One of the largest worries hanging over the heads of many people with disabilities in 2015 was a looming 20 percent cut to Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits if Congress didn’t act to increase its trust fund balance.

Ultimately, a transfer from the larger, but even more financially shaky, Retirement Trust was approved and the 20 percent cut to SSDI was averted. However, none of the major solutions proposed to fix the long-term funding levels of OASDI, Old Age, Survivor and Disability Insurance, a.k.a. Social Security, were implemented. Instead, Congress managed to authorize a handful of low-risk measures to save face as they managed to shove through a compromise measure, which included:

1. Closing a loophole that helped high-income couples file for retirement and then suspend benefits, resulting in a higher-than-intended benefits for those couples;
2. Increasing penalties for committing Social Security fraud;
3. Allowing pilot projects in some areas to address the Substantial Gainful Activity financial cliff by trying various incremental decrease measures at or below the Trial Work level;
4. Requiring medical information from all disability applicants. A handful of states were trying a pilot program where they had a different, ultimately unsuccessful, decision-making system.

In addition to these Social Security changes, the normal Cost-of-Living Adjustment and Medicare formula kicked in for 2016, which means:

1. No increase in SSDI benefits;
2. No increase in Medicare premium costs except for new enrollees and high-income recipients, who face an increase in costs dependent on their income level;
3. A decrease in the maximum amount a retired worker can receive;
4. A minor increase in Substantial Gainful Activity for non-blind SSDI recipients from $1,090/month to $1,130/month.

Some news outlets are reporting that the earliest Congress will address Social Security fixes again is in six years. This means the clock keeps ticking as the OASDI trust funds move ever-nearer to not being able to meet their obligations and any potential fixes become more severe. We can only hope that Congress starts implementing some of the many proposed solutions soon, and not wait until it’s too late.
Upcoming Events

Flathead County

Summit Closed - Jan. 1, 19; Feb. 15

Social Security Orientation - First and third Wednesdays monthly.
Please call 257-0048 ext. 141, to register and get location.

YODA - Youth group meets once a month.

Living Well with a Disability - Starting Jan. 12, 2 p.m.

Social Activities - We get together four times a year for social activities. Call the office to put your name on the mailing list so you won't miss the next fun and exciting adventure!

The next Social Activity will be a Valentine's Party on Feb. 12, 4-6 p.m. May have a DJ and Karaoke. Plans are still being made, so details may change.

Unless otherwise noted, classes and groups meet at:

Gateway Community Center, United Way Conference Room
1203 Hwy 2 West, Kalispell

Call Lynae, (406) 257-0048, ext. 142, for more information or to register.

Ravalli County

Summit Closed - Jan. 1, 19; Feb. 15

Social Security Orientations - First Monday monthly, Jan. 4, Feb. 1, March 7, 1-3 p.m.
Man Cave - Third Thursday monthly, Jan. 21, Feb. 18, March 18
People First - Tuesdays weekly, 3-4 p.m.
Women on the Move - Third Wednesday monthly, Jan. 20, Feb. 17, March 16
TGIAF - Thank Goodness It's Activity Friday - Fridays, 1-3 p.m.
(No meeting Jan. 1)

Unless otherwise noted, classes and groups meet at (new location!):

The Refuge,
317 N 3rd St., Hamilton

Call Joel, Mary or Sarah, (406) 363-5242, for more information or to register.
Thank you to Liquid Planet for designing a unique drink to benefit Summit and support our community.

This December benefit warmed the tummies, and hearts, of even the Grinchiest of Montanans!
UPCOMING EVENTS
MISSOULA COUNTY

Summit Closed - Jan. 1, 19; Feb. 15

Summit Orientation - First Friday monthly, 10 a.m.-12 p.m. (Jan. 1 orientation moved to Jan. 7!)

SSA Orientation - Jan. 7, Feb. 12, March 11, April 8, 10-11 a.m. and Jan. 19, Feb. 23, March 22, April 19, 1-2 p.m.

People First - First and third Wednesdays monthly, 4-5 p.m.

Living Well with a Disability - Mondays, 10 a.m-12 p.m., Jan. 4-March 28

Working Well with a Disability - Tuesdays, 10 a.m-12 p.m., Jan. 5-March 15

WRAP - Wellness Recovery Action Plan - Tuesdays, 10 a.m-12 p.m., Jan. 5-March 15

Alzheimer’s Support Group - Second Wednesday monthly, 12-2 p.m.

Blind Low Vision Support Group - Second Tuesday monthly, 1-2:30 p.m.

Epilepsy Support Group - First Monday monthly, 2-3:30 p.m.

The following activities are now meeting at BASE, 725 West Alder, No. 4, across from St. Patrick Hospital and next to Draughtworks in the Warehouse Mall.

Video Game Night (VGN) - Thursdays weekly, 3-6 p.m.

Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy (YODA) - Second and fourth Wednesdays monthly, 3:30-6 p.m.

Summit Artistic Group Endeavors (SAGE) - Second and fourth Fridays monthly, 2-6 p.m.

Unless otherwise noted, classes and groups meet at:

Summit ILC, Summit's Conference Room
700 SW Higgins, Suite 101, Missoula

Call Kathy, (406) 728-1630, for more information or to register.
Summit is looking for a few people who want to be in a short YouTube video for Give Local Missoula 2016.

Our staff would film you working, playing or being yourself in our community while saying a quick tagline about what you do!

If you want to show our community what you’re about, send an email to justice@summitilc.org or call 728-1630 and ask for Justice.

For this video, all filming will take place in Missoula - so if you want to be in the video you have to live in Missoula or be willing to come to town.

Check out some of our past videos here:

www.youtube.com/SummitILC

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**BULLETIN BOARD**

3-bd, 2-ba double-wide manufactured home in Corvallis. Not on foundation. Wheelchair accessible. All appliances included. Asking $125,000. Call Chris at (406) 241-6862.

**Stair lift to give away. Call Ralph at 295-5668.**

**Stair Lift**, railing, chair, electrical, complete set. $500 obo. Call Bev at 239-3467.

**Garaventa Super-Trac Portable Wheelchair Lift for stairs.** Great for accessibility where lifts or ramps cannot be installed. Can accommodate all types of wheelchairs. Purchased new for $12,000 and used only a few times. Will sell for $9,000 OBO. Contact Jacob Francom, Troy Public Schools, jfrancom@troyk12.org, (406) 295-4520.

**Acorn Stair lift** for going up to 6 stairs. $750 OBO. Call John at 546-7003.

**Permobil C300 Wheelchair.** Full-featured-power-lift, footrest, backrest, vertical lift, Bluetooth, Omni-control module, enhanced steering, removable tray, E-Z lock (vehicle mount), Roho cushion. $1500 OBO. Call Theresa at 251-6450.


View more classifieds at:

www.summitilc.org/newsletter/classified-ads/

Have something you want to sell or give away or are you looking for a hard-to-find piece of equipment?

To get listed contact Justice Ender at (406) 728-1630 or email justice@summitilc.org.

Or, list and find items on the MonTECH exchange:

http://montech.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/mtdb/
(In)AbilityOne

We don’t been had.

The AbilityOne program is supposed to be the largest federal job placement program for people with disabilities.

This multi-billion dollar program is instead being found to be harming people with disabilities. Its actions actually take jobs away from those people, place others in sheltered workshops, and provide cozy deals for contractors and others through a series of backroom deals that are incredibly lucrative for executives of the agencies contracted by AbilityOne. Federal and media investigators are also finding that Source America, tasked by AbilityOne to distribute contracts, often did so with companies whose members had ties with its own board of directors.

AbilityOne exists because the vast majority of people with disabilities are unemployed, or are working far below their capacity due to a variety of factors. Employment programs like AbilityOne were created to help bridge the gap between people with disabilities and their nondisabled counterparts.

Advocates, and many others, are furious that AbilityOne’s lack of checking on Source America, or even direct involvement in their actions, caused such an outcome. Not only have their actions been a waste of taxpayer money, but they actually hurt the people they were being paid to help.

Now, advocates are demanding action. A petition at ReformAbilityOne.org to change AbilityOne has started and is backed by many disability-rights organizations including TASH and the National Council on Independent Living.

Through this petition and other methods, these organizations hope to bring about major changes to AbilityOne including:

1. Ensure Transparency and Accountability
2. End Workplace Segregation
3. Pay Fair Wages
4. Provide Real Job Training
5. Award Contracts to People with Disabilities

Now, these shouldn’t be too much to ask for, as the majority of the demands were the original point of the program.

If these objectives can’t be done, maybe it’s time we be done with AbilityOne.

Follow the story:

www.facebook.com/rootedinrights/
Recently, several Summit staff and board members traveled to Virginia to attend the National Conference on Rural Independent Living.

One of the attendees, Wesley Schneider, posted several short live blog videos (vlogs) during the trip. We asked Wesley about his adventure.

Here’s what he had to say.

“The best part of my experience at APRIL was meeting everyone involved with independent living and learning more about how amazing the movement is.

The hardest part of the conference was our flight being cancelled on the first day, so we had to miss a lot of the teen activities.

I learned that advocating for rights as a person with a disability is very important to get the help you need whether it be in school, at work, or at home.

Mike Beers, Renae and I all did some improv with the youth from around the country to show what we offer at BASE in Missoula.

I would go to APRIL again. It was a great experience as an employee at an independent living center and I’ve learned what other ILC’s are doing around the United States!”

The APRIL conference included activities ranging from legislative updates on transportation and independent living guidelines to frank discussions on relationships and sexuality for people with disabilities.

Attendees at the APRIL conference learned skills through activities including improvisational comedy, self-and-systems advocacy training, and discussions about partnerships and collaborations with organizations outside of independent living like the youth leadership forums.

Of the 300 attendees, more than 70 were youth.

APRIL exemplifies some of the best aspects of the rural community as advocates support each other toward common goals from systems advocacy to individual growth.

To learn more about APRIL, contact Mary Olson at mary.olson@mso.umt.edu, (406) 243-5817 or visit www.april-rural.org
This publication is available in alternative format on request. Please call 1 (800) 398-9002.

IMPORTANT!

Included in the hardcopy version of this newsletter is a pre-paid postcard addressed to Summit Independent Living.

If you wish to continue receiving our newsletter, you must complete and return this card!

If, for whatever reason, you are unable to send back the card, you may call Summit, 1 (800) 398-9002, or email missoula@summitilc.org, and request to receive the newsletter.

We strongly encourage people to subscribe to the electronic copy when possible, as more information about upcoming events is able to be sent electronically throughout the year.

If you are already an electronic subscriber, you need do nothing. Thank you.

Remember, you can always sign up for the electronic newsletter by contacting: missoula@summitilc.org