NEWS & VIEWS

LEHIGH VALLEY LABOR COUNCIL, AFL-CIO
"UNIONS JOINING TOGETHER AS ONE"

www.lehighvalleyclc.org

August 2026

On June 21, 1877, Carbon County prison officials hung four alleged members of the Molly Maguires. An atmosphere of anti-Irish prejudice sealed the fate of the men accused of murder and other crimes in disputes with coal companies in northeast Pennsylvania. Nearly two hundred people filled the jail to witness the simultaneous hanging of Alexander Campbell, Michael Doyle, Edward Kelly and John Donohue. The gallows, reconstructed from press descriptions, can be visited inside the Old Jail Museum in Jim Thorpe. Visit page three for more on this story.

One year later

AFL-CIO details harms to working people from Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill:" House Speaker Mike Johnson, US Rep. Ryan Mackenzie embrace the OBBB.

AFL-CIO Press Release
July 2, 2026

Liz Shuler
President
AFL-CIO

One year ago, President Trump signed the so-called "Big Beautiful Bill," commemorating the July 4th holiday by throwing millions off their health care and food assistance and cutting hundreds of thousands of health care jobs. The AFL-CIO marks the anniversary by detailing the damage the law has done to working families, while the wealthiest few continue to cash in.

In a statement, AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler said:

"It's been one year since President Trump signed the worst job-killing bill in American history. It was made possible by every senator and representative who voted to sell out working people and pick their pockets to hand another payday to corporations and billionaires.

"Since the passing of the Big Ugly Bill, the U.S. economy has had one of the worst years of job growth in decades. Black workers have been hit the hardest, with an unemployment rate now more than double the rate for White workers. Millions of Americans have lost their health care and access to the food programs they rely on, all while dealing with higher costs on everything from gas and groceries to electricity. With even bigger cuts going into effect after the midterm elections, states' budgets are getting blown up and local lawmakers are planning devastating cuts to even more essential programs to cover their residents' SNAP and Medicaid costs. Meanwhile, the people at the top are doing better than ever. This bill handed billionaires, one trillionaire and the country's wealthiest corporations massive tax giveaways paid for by the social programs working families depend on to survive.

"In 1776, Americans stood up against a powerful king who thought he could steal from us, trample on our rights and get away with it. We refused to be silenced. Two hundred and fifty years later, that same spirit is alive in American workers who organize their jobsites, fight for policies that actually help workers and show up at the ballot box to hold their elected representatives accountable.

"This Independence Day and every day, America's unions continue to fight the damage this bill has caused and build an economy that actually works for working people."

One year later, the "Big Ugly Bill":

Contributed to one of the worst years for the job market in decades, with the U.S. economy experiencing almost zero job growth in 2025, and the gap between Black and White unemployment doubling.

Stripped food assistance from more than four million Americans through SNAP cuts, with participation dropping in every state and the steepest losses in Arizona, Florida, Louisiana and Oklahoma.

Forced about three million people off their health insurance and drove up costs for people who get their coverage through the Affordable Care Act marketplace; premiums rose by fifty-eight percent and deductibles reached a record high of nearly $3,800 a year.

Cut state Medicaid budgets by nearly $679 billion, with new bureaucratic red tape projected to strip coverage from up to ten million more people by 2028 and put hundreds of hospitals at risk of closing.

Raised electricity bills by more than $110 a year after repealing clean energy investment incentives that created good union energy jobs, all while Americans get slammed by inflation at a three-year high.

Gifted $1 trillion in tax breaks to the top 1% and raised taxes on Americans earning under $15,000 a year, while adding $3.4 trillion to the deficit.

Is still on track to throw 600,000 health care workers out of a job, along with threatening 1.75 million construction jobs and 840,000 energy jobs in the years to come.

Who's afraid of Vote-by-Mail?

American Postal Workers Union responds to US Postal Service's proposal to change Vote-by-Mail

by the American Postal Workers Union

The American Postal Workers Union (APWU) is deeply alarmed that the US Postal Service (USPS) published a proposed rule to begin implementing President Trump's executive order on Vote-by-Mail.

The executive order is an unconstitutional attack on the millions of Americans who vote by mail and another attack in an ongoing assault on voting rights in the United States of America.

The APWU rejects the premise that the USPS had to comply with the executive order. Congress established the modern Postal Service in 1971 to be independent of the White House.

The executive order also ignores the fundamental purpose of the Postal Service and postal workers, which is to provide universal service to all. The Postal Service serves all Americans; it is not a tool for corporations or politicians to pick which Americans get which benefits.

Postal workers take our commitment to public service seriously. We are proud to keep America's mail moving and to treat it with the seriousness and respect that every postal customer deserves. That is especially true of election mail, and as postal workers, we are proud to have helped hundreds of millions of Americans exercise their right to vote by casting mail-in ballots.

There is active litigation over the executive order. . . . The APWU and its members are engaged in all of the efforts to defend the Postal Service's independence and protect our fellow American's right to vote by mail. Visit www.apwu.org.

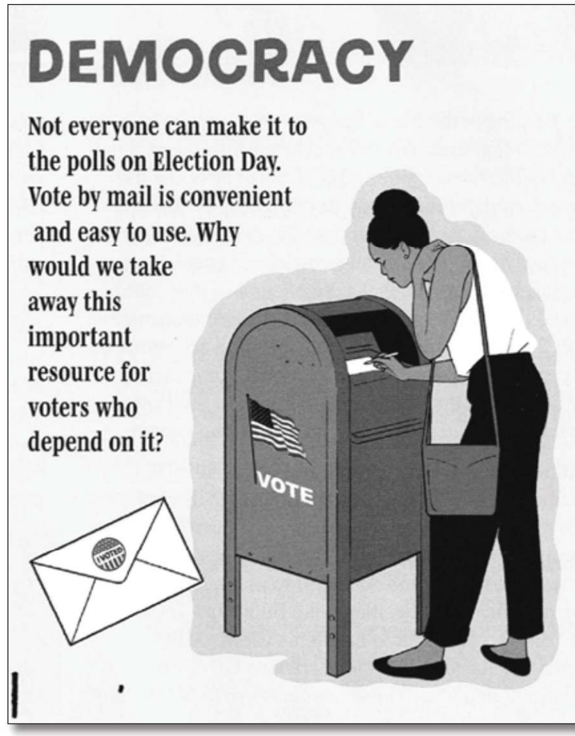
National Association of Letter Carriers files comments on Postal Service's proposed rule affecting mail-in ballots

by the National Association of Letter Carriers

On June 2, the Postal Service published a proposed rule related to the agency's handling of federal mail-in ballots. The proposed rule comes after an executive order related to mail-in ballots was released on March 31.

The proposed rule would require states to submit lists of mail-in voters and ballot barcodes to the Postal Service. Under the rule, USPS would be required to use these lists to verify who is to receive federal mail-in ballots and, under certain circumstances, refuse to deliver them. The deadline to submit comments on the proposed rule is July 2. The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) filed comments strongly opposing the proposed rule.

The NALC opposes the proposed rule for several reasons. First, it exceeds USPS's legal authority and risks dragging USPS and its employees, who are nonpartisan public servants, into the highly charged political climate of elections. Additionally, USPS lacks the legal authority to establish a voter registry, verify ballot mail or refuse ballot mail, as proposed in the rule. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the proposed rule would improve the already secure vote-by-mail process. The proposed rule could potentially deny certain eligible voters the right to vote by mail while causing unnecessary financial burdens on both states and the Postal Service. Visit www.nalc.org.

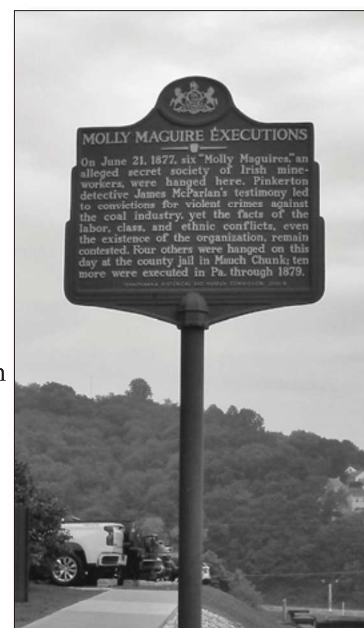


Credit: The American Postal Worker, July-August 2026

The frontpage

History portrays the Molly Maguires as either a band of Irish-American martyrs, a bunch of lawless thugs, or a fictional organization.

Regardless of history's depiction, their story is an example of the countless working-class immigrants who faced trial and tribulation hoping for a better life during the late nineteenth century. Thousands perished in work accidents. Others, like the four miners listed on the frontpage, lost their lives as victims in a regional conflict fueled by prejudice, violence and retributive justice.



Molly Maguire Execution historical marker outside the Schuylkill County jail, Pottsville.

On the same day that Carbon County officials hung four men, Schuylkill County prison guards led six men to the gallows, also accused of committing murder and other crimes. Historians argue that the Molly Maguire trials were a surrender of state sovereignty. A private corporation initiated the investigation through a private detective agency; a private police force arrested the alleged offenders; private attorneys from the coal companies prosecuted them. The state provided only the courtroom and the hangman.

Commemorating fewer workplace deaths

Attendance trends at the annual Lehigh Valley Workers' Memorial Day ceremony

by Ron Ennis, Editor
Lehigh Valley Labor Council

Attendance at this year's Lehigh Valley Workers' Memorial Day (WMD) ceremony ranked among the lowest in the event's thirty-five-year history. Less than forty people gathered for the ceremony held annually at the Bethlehem Rose Garden, Union Blvd. and Eighth Ave., Bethlehem. Why the low turnout for a tribute to local workers who lost their lives on the job?

Organizers initially struggled to explain the small crowd at the seven-and-one-half acre park. The pleasant afternoon on April 26 convinced them to rule out weather as the cause. The WMD committee employed multiple advertising channels, including e-mail, social media, and outreach to seven local news outlets. Yet, this effort in a fragmented media market failed to avert a low turnout. An explanation seemed elusive.

After examining long-term data trends, the answer lies in comparing workplace fatalities across two thirty-five-year periods: before and after the 1991 inaugural ceremony. This answer becomes clear when we revisit the WMD ceremony's origins.

On April 28, 1991, workers, friends and family survivors held the first annual ceremony at the Bethlehem Rose Garden. After eighteen months of overcoming obstacles that threatened to derail the project, the WMD committee erected Pennsylvania's "first Workers' Memorial statue," according to the *Allentown Morning Call*. Roughly 350 people attended the event, heard speeches, listened to the recitation of 614 local workplace fatalities, and watched the unveiling of the eight-foot tall, 2500-pound monument. (*Fig. #1*)

During that eighteen-month period, the area's three daily newspapers extensively covered the monument's progress. Besides the *Morning Call*, the *Bethlehem Globe-Times* and the *Easton Express* described how the WMD committee worked, how local officials reacted, and how the public increasingly supported a monument to workers who perished from a jobsite accident or disease. The memorial's journey from concept to reality proved to be the last major labor story covered by our region's three daily newspapers. Six months after the April 1991 WMD inaugural ceremony, the *Globe-Times* ceased publication.

Back then, the WMD organizers had few direct resources to document workplace deaths. Pete DePietro, the Northampton County Labor Council president who spearheaded the memorial effort, reached out to locals and businesses for fatality lists. Some unions tracked member deaths; many others did not. Some companies kept fatality records but hesitated to re-

Fig. #1: Pete DePietro (*center*) introduces the Lehigh Valley Workers' Memorial Day (WMD) ceremony, while John Weiss (*second from left*) stands nearby to ring the bell, 2012. By this time, the WMD committee had compiled a list of over 700 local workplace fatalities. A line of attendees, like those behind DePietro and the monument, recited the fatalities as Weiss rang the bell after each name. With a current fatality list containing over 4,400 names, the WMD committee decided several years ago to no longer recite all the deaths. Visit www.lehighvalleyclc.org to view the entire WMD fatality list.

THE MORNING CALL

Lehigh Valley's Greatest Newspaper

ALLENTOWN, PA., THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1959

4 Die in Phillipsburg Plant Blast

Allies Want W. Germans At Parley

Seek Advisory

3 Critically Injured As Compressor System At Ingersoll Explodes

Fig. #2: Industrial compressor exploded at the Ingersoll-Rand Co., Phillipsburg, New Jersey, killing six workers in February 1959. The tragedy represents the worst loss of life in an area workplace since the end of the Second World War. Nearly every year between 1955 and 1990, ten or more workers died annually.

Since 1991, the Lehigh Valley Workers' Memorial Day committee has documented only two years where ten or more workers perished. Fewer deaths mean fewer grieving families, but also fewer people with personal connections to the WMD ceremony. (*Credit*: Allentown Morning Call, February 12, 1959)

lease the names. In 1990, Lehigh County Labor Council's Frances Polgar requested data on local workplace deaths from the Pennsylvania's Dept. of Labor & Industry. The department responded with a list of nearly fifty Lehigh County workplace fatalities dating back to 1972, but confessed that the department "cannot be completely certain of (the list's) accuracy." Two years later, Polgar sought input from the public "asking area residents to notify" the WMD committee of workers who died on the job. The committee struggled to compile a comprehensive list in the years before the widespread use of the internet.

Online newspaper archives transformed the discovery of workplace tragedies with keyword searches instead of scrolling through countless microfilm reels or waiting for public responses. For example, inserting the term "fatally injured" into the search bar of an archived early twentieth-century newspaper, can yield dozens of citations. Using online repositories, the WMD committee has compiled a detailed fatality list that has grown to over 4,400 deaths. The Lehigh Valley Labor Council maintains this 1000-plus page list at www.lehighvalleyclc.org.

A review of the latest Lehigh Valley WMD fatality list helps explain the attendance decline. The thirty-five-year period before the 1991 ceremony saw far more deaths than the thirty-five-year period since the inaugural event. This stark contrast suggests an answer to the declining attendance.

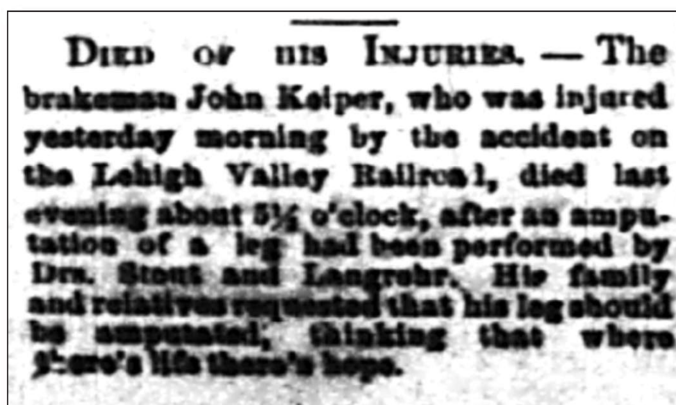
Between 1955 and 1990, over 500 workers died in local workplace accidents. Nearly every year during that period, ten or more workers suffered fatal injuries, and one year reached as high as thirty fatalities. In comparison, nearly 200 work-related fatalities happened between 1991 and 2026. Only two years, 1999 and 2021, witnessed ten or more deaths. The period from 1955 to 1990 witnessed two-and-a-half times more fatalities than the period from 1991 to 2026. This welcomed improvement results from several factors that we will explain later, but how do these contrasting totals account for the attendance decline at the annual WMD ceremonies? (*Fig. #2*)

Understanding the attendance decline requires examining the two core groups who attend the WMD ceremony: family survivors and union activists. Both groups have shrunk during the past thirty-five years. Since 1991, family survivors have gathered at the monument to remember a relative who perished in an accident or suffered a work-related disease. As the figures suggest, the pool of family survivors in 1991, over 500, was far greater than in 2026, about 200. A larger pool of family survivors undoubtedly swelled a crowd of 350 people at the inaugural ceremony.

At least three factors drove local workplace fatalities down. The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) improved safety for millions of workers since its passage in 1970, even though it is continually underfunded. Medical advances since the Second World War greatly improved the survival rate of a severely injured worker. Finally, the hazardous jobs at plants, railyards and quarries like Bethlehem Steel, New Jersey Zinc, the Penn Trojan Powder Co., the Lehigh Valley Railroad, and the Albion Slate Company declined dramatically by the early 1990s. These three factors - the passage of the OSH Act, medical advances that saved the lives of severely injured workers, and the decline in heavy industry as companies shipped work overseas, have fueled a reduction in workplace deaths, leaving behind fewer family survivors. (*Fig. #3*)

The second core group attending the annual WMD ceremonies, including officers and activists from our region's labor community, has also declined in numbers. Some locals no longer exist, such as Steelworkers #3048 at the former Fuller Co., in Catasauqua, Steelworkers #2109 that represented workers at the former Spirax-Sarco in Allentown, and Textile Workers #2552 at the former Sure-Fit Products, Bethlehem. Other unions, such as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union that once represented thousands of needle trades workers in our region, shrank as the garment industry transferred work overseas, and the union merged with other labor organizations.

Of course, we should celebrate the reduction in workplace fatalities in the period from 1991-2026 compared to 1955-1990. Only five workers perished in 2025, a welcomed improvement from 1955 when at least thirty workers died. Fewer deaths mean fewer grieving families, but also fewer people with personal connections to the WMD ceremony. This reduction, combined with the reduced ranks in organized labor have contributed to the memorial's attendance decline. Understanding these trends may help address the issue of attendance for next year's event.



DIED OF HIS INJURIES. — The brakeman John Keiper, who was injured yesterday morning by the accident on the Lehigh Valley Railroad, died last evening about 5½ o'clock, after an amputation of a leg had been performed by Drs. Stout and Langrehr. His family and relatives requested that his leg should be amputated, thinking that where there's life there's hope.

Fig. #3: Where there's life, there's hope. On November 18, 1872, John H. Keiper suffered severe injuries to his leg near the Union Depot, South Bethlehem. Coworkers rushed the thirty-one-year old Lehigh Valley Railroad brakeman to Drs. Stout and Langrehr's office, as St. Luke's Hospital had not yet opened its doors until the following year. Keiper's "relatives requested that his leg should be amputated" in hopes of saving his life, but he died several hours later.

On June 20, 2026, a worker at East Penn Manufacturing, near Fleetwood, Pennsylvania, lost both of his legs in the smelting area of the automotive battery plant. Despite the severity of the injuries, the victim survived. Medical advances since the nineteenth century have saved the lives of many Lehigh Valley workers. (*Credit*: Bethlehem Daily Times, November 11, 1872)

Mark your calendar

Lehigh Valley Labor Council's 2026 events

September 6: Labor Council Labor Day Pete DePietro Picnic, American Club, Coplay
September 7: Labor Day
September 16: Labor Council monthly meeting
September 19: Labor Council Annual Golf Tournament, Shep herd Hills, Wescosville
October 19: Last day to Register to vote in the November election
October 21: Labor Council monthly meeting
November 3: Municipal Election. Polls open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Pete DePietro Labor Day Picnic
September 6, 12 noon—5 p.m. (*rain or shine*)
American Club, 300 Cherry St. Coplay, PA
$20 per person if registered prior to August 30
$25 at the door
Children ten and under are free

“ ” . . .

“The $100-million-plus CEO is making a comeback, just a year after nine-figure pay packages seemed to be fading.

“More U.S. CEOs last year crossed the once-rare pay threshold than in any year since 2021—and nearly a dozen topped $200 million. . . .

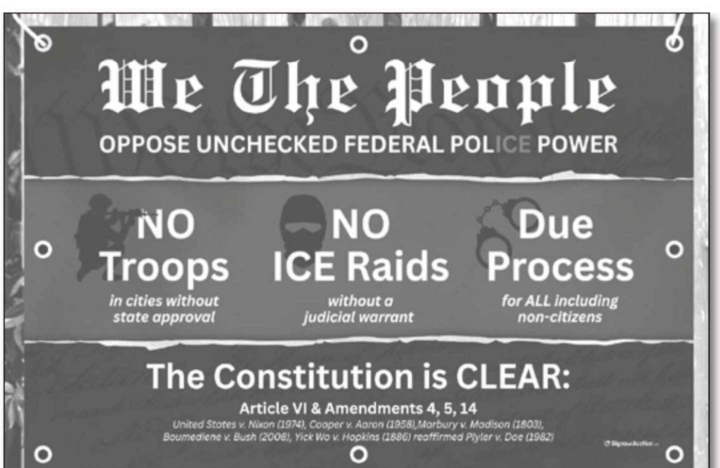
“Median CEO pay rose to nearly $18 million at S&P 500 companies in 2025. More executives made over $50 million, and the share making under $10 million shrank further.

“Half the chiefs got year-over-year raises of 9.8% or more.

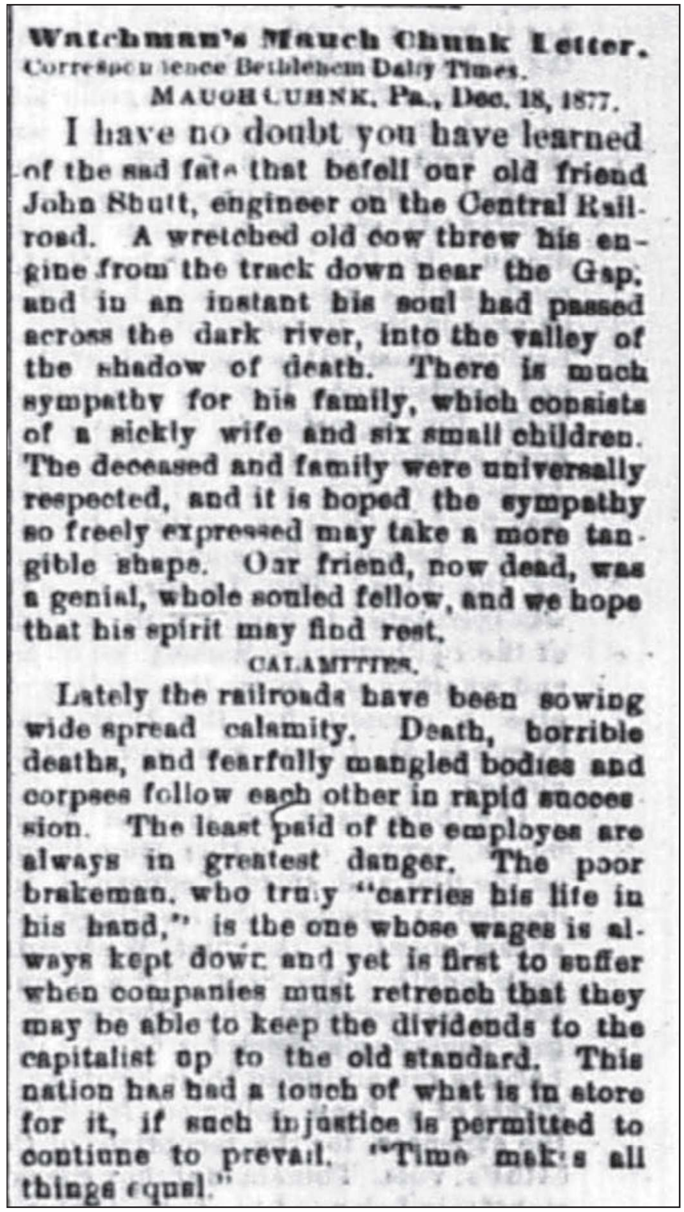
“Most big companies pay their CEOs primarily in stock options or restricted stock, often with strings attached. . . . As a result, what executives ultimately reap can vary significantly from the value companies first report. Often, they wind up with more. . . .

“How much CEOs were paid often bore little relation to shareholder returns.”

Theo Francis and Peter Santilli, in a June 23, 2026 *Wall Street Journal* article entitled “A $100 million payday for U.S. CEOs is back.” Francis and Santilli also reported that these salaries “looked like crumbs . . . compared with Elon Musk's $158 billion pay package from Tesla, which set a new record and is about sixteen times the combined value for all 391 other chiefs in *The Wall Street Journal's* annual CEO pay ranking.”



Credit: SignsofJustice.com



Watchman's Mauch Chunk Letter.
Correspondence Bethlehem Daily Times.
MAUCH CHUNK, Pa., Dec. 18, 1877.

I have no doubt you have learned of the sad fate that befell our old friend John Shutt, engineer on the Central Railroad. A wretched old cow threw his engine from the track down near the Gap, and in an instant his soul had passed across the dark river, into the valley of the shadow of death. There is much sympathy for his family, which consists of a sickly wife and six small children. The deceased and family were universally respected, and it is hoped the sympathy so freely expressed may take a more tangible shape. Our friend, now dead, was a genial, whole souled fellow, and we hope that his spirit may find rest.

CALAMITIES.

Lately the railroads have been sowing wide spread calamity. Death, horrible deaths, and fearfully mangled bodies and corpses follow each other in rapid succession. The least paid of the employes are always in greatest danger. The poor brakeman, who truly “carries his life in his hand,” is the one whose wages is always kept down and yet is first to suffer when companies must retrench that they may be able to keep the dividends to the capitalist up to the old standard. This nation has had a touch of what is in store for it, if such injustice is permitted to continue to prevail. “Time makes all things equal.”

Railroading, 1877. Central Railroad of New Jersey engineer John Shutt lost his life on December 17, 1877. Shutt's locomotive, hauling 130 empty coal cars across the border between Carbon and Lehigh counties, struck a cow that had walked onto the tracks. The train ran over the bovine, derailed, and flipped down an embankment. The engineer left behind “a sickly wife and six small children.”

While investors received hefty dividends from railroad companies, “the least paid of the employees are always in greatest danger.” Their wages are “always kept down” and they are the “first to suffer when companies must retrench.” (Credit: *Bethlehem Daily Times*, December 19, 1977)

Social Security at a crossroads

Historical opposition, misinformation and the proposal to eliminate the payroll tax cap

Ron Ennis, Editor
Lehigh Valley Labor Council

Social Security recently released its annual report forecasting a worsening financial picture. The agency's trustees warned on June 9 that without Congressional action, the program will need to cut benefits to millions of Americans by the end of 2032.

Despite the dire warning, Donald Trump's pick to run the Social Security Administration wrote to retirees on July 2 that "America's seniors are winning" thanks to the president. Frank J. Bisignano pointed to Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill as "protecting and strengthening Social Security while providing world-class customer service." His message read like a Trump campaign pitch rather than informing seniors.

Does Social Security need reforms as its trustees suggest? Or should we place our faith in Trump, who famously declared at the 2016 Republican National Convention that "I alone can fix it," arguing that he was the only one capable of tackling the problems confronting the government?

Over ninety years ago, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law "An Act to provide for the general welfare by establishing a system of Federal old-age benefits." Better known as the Social Security Act, lawmakers amended the landmark legislation several times, dramatically reducing poverty. "We can never ensure 100 percent of the population against 100 percent of the hazards and vicissitudes of life," Roosevelt said upon signing the measure on August 14, 1935. "But we have tried to frame a law which will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and his family against the loss of a job and against poverty stricken old age."

The opposition to Social Security's core principles stretches back to 1964 when Republican Party presidential candidate Barry Goldwater campaigned on making the program's contributions voluntary. Ronald Reagan advocated for partial privatization in 1976, signaling that the GOP had begun abandoning the historic mission of the agency towards working-class Americans. The concept emerged as a major platform of the GOP when President George W. Bush urged Congress in his 2005 State of the Union address to scrap Roosevelt's program and instead create "voluntary personal retirement accounts."

Republican resistance to Social Security's original mission now prevents Congress from fixing the program's finances. Today, Social Security pays retiree and survivor benefits to sixty-eight million beneficiaries. By the end of 2032, the agency's trustees predict that revenue will only cover seventy-eight percent of benefits, resulting in a twenty-two percent reduction. Congress can reverse this outcome by passing legislation that balances revenues with benefit payments.

Rather than address the trustees' warnings, Trump claimed during a recent cabinet meeting that eliminating rampant fraud would reverse the program's uncertain future. "Fraudulent people, . . . people that are 115 years old, 125 years old, (are) getting payments." He offered no evidence to support his allegation that benefits are paid to 125-year-old citizens. Meanwhile, his One Big Beautiful Bill has fueled Social Security's worsening financial picture.

THE WEATHER
Local showers and moderately warm today; fair and warmer Friday.
(Weather Details on Page 3)

ALL

VOL. XCI, NO. 45

Roosevelt Signs Bill to Provide Social Security

Terms it "Hope Of Many Years Standing"

Will Furnish Protection For 30,000, 000 Citizens

Reinstated Olympian

(*Credit*: Allentown Morning Call, August 15, 1935)

Some right-wing columnists dismiss the agency's gloomy outlook entirely, arguing that it faces a "phony crisis," easily solved by artificial intelligence. The *Wall Street Journal's* Joseph C. Sternberg wrote on June 12, 2026 that solving the program's financial outlook may only take "several years of information on how artificial intelligence will transform the economy's productivity." Sternberg added that office seekers should refrain from talking about Social Security's future. "One of the sillier themes to emerge . . . is the notion that candidates for office in the next few election cycles must present a plan for Social Security. . . . Of course, no one who aspires to get elected will be so foolish."

Fanciful claims about fraud and wishful thinking about artificial intelligence won't solve Social Security's challenges. Several proposals aimed at stabilizing Social Security have appeared in news outlets, including a plan by US Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.). She co-authored a statement in the *New York Times* on June 23, 2026 with US Sen. Bernie Moreno (R-Ohio) explaining that lifting the Social Security payroll tax cap is a first step toward addressing the program's funding shortfall.

The Social Security payroll tax cap is currently set at $184,500. The levy is part of the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) tax that workers see on their payroll stub. Earnings above $184,500 pay no FICA taxes. Since most working-class taxpayers earn less than that, they pay Social Security taxes on 100 percent of their annual income. A million-dollar-a-year CEO, however, would receive more than $800,000 FICA-free. "Why should a middle-class nurse pay a larger share of her paycheck than a wealthy corporate lawyer?" Sen. Warren asked.

Sens. Warren and Moreno propose eliminating the payroll tax cap. Their plan applies FICA taxes to all income, which one estimate projects would add $3 trillion over ten years and extend the program's solvency for another generation. "Social Security is a core component of our nation's promise," they wrote, "a covenant between the federal government and Americans who pay into it throughout their working years so they can retire with dignity."

Sens. Warren and Moreno's proposal offers a step toward strengthening Social Security, but political obstacles remain. Trump and his media allies have obscured the political debate, making it difficult for working-class voters to evaluate the Warren-Moreno plan. Fanciful claims about fraud and wishful thinking about artificial intelligence won't solve the real problems facing the agency that serves millions of retired and working Americans. Hard choices about Social Security lie ahead and candidates this November have an obligation to level with their working-class voters.

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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2026

Executive Board @ 7:00 PM – Delegate meeting @ 7:30 PM

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(One block east of the Whitehall Township Police Department)

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