Know someone who needs health insurance?
By Roberta Riley

Chances are we all know dozens of friends, neighbors, and family members who lack health insurance. Maybe it’s the nicest person you know — the neighbor you trust with your extra house key, the person who cuts your hair, or the farmer who sells delicious berries at your local market. Maybe it’s your friend, who cares for her family while juggling a full load of other responsibilities. Maybe it’s your son, who works hard, but can’t see a doctor for fear the bills will bankrupt him.

Or maybe you are one of the million plus Washington residents who lack health insurance — that’s 1 in 7 Washingtonians. Maybe you are stuck in the middle: too young for Medicare, but retired or in a job that doesn’t offer health benefits.

The good news: Starting in October, the uninsured can apply for new, affordable coverage options. People who currently have insurance can also explore the new options, but may not always be eligible.

The bad news: Few Washingtonians know about the good news. Years of attacks against the Affordable Care Act (sometimes called “Obamacare”), left many people with the mistaken impression that health reform failed — but the truth is the best parts of the new law are just about to take effect.

Who do you know who needs health insurance?

This fall is the time to reach out and encourage your friends, neighbors, and

Continued on Page 3

Union Iron Worker Evicted

By Kraig Schwartz

Every month over 250 Seattle families have their foreclosed homes sold at auction. Even when families begin to financially recover and are willing and able to pay to stay in their homes, the banks refuse to negotiate and throw people into the streets. Jeremy Griffin, Ironworker and member of Local 86, has been thrown into the streets. Instead of submitting to the will of the banks, however, he is fighting back, and doing so with SAFE (Standing Against Foreclosure & Eviction).

Mr. Griffin became unemployed when the economy crashed in 2008. Soon he fell behind in his mortgage payments. In 2012 he resumed working, and tried to negotiate with Wells Fargo in order to stay in his home, but the bank refused and sold his home of eight years. Jeremy explains, “I’ve offered Wells Fargo six months of payments in advance,” said Mr. Griffin, “but they’d rather evict me and blight my neighborhood with another empty home. Why won’t they take my money?”

In late May, SAFE organized an eviction blockade in front of Jeremy’s South Park Home, where for a week SAFE activists stood guard 24/7 to prevent an eviction. The Sheriff’s office appeared to be sympathetic, and a scheduled hearing regarding his case was postponed for one month. But, when the hearing resumed on June 25th Jeremy lost, even though the judge was sympathetic with his case. “At my eviction hearing the only reason the bank’s attorney gave for why they won’t negotiate with me is they ‘have no legal obligation to do so.’ That may be a legally sufficient reason,” Jeremy said, “but it’s morally wrong. Basically, they refuse to negotiate with me and accept my money without having the decency to give me a reasonable explanation as to why.”

The Sheriff’s eviction team posted notice of his eviction. When the Sheriff’s eviction team appeared that day, 50 members of SAFE occupied Mr. Griffin’s front yard and nonviolently blockaded the entrance to his home. A dozen sheriff deputies confronted the occupiers; four SAFE members were arrested, and the eviction proceeded. Two weeks later Jeremy reoccupied his house only to be evicted again. “I’m embroiled in a civil land dispute with Wells Fargo, which has a well-documented
Restrictions on Health Care at Religious Affiliated Medical Facilities

By Susan Levy, PSARA Outreach Vice President

Patients may be at risk of being denied services at some religiously affiliated medical facilities in Washington. This will become increasingly commonplace as more secular hospitals merge (or affiliate) with religiously affiliated ones and come under the control of religiously affiliated health care corporations.

PSARA is working with the ACLU of Washington to ensure that no patient is refused access to lawful health care because of the religious doctrines of the institutions running hospitals, clinics, or other medical facilities. Health care facilities open to the general public should not refuse to provide reproductive health care and end-of-life care services; nor should they refuse to serve the full medical needs of LGBT people. Religious ideology should not dictate which health care services a patient may choose.

More and more Washington State hospitals have entered or are entering into relationships with religiously affiliated hospitals. Currently, about 40% of the hospital beds are in religiously affiliated hospitals.

**Why does it matter whether a hospital is religiously affiliated?** A hospital’s religious affiliation may impact access to health care services. For example, Catholic-affiliated hospitals follow the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, which restrict access to reproductive and end-of-life health services, counseling, and referrals.

All Washington State residents should be able to make their end of life and reproductive health care decisions and be treated without discrimination.

Can you help? Do you know of any examples where patients have been denied services or discriminated against in religious affiliated health care facilities? If so, please e-mail me at outreachVP@psara.org. Or, go to the ACLU-WA website: https://www.aclu.org/secure/patient-and-provider-web-intake.
family members to explore their new options.

Here are the key things every Washingtonian needs to know:
• If you have Medicare, your coverage will only change for the better. Though you won't be eligible for the new coverage options, Medicare will still be there for you—with some positive changes, like more affordable prescription drugs in the “doughnut hole” and free annual exams.
• You will be able to find the plan that fits your budget. Premium rates in Washington are actually expected to decrease with the new coverage options. Plus, you might be able to get financial help to pay for insurance, depending on how much money you make. Even a family of four making as much as $94,200 could qualify for help with costs.
• The insurance plan you choose will be there to cover the care you need. All insurance plans will have to cover the basic care you need, including doctor visits, hospital stays, emergency room visits, mental health care, and prescription drugs. Plans will have to cover many preventive services, like mammograms and annual women's exams, with no copay from you.
• You will be able to get help choosing a plan. You can get help online, over the phone and in person to find the plan that is best for you and find out whether you can get financial help to pay for it.
• Don’t delay! Open enrollment starts October 1st. For some options, open enrollment ends March 31st.

How You Can Apply:
• Starting in October, you can apply for the new coverage options through the Healthplanfinder, a state-approved website and call center that will help you understand and compare your new options.
• You can get in-person help from an organization in your community who is trained to help you.
• You can get help in your language or disability accommodations for free.

When You Can Apply:
• September 3, 2013 – Call Center Opens
  Call 1-855-WAFINDER (855-923-4633) if you have questions about your new coverage options (but you can’t start applying until October).
• October 1, 2013 – First Day to Apply
  You can complete an application online at www.healthplanfinder.org or by calling the call center. You can also use the website and call center to find an in-person assister in your community, who can walk you through your new options.
• March 31, 2013 – Last Day to Apply for some options (until next year). Other options will still accept enrollment after this.

Robert Riley is Communications Consultant at Northwest Health Law Advocates and a Member of PSARA.
Roberta Riley has a very informative piece in this newsletter on the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). October 1 is the kick off to the January 1, 2014 implementation of some of the most important pieces of the act. A significant number of people will gain health care coverage as a result of the passage of the ACA and PSARA will do all that we can to help make it work. (Obviously, many things are out of our control like the delay of the employer mandate and the decision by the Washington Office of the Insurance Commissioner to exclude certain Medicaid networks as options within the WA State Exchange. This decision will make continuity of coverage more difficult for low income residents whose incomes fluctuate.)

The complexity of the ACA and the continuation of predatory private insurers under the provisions of the act are precisely why PSARA remains committed to advocating for a universal coverage, single payer system. It is a basic human right that everyone have health care coverage. While we will try to assist with getting coverage to as many people as possible under the ACA, we continue the struggle for a genuine universal coverage system.

One of the provisions of the ACA provides that, beginning in 2017, states can apply for waivers to create a universal health care, single payer system. Vermont is ready to go! Winning this battle in Washington is a huge political lift but we are committed to working with a coalition of organizations to prepare the ground work for an all out effort in Washington.

Western Washington Physicians for a National Health Program are the convenors of a new coalition which will set a course to build momentum for Washington to apply for waivers in 2017. Additionally, PSARA will join with other organizations to force onto the national stage expansion of Medicare. We want to make sure that expanding Medicare becomes part of the debate as the shortcomings of the ACA become apparent.

The real solutions for strengthening Medicare and assuring its solvency can be found in some of the following proposals:
- Require the Secretary of Health & Human Services to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies over the cost of prescription drugs for Medicare recipients saving billions of dollars. The Medicare prescription drug law passed in 2003 prohibited the Secretary from negotiating.
- Stop paying private Medicare plans more than traditional Medicare.
- Include a drug benefit in traditional Medicare giving beneficiaries a choice they do not now have. This would encourage people to stay in traditional Medicare, saving money for taxpayers. The appeal of a number of the Medicare Plus plans is they do offer a prescription drug benefit.
- My favorite is lowering the age of eligibility for Medicare. This would bring a healthier cohort into Medicare and actually allow people who are holding on to their jobs only for health care coverage to exit the work force and create opportunities for younger people.
- There will be opportunities for PSARA members who are interested to participate in these efforts.

Survey on Social Security

The National Academy of Social Insurance (NASI), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization made up of the nation’s leading experts on social insurance conducted a multigenerational study. They want to better understand American’s perspectives on Social Security and their preferences regarding options to strengthen the program for the future. Two thousand Americans, aged 21 and older, were involved in the research. Here are the key findings:
- Americans do not mind paying for Social Security because they value it for themselves (80%), for their families (78%) and for the security and stability it provides to millions of retired Americans, disabled individuals, children and widowed spouses of deceased workers (84%).
- 84% believe current Social Security benefits do not provide enough income for retirees, and 75% believe we should consider raising future Social Security benefits in order to provide a more secure retirement for working Americans.
- 82% agree it is critical to preserve Social Security for future generations even if it means increasing Social Security taxes and 87% want to preserve Social Security for future generations even if it means increasing taxes paid by wealthier Americans.
- 71% would prefer a package of changes that increases Social Security revenues, pays for benefit improvements and eliminates more than 100% of the projected financial gap. These changes include: eliminating the cap over 10 years; raising the Social security tax rate from 6.2% to 7.2% for workers and employers over 20 years; raising Social Security’s basic minimum benefit; increasing the Social Security COLA to more accurately reflect the level of inflation experienced by seniors.

This package of changes is preferred over the status quo by 76% of people born before 1946; by 71% of baby boomers born between 1946 to 1964; 73% of Generation X born between 1965 and 1979; and by 67% of Generation Y born in 1980 and after.

PSARA members are clearly not alone! We have a solid majority on our side. The elected officials who continue to propose cuts and fail to heed this majority do so at their own peril!
What SSA Service Will Look Like in Fiscal Year 2014

By Steve Kofahl

Acting Commissioner Carolyn Colvin and Chief Strategic Officer Ruby Burrell recently warned the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) that we will continue to be constrained by tight budgets when the new fiscal year begins on October 1, 2013. There are many different scenarios, and things are sure to change after Congress returns from the August recess, but this is what the landscape looks like right now based on what we have learned from AFGE meetings with Agency leaders, with our coalition partners like Social Security Works, and with Congressional representatives and staff.

A government shutdown is possible if Congress fails to authorize spending after September 30, or fails to raise the debt ceiling later in the Fall, but we don’t believe that is likely to happen.

The Social Security Administration’s (SSA) operating budget would be reduced by 18%-22% if the House Appropriations Committee adopts the House Labor-HHS-Education Bill (which includes administrative funding for SSA) and follows the guidelines set forth in the House-passed Budget, if the Senate then agrees, and if the President then signs it into law. We also believe that it is an unlikely scenario, but if it happens SSA would face not just massive furloughs, but almost certainly significant Reductions-In-Force (layoffs). The administrative budget has been cut nearly 7% since Fiscal Year 2010, and that resulted in a virtual hiring freeze, sharply reduced office hours, dozens of office closures, and elimination of contact stations where employees served those in remote areas who could not visit an office. The devastation that would result from an 18%-22% cut is almost unimaginable.

The Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Committee Bill would provide a 4.7% increase above this year’s levels if passed by the Senate and the House, and signed by the President. AFGE is supporting this alternative. Unfortunately, in our meetings with Ms. Colvin, she has consistently talked about prospects for an additional cut of 8%-22% from current funding levels, not the possibility of an increase, which leads us to believe that SSA is not fighting hard for this option.

Given the gridlock in Washington, D.C., many people expect that there will be no appropriations for SSA, or a budget passed at all, before the end of the current Fiscal Year, and that we will once again be limping along under a Continuing Resolution (CR). A CR at current levels would be a real cut, because even in a period of low inflation, many items become more costly as time goes on. A CR at the sequestration levels established in the Budget Control Act of 2011 would represent a cut of about 8 - 10% for SSA, and furloughs would be possible.

AFGE has repeatedly made a number of recommendations to SSA that would save significant amounts of money without gutting service, but so far they have been rejected out of hand. We asked SSA to close Area Director Offices, consolidate Regional Offices, reduce the spending on contracts that has been increasing rapidly in recent years, and sponsor legislation that would take the 2/3 of our administrative funding that comes from Social Security and Medicare Trust Funds “off budget” and out from under caps on discretionary spending. We also are pressing for a responsible re-examination of Internet self-service, in place of the reckless approach that has led to substantial overpayments and underpayments, and widespread fraud and theft of benefits.

AFGE will continue to oppose the closure of field offices, and to promote an approach to service delivery that keeps our employees involved in providing the assistance that our clients need, deserve, and in most cases have paid for throughout their working lives.

Steve Kofahl is President of AFGE 3937 and a member of PSARA’s Executive Board.
We Must Not Accept This Economic 'New Normal'

By Sen. Bernie Sanders, Reader Supported News

The front pages of American newspapers are filled with stories about how the US economy is recovering. There is some truth to that. Since President George W Bush left office in 2009, significant progress has been made in moving our economy out of the abyss of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. But in the midst of this slow recovery, we must not accept a “new normal.” We must not be content with an economic reality in which the middle class of this country continues to disappear, poverty is near an all-time high and the gap between the very rich and everyone else grows wider and wider.

The good news is that housing prices are beginning to rise, providing some additional wealth for most home owners. The bad news is that since January, all of the new wealth generated in this country went to the top 7% of American households, while the bottom 93% saw a net reduction in their wealth. Further, the US has more wealth inequality than any major country on earth with the top 1% now owning 38% of the financial wealth, while the bottom 60% owns just 2.3% of the wealth.

The good news is that the stock market has fully recovered from its collapse in 2008 and is now at an all time high. The bad news is that the top one percent of Americans earn more income than the bottom 50%, and 100% of the new income generated in this country from 2009-2011 went to the top 1%. During that period the bottom 99% of Americans lost ground economically.

The good news is that, since 2008, the deficit has been cut by more than half. In 2008 it was $1.4 trillion, this year it will be about $642 billion. The bad news is that many working class families can no longer afford the outrageously high cost of college, and the average American student leaves school about $25,000 in debt, with graduate students running debts far higher.

The good news is that if you are a CEO of a large corporation, you are now making 350 times more than your average employee. The bad news is that unemployment benefits have been cut, making it harder for the long-term unemployed to live in dignity.

The American people get the economic realities. According to a Gallup poll, nearly six out of 10 believe that money and wealth should be more evenly distributed among a larger percentage of the people in the US, while only a third of Americans think the current distribution is fair. A record-breaking 52% of the American people believe that the federal “government should redistribute wealth by heavy taxes on the rich”.

The United States Congress and the president must begin listening to the American people. While there clearly has been some improvement in the economy over the last five years, much more needs to be done. We need a major jobs program which puts millions back to work rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure. We need to tackle the planetary crisis of global warming by creating jobs transforming our energy system away from fossil fuels and into energy efficiency and sustainable energy.

We need to end the scandal of one of four corporations paying nothing in federal taxes while we balance the budget on the backs of the elderly, the children, the sick and the poor.

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Fair elections on the November ballot

By Mike Andrew

On November 5, Seattle voters will have the opportunity to approve fair elections free of the influence of big money.

Seattle Proposition 1 would create a system of publically financed City Council elections. Proposition 1 is a responsible, common sense reform that restores Seattle's tradition of fair election laws—now, when we need it most.

Here's how it would work:
• Candidates who raise 600 individual contributions of at least $10 can opt into the program.
• Contributions up to $50 to qualifying candidates are matched 6 public dollars for every individual dollar, up to $210,000.
• Participating candidates may only spend $140,000 in the primary and $245,000 overall, except when an opponent spends more.
• Approval authorizes six years of additional property taxes, with $2,000,000 (less than two cents per $1000 of assessed value) collected in 2014.

"Back when Seattle had public campaigns we had a more diverse and representative city council," says Alice Woldt, executive director at Washington Public Campaigns, and PSARA member, “and races that were more fair and provided equal opportunity for all. I'm confident we have a proposal in place to increase the number of female and minority candidates running for City Council and one that will strengthen our democracy.”

Under the existing system, candidates spend a lot of time raising a lot of money from relatively few people and businesses. In 2011, the average contribution was $224 and 68% of the contributions were greater than $100.

The cost of running for office discourages good people with good ideas from running. In 2011, winning candidates for Seattle City Council raised an average of $275,000 – a $100,000 increase from 2009.

With public financing, candidates will have time for regular voters because they aren't chasing big contributions, and elected officials work for ALL the people, not just their biggest contributors.

Public financing also makes elected office more accessible to everyone, allowing a greater diversity of people with a wider range of ideas to run for office and win.

New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and many other cities have robust public financing systems. Maine, Arizona, and Connecticut have all passed systems of public financing for legislators and state officeholders. North Carolina and New Mexico use public financing for judicial elections.

Participation in the Maine system reached a high of 87% in the 2006 legislative election. Voter participation has increased in Arizona, especially among minority communities. Many studies document how public financing increases minority participation in the electoral system.

Seattle Proposition 1 is endorsed by PSARA, both candidates for Mayor of Seattle – incumbent Mike McGinn and Sen. Ed Murray – and all current members of the City Council, except Sally Bagshaw.

It's also backed by the Martin Luther King County Labor Council, SEIU Washington State Council, and a number of individual unions and community organizations.

For more information on Seattle Proposition 1, readers can visit www.fairelectionsseattle.com

The July 19 Seattle Mayoral Forum jointly sponsored by the Central Area Senior Center and PSARA featured 5 of the 9 candidates running for Seattle Mayor: (from left) moderator King County Council Chair Larry Gossett, Mike McGinn, Kate Martin, Peter Steinbrueck, Ed Murray, Bruce Harrell

The lunchtime Forum, attended mostly by seniors from CASC and PSARA, provoked spirited discussion of four topics selected by CASC and PSARA representatives: Safe, efficient (and affordable) transportation system; Low income housing in Seattle; Responsive and responsible policing; and Human Services.

CASC director Cynthia Andrews, PSARA president Robby Stern and the candidates were impressed by the great turnout for the event. Attendees continued their conversations with the candidates after the program was over.

In the August 6 election, State Senator Ed Murray and Mayor Mike McGinn were the top two finishers and are the candidates in the General Election.

PSARA and the Greenwood Community Senior Center plan to co-sponsor a town hall type forum with the two candidates in early October. Stay tuned for more information.

-- Bob Shimubukuro
Social Security approves benefits for same-sex spouses

By Mike Andrew

The Social Security Administration has announced new rules that will entitle some – but not all – same-sex spouses to the same benefits available to opposite sex spouses.

An August 9 statement from Acting Social Security Commissioner Carolyn W. Colvin said that the new guidelines came as a result of the US Supreme Court decision in USA v. Windsor, striking down Section 3 of DOMA (the Defense of Marriage Act).

“I am pleased to announce that Social Security is now processing some retirement spouse claims for same-sex couples and paying benefits where they are due,” Colvin’s statement said.

“The recent Supreme Court decision on Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act, made just over a month ago, helps to ensure that all Americans are treated fairly and equally, with the dignity and respect they deserve…

“In the coming weeks and months, we will develop and implement additional policy and processing instructions. We appreciate the public’s patience as we work through the legal issues to ensure that our policy is legally sound and clear. I encourage individuals who believe they may be eligible for Social Security benefits to apply now, to protect against the loss of any potential benefits. We will process claims as soon as additional instructions become finalized.”

As of August 9, a new section for “Windsor Same-Sex Marriage Claims” — named after the Supreme Court case — was added to the Social Security Administration’s Program Operations Manual System (POMS), the guidebook used by Social Security employees to process claims for Social Security benefits.

On retirement, married spouses are allowed to claim Social Security benefits based on their own income, or 50% of their spouse’s benefit, whichever is more.

After reaching full retirement age, a spouse may choose to receive only their spouse’s benefit, and delay receiving their own retirement benefits until a later date, allowing them to receive a higher benefit later based on the effect of delayed retirement credits.

A spouse may also collect survivor benefits from their deceased partner’s record beginning as early as age 60, or as early as age 50 in the case of disability.

However – and this is a big however – the Social Security Administration will limit payment of claims for same-sex married couples only to those couples who were legally married in a state that allows same-sex marriage and are “domiciled,” or live, in a state that recognizes same-sex marriages.

For example, a couple married in New York and domiciled in Washington get benefits, because both states allow same-sex marriages. A couple married in New York but domiciled in Florida, which does not recognize same-sex marriage, do not get spousal benefits.

Claims from legally married same-sex couples currently living in a state that does not recognize their marriages will be put on hold for the time being, the Social Security Administration said.

Everyone who thinks they may have a claim should file for benefits as soon as possible, even if their claim is put on hold.

Thirteen states and the District of Columbia afford equal marriage rights to gay and lesbian couples.

If SSA finds that benefits are, in fact, payable, they will pay benefits retroactively from the date the claim is filed, so it’s an advantage to have as early a date as possible on the application.

Contact the Social Security Administration right away, at 1-800-772-1213, if you believe that you may be eligible for benefits. You can also visit your local Social Security Office between 9 a.m. and noon on any Wednesday, or from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on one of the other four weekdays, except for Federal holidays.
The art lesson, a tale from my youth

By Mike Andrew

Between 1967 and 1970 I attended George Washington High School in San Francisco. It was the same high school my father went to in the 30s, but in his day it was brand new – one of hundreds of WPA projects that not only put people to work, but improved their lives and communities.

Like many other WPA projects, it was decorated with murals – FDR’s administration thought it was important to hire artists as well as masons, plumbers, and carpenters. And since the school was named for George Washington, the murals depicted scenes from his life.

Of course, there were the scenes you’d expect. Sturdy colonial militia faced off against the British redcoats, and Washington looked stately at his inauguration.

But the artist also included panels depicting Washington supervising his slaves as they picked and baled cotton. For more than three decades, no one complained about these scenes, but in 1968 the Black Student Union demanded that they be removed. The School Board insisted that the mural should be preserved – it was “art” after all, and all of them were white.

After being put off for several months, the BSU got fed up and shut down the school.

In the end, the School Board settled on a compromise – they would cover the offensive scenes till new murals could be painted depicting the contributions of people of color to American society. They hadn’t even started by the time I graduated, and they were only half-way done by the time my brother graduated five years later, but eventually they did finish, and the murals are still there to this day.

I was 16 when the BSU shut down the school. It was the first time I’d ever seen people my own age take collective action against authority. I was impressed.

The next year we shut the school down again to protest the war in Vietnam.

An enterprising reporter working for one of the local newspapers discovered that the artist who did the mural in the 30s was Victor Arnautoff, a Russian emigre who’d studied under communist muralist Diego Rivera in Mexico. As it turned out, Arnautoff painted the slave-scenes deliberately to show the underlying contradictions of the American Revolution.

The thing that always fascinated me about this story is that it took a foreign-born artist, not someone who grew up in Jim Crow era America, to notice and comment on the ugly side of US history.

That alone is a convincing argument for opening our borders to immigrants.
Political Corruption and the "Free Trade" Racket

By Dean Baker, Co-Director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research.
(Reprinted from Al Jazeera English edition. Dean Baker has granted PSARA permission to reprint any of his articles.)

In polite circles in the United States, support for free trade is a bit like proper bathing habits. It is taken for granted. Only the hopelessly crude and unwashed would not support free trade.

There is some ground for this attitude. Certainly the United States has benefited enormously by being able to buy a wide range of items at lower cost from other countries. However this doesn’t mean that most people in the country have always benefited from every opening to greater trade.

And it certainly doesn’t mean that the country will benefit from everything that those in power label as “free trade.” That is the story we are seeing now as the Obama administration is pursuing two major “free trade” agreements that in fact have very little to do with free trade and are likely to hurt those without the money and power to be part of the game.

The deals in questions, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the U.S.–European Union “Free Trade” Agreement are both being pushed as major openings to trade that will increase growth and create jobs. In fact, eliminating trade restrictions is a relatively small part of both agreements, since most tariffs and quotas have already been sharply reduced or eliminated.

Rather, these deals are about securing regulatory gains for major corporate interests. In some cases, such as increased patent and copyright protection, these deals are 180 degrees at odds with free trade. They are about increasing protectionist barriers.

All the arguments that trade economists make against tariffs and quotas apply to patent and copyright protection. The main difference is the order of magnitude. Tariffs and quotas might raise the price of various items by 20 or 30 percent. By contrast, patent and copyright protection is likely to raise the price of protected items 2,000 percent or even 20,000 percent above the free market price. Drugs that would sell for a few dollars per prescription in a free market would sell for hundreds or even thousands of dollars when the government gives a drug company a patent monopoly.

In the case of drug patents, the costs go beyond just dollars and cents. Higher drug prices will have a direct impact on the public’s health, especially in some of the poorer countries that might end up being parties to these agreements.

There are also a wide variety of regulatory issues that are being pursued through these agreements, in large part because there would be difficulty getting them accepted through the normal political process. For example, the sort of government mandated Internet policing that was part of the shipwrecked Stop Online Piracy Act is likely to reappear in one or both agreements.

It is also likely that rules that limit the power of governments to restrict fracking could be in the agreements. Such rules could prohibit not only the federal government, but also state or county governments, from imposing restrictions designed to protect the public’s health.

These are the sorts of restrictions that may appear in the TPP and U.S.-EU Free Trade Agreement. The reason for using tentative language is that none of the specifics of the deal have yet been made public. The Obama administration is negotiating these pacts in secret. It has made almost nothing about the negotiating process public and has shared none of the proposed text with the relevant committees in Congress. (Public Citizen posted information on the TPP based on leaked documents.)

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PSARA members at the July 19 Trayon Martin rally say "The whole damn system is guilty" of killing Trayvon.
(Photos: Garet Munger)
UFCW Negotiation Update; or why I find PSARA so intriguing, part II

By Bob Shimubukuro

UCFW 21 reports that the Companies (Safeway, Fred Meyer, QFC, Albertsons) are not willing to negotiate seriously, sticking by their previous offers: drop family health coverage for those working less than 30 hours/week, and personal health coverage for those working less than 20 hours/week.

Bob’s translation of Company offer: “Despite the fact that we’re making a lot of money, we need to cut back on what we give to the workers.”

The union is having more informational picketing at many local stores August 28, and they are also gearing up for more pressure, contacting supporting community organizations and individuals about the possibility of sponsorship for union action that might bring the Companies into a little more serious bargaining sessions.

As we mentioned in earlier issues of the Advocate, health care and insurance are very big issues for UFCW rank and file, and they don’t want to see any backsliding on that. This is a huge issue for labor right now, not only in the grocery, retail business, but in the hospital/medical service industry, too. In fact, all employers are looking for ways to get hard earned employee benefits off the table. Some employers don’t even want a living wage, let alone a benefits package, on the table, so we know it’s not just a union issue. All workers should be alarmed.

When we hear that companies like UPS, and institutions like our State of Washington are weighing consequences of dumping family health coverage as part of the compensation package we have to realize that UFCW and SEIU (fighting for a living wage for airport workers) are not going to be isolated incidents. In case you haven’t noticed, there’s a real dogfight that affects all of us 99 per centers.

We need to have a strong response to this assault. We need to support labor, we need to support communities, we need to protect our air, water and land. And we need to share responsibility.

If there’s one thing we can all agree on, it’s that there is too much inequity. PSARA is one organization that is battling on all fronts to bring a more level playing field for all. We need to have a decent place to live, learn, eat, sleep, work, play, and die. Sounds simple, doesn’t it? Well, it is. Subscribe, Renew or Donate.

Bob Shimubukuro is a member of PSARA’s Executive Board and Associate Editor of the Retiree Advocate.

To subscribe or renew visit http://psara.org/become-a-member-ofpsara
Meetings and Events

PSARA Environmental Committee: Thursday, Sept 12th, 2:00 - 3:30 PM., Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First AV, Room 226, Seattle. All PSARA members welcome. Committee is discussing the development of a brochure on jobs and the environment, and other activities.

PSARA Executive Board Meeting: 1p.m. – 3p.m., Thursday, Sept. 19, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Avenue S., Seattle. All PSARA members are welcome.

Green Lake Discussion Group: 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 26, Green Lake Library, 7354 East Green Lake Drive N., Seattle. PSARA Outreach Committee led discussion group. Topic TBD.

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 12:30 – 2 p.m., Wednesday, Oct 2, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First AV, Seattle. All members welcome as we prepare for legislative session

Remembering the March on Washington

"For the first time in one hundred years this nation is being awakened to the fact that segregation is evil and that it must be destroyed in all forms. Your presence today proves that you have been aroused to the point of action."

"We are now involved in a serious revolution. This nation is still a place of cheap political leaders who build their careers on immoral compromises and ally themselves with open forms of political, economic and social exploitation. What political leader here can stand up and say, "My party is the party of principles?" The party of Kennedy is also the party of Eastland. The party of Javits is also the party of Goldwater. Where is our party?"

"The revolution is at hand, and we must free ourselves of the chains of political and economic slavery. The nonviolent revolution is saying, "We will not wait for the courts to act, for we have been waiting for hundreds of years. We will not wait for the President, the Justice Department, nor Congress, but we will take matters into our own hands and create a source of power, outside of any national structure, that could and would assure us a victory."

"We all recognize the fact that if any radical social, political and economic changes are to take place in our society, the people, the masses, must bring them about. In the struggle, we must seek more than civil rights; we must work for the community of love, peace and true brotherhood. Our minds, souls and hearts cannot rest until freedom and justice exist for all people."