

United States Postal Service Endangered by Trump Administration

Millions of Americans are depending on the United States Postal Service (USPS) to deliver life-saving products during the COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions, and yet the President is poised to let the service go bankrupt.

A recent letter from Bloomberg Businessweek to Richard Fiesta, Executive Director of the national Alliance for Retired Americans, underscored the fact that the USPS has never been more important, *or more endangered*, than at the present time.

According to the Bloomberg letter, the future of the USPS is now in doubt. U.S. Postmaster General Megan Brennan says the current coronavirus crisis is threatening the Postal Service's ability to operate beyond September 2020. And, the Trump administration has told Congress that it will block any emergency relief that allows the postal service to keep delivering the mail. This is an outrage.

According to Fiesta, this course of action is insane and dangerous. "Without the USPS, voters literally

won't be able to vote by mail. We depend on the mail for so much--to deliver critical mail, medicines and packages every day to every address in the country--and to make sure every American can vote in this challenging time."

"Of course, extremists have tried to sell off the Postal Service for years, but the threat has never been more real," Fiesta continued.

One of the many groups of people hurt by the collapse of the USPS would be veterans. The USPS ranks among the nation's largest employers of veterans and disabled veterans. It has more than 100,000 former military men and women on the payroll, who collectively make up more than 24 percent of the USPS workforce.

One non-profit, VoteVets.org, has predicted that mail delivery may be slowed as soon as June, and they have called on President Trump to fully fund the USPS before this happens.

VoteVets.org has seen a large outcry from their constituents who are worried about the critical need to save our post offices. One member wrote:

"As a USMC combat veteran, I relied on the USPS when I was in Iraq to communicate with my family. This is an American institution that must be supported way before any corporate bailouts."

Another member pleaded, "Do not do a disservice to our veterans. They need their jobs at the USPS to survive and coexist after a military career of serving this great country."

The USPS has a long history of service to our country. We cannot let greed for profits stop an organization that serves every American and employs thousands of veterans and others. Contact your congressional representatives and tell them to fully fund the USPS.

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Alliance Members Mourn the Death of Ruben Burks

Members of the Alliance for Retired Americans and union brothers and sisters everywhere are joined together in mourning the recent passing of UAW leader and lifelong Flint resident Ruben Burks due to complications from COVID-19.

Ruben served as the founding secretary-treasurer for the national ARA, and prior to that was the first African American International UAW Secretary-Treasurer, a post he held from 1998 until 2002.

Dick Long, president of the Michigan chapter of the Alliance for Retired Americans (MiARA) and retired UAW political director, paid tribute to his union brother stating, "Ruben Burks was a great union leader. He had a long history of UAW activism, and he was a great friend."

The following tribute to the life of Ruben Burks appeared in the national ARA "Friday Report":

Members of the Alliance for Retired Americans are joined together in mourning the passing of founding Alliance Secretary-Treasurer Ruben Burks. He died on Monday, April 6th at the age of 86 in his hometown of Flint, Michigan.

Mr. Burks became the first Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance following a long history of unionism in the United Auto Workers and fighting for social justice. He served in that position from 2001-2015.

In 1955, he began working as an assembler at the former General Motors Fisher Body Plant 2 in Flint. He joined UAW Local 598. He rose through the ranks of the local, serving in various leadership posts, including shop committeeperson and Executive Board member.

He was a leader in the early days of the civil rights movement, and he was a pioneer in the UAW, becoming the highest ranking African American officer in the union when he was elected Secretary-Treasurer in 1998.

"Even in retirement Ruben continued fighting for social and economic justice for the people of Flint," said Joseph Peters Jr., current ARA Secretary-Treasurer and longtime UAW colleague. "He was a gentleman, mentor and above all, a friend. Of all his accomplishments, he will best be remembered for his warm and welcoming smile. It truly reflected what was in his heart. Rest in peace, my brother."

"It is never easy losing a member of the UAW family, and it is especially hard when it is someone like my union brother Ruben Burks, who gave so much to the members of the union he loved," said UAW President Rory L. Gamble. "He was a gentleman, and a fighter for what is right and just. I am forever thankful for his leadership and his friendship."



Mr. Burks believed in the fight for justice and support for working men and women. He was a respected and powerful force in the UAW and for his hometown of Flint.

MiARA Activist Spotlight

Kris Raisanen Schourek

This month the MiARA Activist Spotlight falls on educator Kris Raisanen Schourek. Kris is a Michigan Education Association-Retired member.

Before she retired in 2013, Kris taught biology, kindergarten through 12th grade art, and other science classes for 40 years in Hancock Public Schools.

Kris earned her BA degree from Wayne State University in Art Education. Thirty years later she completed her master's degree at Michigan Technological University (MTU) and became an adjunct instructor for MTU and Finlandia University in the Upper Peninsula.

Before she retired, Kris was active in her union. She was president of both the Coordinating Council and was the MEA Region 18 Coordinator. In addition to these duties, Kris was elected to be a representative to both the Michigan Education Association (MEA) and National Education Association (NEA) Representative Assemblies.

When Kris is not doing union work, she spends time writing. Kris has authored two illustrated canning cookbooks. She took all the photographs for the books and used publishing software to design the pages. She said, "It was a lot of fun. All the printer had to do was actually print the books and bind the pages."

Kris includes camping at her rustic campsite on Lake Superior with her daughters and their friends as one of her favorite activities. She likes eating healthy homemade food which uses locally sourced organic produce when possible. She also admits, "I do love a glass of wine with that food."

When asked how she spends her time as a retiree, Kris, a bundle of energy, quickly replied, "I like to do lots of things: photography, gardening, cooking, baking, writing, and taking care of all the



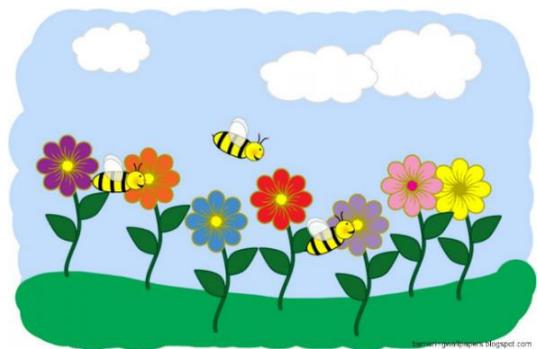
Retired biology and art teacher Kris Raisanen Schourek the simple beauties of life in the UP.

chores I have living in a log home on 40 acres. I would like to dabble again in painting, the guitar, and the piano, things I haven't done for years."

Upon retirement Kris knew she wanted to stay connected with her union. She joined the local Amygdaloid chapter of MEA-Retired as a rank and file member. Then, a year later, Kris joined the Region 18 Board she had previously served.

Kris feels that politics controls everything in education and the issues that affect retirees. "Our MEA-Retired members have continued to be vigilant and generous in their contributions as they fight for public education and the standard of living for both active and retired school employees," Kris said. "I am proud to be a part of these continued efforts and urge more of my fellow retirees to get involved."

Think Spring



Congress Responds to Coronavirus Pandemic Effects on Older Americans

The following information was taken from a March 20th Fact Sheet issued by the national Alliance for Retired Americans.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, Congress has enacted three coronavirus assistance packages to provide relief to families and businesses. The first two bills provide money for testing and treatment; vaccine development; paid sick leave and paid family and medical leave for workers; increased medical funding to help states provide care; and increased funding for nutrition programs for low-income people.

The third bill addresses the financial impact of the outbreak by providing money to families, states, hospitals, health care personnel, first responders, and nursing homes as they battle the pandemic.

The parts of these bills that will be of most interest to retirees include the following:

Coverage for Coronavirus Testing/Treatment

Testing for the virus will be covered under Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance, if ordered by a doctor. Medicare covers testing under Part B and co-pays are waived, including physician services. Treatment is covered under Part A, and patients must pay any deductibles and co-pays. Medicaid covers testing and provider visits at no cost to the beneficiary and may also cover uninsured people.

Out-of-Network Care and Drug Coverage

The out-of-network requirement is waived for coronavirus-related illness under Medicare management care. All Part D drug plans must provide a 90-day supply of prescription drugs at any pharmacy, including online pharmacies.

Observation Status

During this crisis, if an individual must be transferred to a skilled nursing facility after their

hospital stay, the observation status rule will not apply, and seniors cannot be billed for it.

Telemedicine

Restrictions on telemedicine have been waived during this crisis. Medicare providers can offer telehealth services to all beneficiaries, allowing beneficiaries to receive health services from their doctors over the phone and avoid the risk of exposure to the virus.

Individual Payments

Most seniors will automatically receive a payment from the government in the next 3-8 weeks. This includes people receiving Social Security, government, railroad, or other pensions, and those impacted by the windfall elimination provision (WEP) or government pension offset (GPO). Eligibility will be determined using a person's adjusted income from wages, investments, and retirement benefits, including Social Security, government pensions, Railroad Retirement income, and from 401(k) and IRA distributions calculated in 2019 tax returns, or 2018 tax returns for those who have not filed this year.

- People with no tax liability will receive \$1200.
- Individuals with incomes up to \$75,000 will receive \$1200.
- Couples with incomes of up to \$150,000 will receive \$2500.
- Individuals with incomes between \$75,000 and \$99,000 and couples with incomes between \$150,000 and \$198,000 will get a pro-rated payment.
- Seniors who only receive Supplemental Security Income will have to follow certain procedures to receive payments.

Protections for Nursing Home Residents

The bill provides \$200 million to assist nursing homes with infection control.

Expanded Unemployment Benefits

Nearly one in five people over age 65 are in the paid workforce. The bill includes \$260 billion in additional unemployment benefits to anyone who

has lost their full or part time jobs due to business closures or stay-at-home orders.

Unemployed workers will receive an extra \$600 a week in addition to their state benefits for four months. So called “gig” workers who work and who are not employees under standard labor law will also get unemployment benefits. Workers who remain unemployed after that period will receive an additional 13 weeks of unemployment benefits until the end of the year.

More Supplies and Equipment to Medical Workers and Hospitals

Industries will receive \$1 billion to increase production of ventilators and personal protective equipment for doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel on the front lines of the pandemic.

Housing Assistance

The Department of Housing and Urban Development has allotted \$3 billion to assist low income households with housing payments. This includes \$1.25 billion for Section 8 vouchers and rental assistance for seniors, disabled and low-income working families and \$50 million for Section 202 housing stability and services for low-income seniors

Help with Heating and Cooling Bills

The low-income Home Energy Program (LIHEAP) has an additional \$900 million to help low-income households pay to heat and cool their homes.

Nutrition Assistance

Funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) was increased by \$15.5 billion. This will help low-income households, including seniors, pay for food. An additional \$250 million was allocated for the senior nutrition program to provide an additional 25 million home-delivered and pre-packaged meals to low-income seniors who are home-bound and have disabilities or multiple chronic illnesses and their caregivers.



April 22 Marks the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day

On April 22, 1970, rallies were held across America to celebrate the first Earth Day. Speaking at the rallies were notables like Paul Newman, Ali McGraw and folk singer Pete Seeger.

As a result of such activism, the 1970s saw the adoption of important environmental legislation including: the clean Air Act, the Water Quality Improvement Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Toxic Substance Control Act and the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.

These laws have done much to slow climate change and clean up the smog that once choked our cities. There is still much to do. Yet, the Trump administration has gutted or repealed many of these important safeguards that we have put in place to save our planet.

We must remember that we do not inherit the world from our ancestors, rather, we borrow it from our grandchildren.

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