merit Council To Honor Five

For more than three decades, the Civil Service Merit Council has brought together unions, organizations and individuals committed to preserving and strengthening the civil service merit system in public employment.



Civil Service Merit Council

On Thursday, April 27, 2006, the Merit Council will be holding its annual awards dinner. The Council will honor five individuals for their commitment and contributions to City labor, government and the merit system: **Arthur Cheliotis**, President of Communication Workers of America Local 1180 representing administrative workers in City government; **Richard Steier**, Editor of the *Civil Service Chief Leader* newspaper;

Ed Ott, Director of Public Policy and Worker Education for the NYC Central Labor Council, and two members of the City Council, **Joseph Addabbo, Jr.**, chair of the Civil Service and Labor Committee and **Yvette Clarke**, chair of the Contracts Committee.

The ceremony will take place from 6–10pm at La Maganette Ristorante at 825 Third Ave at 50th Street. Tickets are \$75 a person. Make checks payable to Civil Service Merit Council and mail them to Louis G Albano, Civil Service Merit Council, 220 East 23rd Street Suite 707, New York NY 10010. If you have questions, call Lou at 212-686-1229.

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Income Inequality Growing Nationally, Highest in NY State

New reports by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Economic Policy Institute, based on census data, and a local NY State report by the Fiscal Policy Institute have found growing income inequality. The reports found that the income of the poorest 20% of American families grew by an average of \$2,664 or 19% over the past 20 years (through 2003), while the income of the richest 20% of families grew by \$45,101 or nearly 59% over the same period. Families in the middle 20% saw average incomes grow by \$10,218 or 28%.

In NY State, the average income of the richest 20% of families (\$130,431) was 8.1 times the average income of the lowest 20% (\$16,076), the largest disparity in the country. Nationally, families in the top fifth earned on average 7.3 times the income of the poorest fifth. The average income of the top 5% of New York State families was \$216,061.

Over the same period, the richest 20% of families increased their share of total personal income from 43% to 49%, while the other 80% of families saw their combined share of total income contract. The bottom 20% of families saw their share of total income decline from 5% to 3.9% and the middle 20% of families saw their share of total income drop from 16.6% to 15.1%.

The richest 5% of families accounted for almost all of the increase for the top 20% and accounted for 22% of total

income, up from 16.8% of total income two decades ago.

The disparity in NY City was even greater. Families in the top 20% of earners had average incomes 9 times greater than those in the bottom fifth and the average income of the top 5% of City families was 14.6 times greater. During the two decades studied, the average income of the top 20% of families grew at a rate almost six times faster than the average income of the poorest fifth.

The reports cited large periods of higher than average unemployment, outsourcing of jobs overseas, the shift from manufacturing to service sector jobs, the declining power of unions, the lack of a real increase in the federal minimum wage in relation to inflation, and the growing inequality in wages for the best and lowest paid workers as factors, according to the January 27 *New York Times*.



Barbara Hunt

The study also cited tax policy as increasing income inequality. NY Governor George Pataki has recently proposed yet another round of income tax cuts targeted largely at the wealthy in his latest budget proposal. According to the *NY Times* of January 19, "the fine print shows that 24% of his personal income tax cuts, credits and rebates would go to New Yorkers who earn \$200,000 or more, while more than half would go to the roughly 10% of

New Yorkers who earn more than \$100,000."

Trudi Renwick of the Fiscal Policy Institute said "we've made taxes less progressive – we've cut the top rate by more than half since the early 1970s." She urged the state to tie the minimum wage to the rate of inflation and argued that economic incentives only be used to create well paying jobs.

Quoted in *Metro*, Dan Steinberg of Good Jobs New York observed that the City "justified all of its major economic development initiatives in the name of job creation ...but when you're talking about baseball stadiums, the Ratner arena and the Gateway mall at the Bronx Terminal Market you're talking about low-wage jobs without health insurance. These workers then rely on state health programs, so government ends up taking a double hit."

Contribute to the Newsletter

We want *your story!* We want *your* letters to the editor! What are you doing in retirement? What is meaningful to you? Are you doing something in your community? Are you making a difference? Traveling to interesting places? Active politically? Concerned about an issue of relevance to other OSARC members? Have a short story, poem, or other creative work you'd like to share? Happy or downright pissed off about something we've published in a prior issue? Contact editor Rob Spencer at OSA (212) 686-1229 or mail your submissions to Rob Spencer, Organization of Staff Analysts, 220 East 23rd Street Ste 707, NY NY 10010.

Round Robin



Jim McKeon reports that he was supposed to go to Las Vegas with his brother in December 2005, but a serious illness intervened. Jim's been taking 3 or 4 trips a year for the past 5 years with his brother, a battalion chief in the Fire Department. As a board member of the Municipal Credit

Union, Jim serves unpaid, but the MCU sends him to conferences where he can develop the skills to be a better director. The MCU, he notes, holds its conferences in "nice rather than lousy places to encourage us to go." Jim takes in the Vegas shows and the conference, while his brother likes to spend his time at the gaming tables. Says Jim, "he's good at it." Jim, himself, is terrified of gambling and losing. At the end of January 2006, he's looking forward to his next five day trip with his brother to Vegas.

Hakimah Al-Zahra retired in 1997 and has taken several cruises, the latest "Yuletide in the Caribbean" on the Queen Mary. She volunteers with Literacy Volunteers of America, serves as an AARP defensive driving instructor and volunteers at a hospital in Orange County.



Hakimah al-Zahra

Rev. Kaye Lee exited DHS in 2002 and took her first cruise in 2004. She goes to her church conventions twice a year and notes "they go to exceptional cities – Houston, St. Louis, Charlotte, and this year to Cincinnati." She has applied for admission to Union Theological Seminary in New York City and observes that their program "takes about 20 years, so I plan to live a long time."

Nilsa Mangual worked for the Office of Employment Services and has been retired for five years. "I am much busier now than before I retired. I belong to a hula group, a theater group, the borough president's Mitchell- Lama Task Force. She's traveling a lot and keeping very busy.

Mean Jean (Jean Anmuth) proudly brandishes that lovable moniker and says "everyone knows that it's true." Introducing herself to new OSARCers at the January meeting, she said "for the new people, I'm the one who takes photographs of you. I also do things like fall off ladders so I get to be a cripple. I get to have carpal surgery from using a walker after falling off ladders and becoming a cripple and I also tell dirty jokes." Jean also is a committed volunteer at the social work trailer of Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen once a week on Thursday mornings. She continues to ask that you donate any clean gloves, hats, scarves and socks for homeless New Yorkers. You can drop them off for her any day at the union office or bring them to the February meeting.

Carl Prisco comes to OSARC meetings a couple of times a year. He says he "loves his retirement and he should have made it his life's work."

"I'm Isza and if you are wondering Isza what? **Isza Williams-Darlington**" said the next Round Robin participant. Isza used to work for ACS's Office of Confidential Investigation before retiring in October 2002. She's done a lot of traveling. While she notes, "money is far less now that I'm retired, I do what I can." She's visited relatives in the US Virgin Islands, where she's originally from, and Texas, Florida and California. She "loves meeting in groups like this. I tell my friends about it and they all want to join OSARC."

Manny Friedman retired from HRA's Office of Labor Relations at the end of 1992. He observes, "one of these days I'll be retired longer than I worked. Of course when I was working, some people didn't think I was working anyway." Manny's pet peeve: people who ride motorized vehicles on sidewalks.



Phyllis Hailstock

Phyllis Hailstock retired in December 1999 and has traveled extensively – to Africa, South America, and Europe and hopes, this year, to go to Australia. She belongs to the Coalition of 100 Black Women and plays English handbells with Riverside Church. In her spare time she goes to dance classes and "enjoys family more and more each day." [ed. note: we were curious about English handbells and did a quick web

search. Did you know there is an American Guild of English Handbell Ringers and that it counts more than 9,100 individuals as members? A basic set of handbells covers one octave and contains 13 bells, but bell choirs may use sets covering up to eight octaves. For more info visit both <http://www.agehr.org> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handbell>]

Allan Rose retired at the end of September 2002 and served as OSARC co-chair for two years. He recently bought a condo in Deerfield Beach, Florida and by the end of January 2006 hopes to be in his new home in Century Village. He notes the development has a big club house, three dances a week and free movies. He marked New Year's Eve at a gala celebration there for \$6 – an experience he estimates would have cost him \$175 in New York. His dream is to create a local OSARC club in Florida. He intends to get permission of the officers and reach out to Florida-based OSARCers in the hope of providing a venue for Floridians to become active in OSARC. Asked how many women he had met so far in Florida, he answered three or four, which resulted in group cheers and his protest that the relationships are purely platonic.

Jane Kronholtz retired in 2001 and says the time since has been an "unaccountable blur." She's traveled to Baja California, London and Spain. She says she has "been able to fulfill my ultimate ambition which was to be a 'beach bum' in Sag Harbor for a couple of summers." She volunteers her time in service to two causes. She visits children hospitalized for "the same unhappy thing I have – hydrocephalus. Most kids die from it. I had an onset as an adult

and here I am alive and well, so I visit children who have this and say 'I have this and I'm all grown up.'" She also works for the Volunteer Referral Center which matches volunteers with non-profit organizations in the five Williams-Darlington, Carl Prisco, Allan Rose, Trudy Stone, Mary Flannelly.



says, "if you need volunteers call me." [editor's note: The Volunteer Referral Center can be contacted at 212-889-4805]

Richard Kucera retired in 1996 and serves as the chair of the OSARC membership committee. Richard notes, "I have three other gentlemen who are very helpful in processing your dues. [Richard Walters, Vincent DiGesù and Fred Ranzoni]. I enjoy my retirement – I've been healthy, I made a few bucks and I am happy and I'm happy with our new Medicare Part D, so thank you, and God Bless America."

Edna Fraylon retired last year although January's meeting was the first one she's attended. Since retiring, she has taken a couple of cruises, including one to Barbados. She has spent a great deal of time in Charlotte NC assisting an aunt who became ill and eventually went into a nursing home. She goes down periodically and stays a week or two at a time to give her family a break in caring for the aunt. She reports she is involved in a civic organization and in groups at her church. She says, with a smile, "I am going to find me a job – so I can get some rest."

Edna Riley retired from HRA in 1992 and serves as one of three OSARC reps to the Council of Municipal Retiree Organizations. She says, "I am getting my Phd in learning how to be more trifling as a retiree. I am soon going to be graduating and I'm planning this year to go on a Mediterranean cruise with my family."



Trudy Stone retired in October 2002, and since that time, "I've been running around like a crazy lady doing everything I can possibly do. I'm involved in the parks department in my neighborhood and I'm an officer in that organization. I go to lunch once a month with retirees from Brownsville Brooklyn and I like to spend at least one day a month in Atlantic City."

OSARC's Two Ednas. Long-time OSARC activist Edna Riley (l) and new OSARC member Edna Fraylon (r)

Betty Henderson retired in the fall of 1995 and finds it hard to believe it has been 10 years. She has still not achieved some of the original goals she set for herself when she retired. She notes, "in December I started trying to track down my

great-great-grandparents to see how they got to the United States. Since their last names were Nelson and Nelson and their first names were Anna and John, this is a bit challenging.”

Dan Morgan, OSARC’s treasurer this year says, “I have a great job collecting money at every meeting except at the end I have to give it back.”

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Pataki Plots to Pull Plug on Prescription Prices

Back in August 2005, this *Newsletter* reported that New York Governor George Pataki had signed into law legislation which would mandate online posting of prescription drug pricing. Only six months later, in Pataki’s recent budget proposal, he has called for repealing the law.

The new law required all pharmacies in the state to provide a weekly-updated prescription drug price list covering the 150 most frequently prescribed drugs to the NY State Department of Health. The Health Department was to post the information on its website starting this spring. Signs were to be posted in pharmacies notifying consumers of the availability of the list online. The database was to be searchable by zip code.

Said the governor, “pharmacies are required to make available their price lists upon request from the consumer and no funding was made available to implement this labor and resource intensive requirement.”

Assembly member Richard Gottfried (D-Manhattan) labeled the proposed repeal “absurd” in a January 20 article in the *New York Times*.

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Donnell Library Screens African-American History

Thursday, February 16 at 6:00pm, the Donnell Media Center of the New York Public Library will present a program with media maker William Miles, who presents and discusses *Men Of Bronze* (1977), about the 369th infantry, the all-black infantry combat regiment in World War I. Using photographs, interviews, and interviews with regiment veterans, and film from the French and American national archives, the documentary tells of their experiences in France, where they spent 191 days in front line trenches.

Also on Thursday, February 16 at 2:30pm, the Donnell will screen "The Black West" (1993) and "The Different Drummer: Blacks in the Military" (1984) which traces the history of African-American soldiers in the United States.

On Saturday, February 25 Donnell Media Center screens all four episodes of “I Remember Harlem,” also by Miles, a four-hour documentary which traces Harlem’s 350-year social, political and religious history. The first two hours screen at 1 lam and the last two hours at 2pm in the Donnell Auditorium. Admission to all screenings is free.

The Donnell Library Center is located at 20 West 53rd Street in midtown between 5th and 6th Avenues. The closest trains are the E and V to the Fifth Avenue stop. For more information call 212.621.0618.



Louis Starkey and Mary Hillman’s close encounter at the January meeting gives Ana Vives (center) a chuckle.

AFL-CIO Pushes Universal Healthcare & Targets Wal-Mart

In a January 18 speech, AFL-CIO head John Sweeney called on Congress to pass legislation creating universal health insurance coverage in the United States. Labeling the current healthcare system a failure, Sweeney, in his strongest statement as AFL-CIO president on universal health coverage said “We need a simple national health care plan that covers everybody – the failure of Bush’s complicated Medicare prescription drug benefit demonstrates that.”

In the meantime, the AFL-CIO announced its intention to push for legislation in 30 states along the lines of a Maryland bill passed in mid-January by the state’s General Assembly over the Republican governor’s veto. The legislation mandates larger companies with more than 10,000 employees provide at least 8% of payroll in health benefits. If they fail to meet that standard, they must pay the difference into the state’s health program for the uninsured.

A January 14 *Washington Post* article, in noting the impact on Wal-Mart specifically said, “at least four companies of that size operate in Maryland, but Wal-Mart is the only one that has said it would not likely meet the target.”

In the run up to the enactment of the bill, Wal-Mart had put on hold plans for a regional distribution center in Maryland. It also said it intended to examine whether the legislation conflicted with the federal ERISA law and would likely sue to stop the bill’s implementation.

Sweeney said the campaign for what are called “fair share health care laws” is needed because “big companies such as Wal-Mart are pulling [our healthcare system] apart and profiting at taxpayers’ expense.” Sweeney, quoted in the *Chicago Tribune*, cited a study showing \$21 billion in annual healthcare expenditures are transferred to taxpayers nationally when companies do not provide affordable insurance for their workers.

In just one example, Wisconsin found that 4,700 Wal-Mart employees are covered by state sponsored health insurance because they are unable to afford or are not provided health care by the company, according to the January 5 *New York Times*.

In 2001, sales associates, the most common job title at Wal-Mart, earned on average \$8.23 an hour or \$13,861 a year. The poverty line for a family of three that year was



Eli Gottlieb

\$14,630. According to Wal-Mart's own figures, nearly half the children of the company's 1.33 million employees in the US are either uninsured or on Medicaid

In New York, State Senators Diane Savino of Staten Island and Eric Schneiderman of Manhattan have introduced a bill along the same lines which would mandate a \$3 per hour healthcare payment by companies with more than 500 workers with facilities of 10,000 square feet or more and any company that occupies 100,000 square feet of space with 5% used for the sale of groceries. Referring to Wal-Mart, Savino said "I believe that the largest, most profitable company in the world, at a minimum, should provide basic health insurance."

The Service Employees International Union and the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union have taken the lead in pushing for the legislation.

The AFL-CIO's Sweeney said "if this administration and congressional leaders won't give us a fair health plan that will cover all families in all 50 states, we'll give them hell in all 50 states."

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Protecting Older Adults Against Fraud

NY State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer has unveiled a new program, "Scam Stopper," aimed at preventing the victimization of seniors by con artists through various frauds including identity theft, home improvement scams, credit card and telemarketing scams, foreign lotteries, and predatory lending.

The program will enlist volunteers to bring educational materials to community and advocacy groups to help individuals recognize, report and prevent consumer fraud.

The volunteers participate in a training session to gain a basic understanding of fraud and its various forms, as well as information about consumer rights and resources available to help those victimized.

Those interested in taking part in the program should contact the Attorney General's office at 800.771.7755 or visit www.oag.state.ny.us. Training is available at no cost to clubs and community based organizations and train-the-trainer materials are available for group leaders. The AARP, the NYS Senior Action Council and the NY State Alliance for Retired Americans have all supported the program.



Jean Anmuth, Louis Starkey, Trudy Stone

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Drug Riders Clarified

OSA Chairperson Bob Croghan and Executive Director Sheila Gorsky addressed the January meeting and answered questions about the implementation of the Medicare Part D-enhanced drug riders as of January, 2006.

Bob observed, "on the one hand, Medicare Part D has reduced the price of drugs overall. In the case of GHI, the price of the drug rider was creeping toward \$200 a month and now it is back down to \$80. On the other hand, the OSA Welfare Fund is not going to continue paying for the full costs of the drug riders for those in Medicare HMOs."

He noted that the drug rider premium for some Medicare HMOs had reached as high as \$300 a month, while the Welfare Fund has only been receiving \$125 per member per month from the City to cover all Welfare Fund benefits. He said, "how can we cover you and your spouse at \$300 each a month for drugs alone and receive only \$125 a month for you both for all benefits? When we had only a limited number of Medicare-eligible retirees, we were able to do that, but long term we could not."

Members have asked whether the Welfare Fund will reimburse the \$50 per month for all Medicare Part D drug plans. Bob said, at least for now, "the answer is not if it is not one of the drug riders listed with the City. Why? The complexity of the situation. There might be 100 plans on the market and we don't know what each of them entails."



Madeline Taylor

Some members have expressed concern about the removal of out-of-pocket drug costs from Major Medical reimbursement. Bob noted that "disproportionately, we were spending a lot of money for a small portion of our members. If you are getting only \$1500 per member to spend and you pool the funds, you can get away with giving one member more than \$1500 a year, so long as only a small number are using such a benefit. But, if you have a population that is all taking advantage of a benefit – and virtually all of our Medicare eligible retirees are in fact taking a drug plan – this is unsustainable. The money on Major Medical not spent on drugs will now either go toward needed reserves or more likely for current ongoing expenses. We report the per capita benefit costs in the summer mailing."

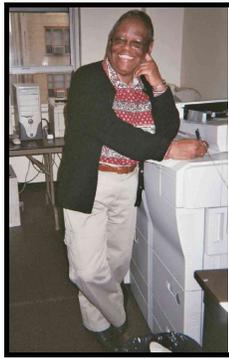
Sheila said that, previously, "you probably didn't pay that much when you bought your drugs, but your premium was high. Now, it's the other way around, the drugs may cost more but the premium is less. You have to figure out the nickels and dimes of what's coming out of your pocket and what's not. In the long run you probably will be better off."

At the end of the year the OSA Welfare Fund will reimburse in one lump sum check \$50 per month for every month a member and his/her spouse were in a City-approved drug rider.

Sheila noted that all current mail order drug provisions remain in effect.

Sallie Sallies Forth

OSARCer Sallie Stroman writes: “December 24, 2005, I ended the year by visiting the Schomberg Center to see *Malcolm X: A Search For Truth*, which chronicled Malcolm X’s life from his birth in 1925 in Detroit to his assassination in 1965. The exhibit was based on personal and professional papers and memorabilia of Malcolm’s that were rescued from auction and placed on deposit at Schomberg by the Shabazz family. The exhibit covered the major sections of Malcolm’s life: Growing Up (1925-45), his development from Malcolm Little into “Detroit Red”; Becoming Malcolm X (1946-52), his incarceration and conversion to the Nation of Islam; Being Malcolm X (1953-63), his work in building the Nation of Islam; and Malcolm X to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (1964-5), his estrangement from the Nation, journey to Africa and embrace of traditional Islam. The exhibit was informative and I’m happy I had a chance to see it.” [ed. note: the online version can be viewed at www.nypl.org/research/sc/malcolmx]



Sallie Stroman

Sallie continues, “My new year started off with a big bang. On January 4, I saw the exhibit *Slavery in New York* at the New York Historical Society. In the December, 2005 *Newsletter*, plans were outlined for an OSARC visit to this exhibit in March based on the interest expressed by many OSARCers. I hope the group makes an effort to see this fine exhibit and learn the history of New York’s slave trade.”

Fashionable Museums

The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology offers visitors the chance to learn more about the history of American fashion. From February 17 through April 22, the museum offers “Textiles from the Garden of Eden,” which features a variety of textiles with flower and plant themes. The Museum recently unveiled a permanent exhibit tracing the chronology of 200 years of American fashion and the cultural, social, and technological changes it reflects. Admission to the museum, at the southwest corner of 7th Ave and 27th St, is free. Hours are Tuesday-Friday from noon to 8pm and Saturday from 10am-5pm. Visit www.fitnyc.edu/museum or call 212.217.5800.

And, the Yeshiva University Museum at 15 W. 16th Street, is presenting “A Perfect Fit: The Garment Industry and American Jewry 1860-1960,” exploring the rich history of the Jewish community’s involvement in the garment industry over a key 100 year period. The exhibit includes the role played by garment industry unions in the development of the American labor movement. Film showings, workshops and readings connected to the exhibit are scheduled.

The museum is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday from 11am-5pm, Friday from 11am-2pm and Monday from 11am-8pm. Senior admission is \$6. For information visit www.yumuseum.org/APerfectFit or call 212.294.8330.



Nilsa Mangual,
Paul Henry

Bloomberg Demands Concessions [continued from page 1]

The mayor’s call came even as *Newsday* reported (1/31) that “the multi-billion dollar city deficit once projected for the fiscal year July 1, 2006 has not only vanished, but turned into a short-term cash surplus like the city had last year.”

Randi Weingarten, head of the Municipal Labor Committee, rebuked the Mayor in the *NY Sun* (1/27): “There are

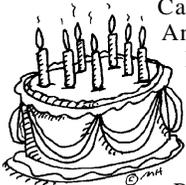
lots of things that the NYC workforce has done to help the city, but in a period of unprecedented prosperity... he can’t at the same time look to decrease [health benefits] and roll it back for the hardworking New York City workforce.” In the January 27 *Newsday*, Weingarten added, “this mayor has asked several times for that same kind of premium payment. Every

time, we’ve rejected it and found instead ways to deal with the budget issues and to keep a health care plan that’s premium free for the worker.”

Weingarten, the January 28 *Daily News* reported, is “urging all city unions to bargain together as a coalition on wages, health care and pension benefits.” We hope she is successful in her goal.

Happy Birthday to OSA Retirees Born in February!

Gilberte Ambrose, Marsha Ambrose, Jean Anmuth, Henry Armendinger, Kewal K. Arora, Mary Bacote-Norkhird, Charles F. Baroo, William Baskerville, Judith Beiss, Margarita Bermudez, Lois Blaine, Eddie Marie Brodie, William Burgess, Annette J Carrington, Janice Cerra, Paula Clair, Glynton Coleman, Rose Collins, Robert Croghan, Antonio DeGrella, Janet Deluca, Anthony DiLeonardo, Gloria Djaha, George M Drakos, James Duffield, Minna Dunn, William Eglinton, Joyce Eversley, Betty Figueroa, David Fleischmann, Daniel Flynn, Constance Ford, Linda Galperin, Sheila Gorsky, Lucille Hamilton, Joan Henry, Sherry House, David Houser, Victoria Illery, Ana Irizarry, Brenda Ann Jackson, Flora Jones, Barbara Jones, Herschel Kaminsky, John Kelly, Randy Kelly, John Kelly, Alma King, Patricia Kushner, Harry Lee, Henry H. Lenz, Rosanne Levitt, Leopold Loher, Rosa Lovejoy, John Maroney, Roberta Martell, Letitia Maxwell, John Dennis McGreen, Michael Meyer, Carole Mosley, Susan Mullgrav, Alfred Murphy, Leslie Myers, Elizabeth Nobile, Kathryn Nocerino, Patricia Nolan, Catherine O’Connell, Thomas Ogden, Anthony Pappas, Anita O. Payne, Richard Pellechia, Sandra Philip, Peter Piroso, Douglas Potts, Evelyn Marie Pridgen, Alma Pugliese, Lidia Resnansky, Vernida Robinson-Ellis, Lloyd Rotker, Anna Rudbarg, Ellen Ryan, Helen Samuels, Sylvia Sands, Wilma Shiffman, Dorothy Skelin, Edward Smith, Jo Ann Stone, Franklin Victor, Joy M. Walton, Donald Weinberg, Erich Werner, Naomi Wurzbarger



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