

The Retiree **ADVOCATE**

a Publication of

PUGET SOUND ALLIANCE FOR RETIRED AMERICANS

Vol XXVIII, No 2



February 2012

To sustain Planet Earth

By Will Parry

Charged with saving a planet that's heating at a calamitous rate, delegates from 194 nations, meeting under UN auspices in Durban, South Africa, have adopted a "Durban Mandate" as the next step in climate negotiations that have been conducted at intervals since the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1992.

The Durban meeting leaves vital questions unanswered: Will decisive action be taken, especially by the U.S. and other major polluters? And will it be taken soon enough to save the Earth?

The delegates in Durban, after contentious negotiating, forged commitments to work toward a new climate treaty by 2015, which would project specific emission cuts in 2020.

Governments now head into grueling years of horse-trading over how far and how fast each country should cut its carbon. China and the U.S. bear the heaviest responsibility, as the two worst polluting countries. Amy Goodman sharply criticized "U.S. intransigence, its unwillingness to get off its fossil fuel addiction."

Keith Allott, climate change authority with the World Wildlife Federation in the United Kingdom, said that "governments have salvaged a path

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Feb. 23 is Senior Lobby Day

By Mary Anderson

In the last three years our state budget has been slashed by \$10 billion, costing thousands of jobs, eliminating health care coverage for families and further damaging our educational system. Adult Day Health programs were eliminated, eviscerating seniors' access to caregivers and food programs, often driving seniors into nursing homes. The all-cuts budget last session was a disaster and may have cost lives. An all cuts budget this session *will* cost lives.

The Puget Sound Alliance for Retired Americans expects legislators to protect our communities by investing in jobs and by funding education, health care and other public necessities.

On February 23, Senior Lobby Day, PSARA will join labor and community allies in promoting this agenda.

FIRST, support increased revenues and protect and create jobs by:

- Substantially increasing revenue and utilizing revenue bonding to protect critical services and jobs in education, health care and public safety.
- Creating 30,000 direct jobs, and more indirectly, by building and repairing public buildings, bridges, state parks, water and irrigation systems, and college campuses by

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MORE THAN 300 PEOPLE, including many residents of Seattle's International District, rallied to protest a bureaucratic Social Security decision to close its most heavily used Seattle offices and consolidate the offices in the Jackson Federal Building.

For up-to-date

information about

PSARA and

issues important to all of us,

go to the PSARA web site:

www.psara.org

Read the Advocate on line,

post your comments

on our blog,

engage in discussions

with other PSARA members or

visit PSARA on Facebook.

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If necessary, leave a message and your

phone number. We'll call you back.

The Retiree ADVOCATE

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Attend the Care Congress

By Sterling Harders

Caregivers provide an invaluable service. They make it possible for those they care for to live their lives in their own homes, with dignity and respect. Yet we as a society don't give these caregivers the dignity and respect they deserve.



Sterling Harders Because long-term care is inadequately funded, few caregivers earn a living wage and many live in poverty.

As the baby boomers age, the gap between the number of people who need in-home care services and the number of caregivers providing those services grows ever wider. We will soon face a crisis as the number of people needing care dwarfs the number of caregivers providing it.

Compounding this developing crisis is the fact that federal workforce training requirements have not been revised in two decades. In most states, the existing training and certification programs are inadequate. Because there are no career ladders or pathways to reward those who choose to stay in the field, caregiving is not seen as a long-term quality job..

The Caring Across Generations Campaign is a national initiative with the goal of addressing these issues.

Join us for the launch of the *Caring Across Generations Campaign* here in Seattle at the Care Congress on Saturday, February 11 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Greenwood Senior Center at 525 North 85th Street in Seattle. Lunch will be served.

The priorities of the Caring Across Generations Campaign are:

- Create new caregiving jobs to address the growing need for long-term care services
- Transform the quality of caregiving jobs by ensuring fair wages and access to health insurance, and by respecting the right of caregivers to join unions
- Provide training, certification programs and career ladders for caregivers
- Create a path to legalization for workers so that immigration status is not a barrier to providing long-term care
- Provide better support for both individuals and families by implementing policies that ensure financial support as well as high quality and dignified care.

We as a society have a responsibility to make sure that our elderly population and those with disabilities are well cared for, and that those doing the caring are treated with the respect they deserve.

Join us at the Care Congress in Seattle on Saturday, February 11!

(Sterling Harders is Organizing Director and Vice President of SEIU Healthcare 775 NW and a member of PSARA.)

Listen to my Dad, folks!

Do you know my father? If you know him, you're lucky. He's a great guy; warm-hearted, generous, smart, hilarious. And he LOVES PSARA.

The funny thing about that is, my father can be very free with his critical comments. How was the Seattle Art Museum yesterday? I might ask. "Horrible! They call that art?" What about the movie we just went to? "Awful. The guy who wrote that must be the village idiot!"

You see what I mean? But here's what he says about the PSARA newsletter: "Thank you for these articles that tell me what I need to know about national events! Much better than the garbage I read in the AARP newsletter."

My father recognizes how important it is to have a strong, vibrant, growing membership in PSARA. Join him and the rest of my family, including my kids age 27 and 31, in supporting and building PSARA. Sign up or give gift memberships for your friends, your neighbors and your co-workers.

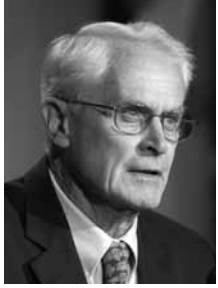
By the way, my father thinks it's great to have people of all ages, including young people, in PSARA. But he asked me to say that the young people need to learn to speak louder and enunciate more clearly!

--- Dina Burstein

'Citizens United' triggers national outrage

By Will Parry

Two years ago, when five U.S. Supreme Court justices issued their now infamous decision in the *Citizens United* case, they could hardly have foreseen the nationwide firestorm of ridicule and outrage their decision would ignite.



Will Parry

The nub of the decision – that soulless corporations have the First Amendment rights of human beings – is so transparently fraudulent as to earn the mockery of satirists and the contempt of the 99%.

Judicial robes do nothing to dignify so crass a betrayal of the Bill of Rights the court is sworn to defend.

For years, money has bought elections in our country. Under-financed candidates, however superior their qualifica-

tions, all too often lose.

But *Citizens United* opens the gate to unprecedented floods of cash from the 1% -- from corporate treasuries and reactionary billionaires – drowning elections in wall-to-wall negative TV ads.

The fragile limitations on political spending embodied in laws enacted over the past century are swept away in *Citizens United*.

The instrument newly created to raise and deliver the bundled bucks is the “super PAC” – the traditional political action committee on steroids. The sole function of the super PAC is to collect money and pump it into elections, most often targeting an opposing candidate for defeat.

Transparency? There isn't any. Under *Citizens United*, the identity of super PAC donors need not be disclosed. And for the most part, it is not.

A mighty 'Movement to Amend' arises

By Rap Lewis

The U.S. Supreme Court's five-member corporatist majority is a fat target, sitting there with its indefensible *Citizens United* decision enabling corporations and billionaires to inundate the election process with unlimited infusions of cash.

The decision has triggered the outrage of millions of Americans and the development of a movement to amend the Constitution “to firmly establish that money is not speech, and that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights.”

The Montana Supreme Court, rejecting the twisted logic of the Roberts-led Supremes, defiantly upheld a century-old state law that bars direct corporate contributions to political parties and candidates.

That decision will probably be appealed on up to the U.S. Supreme Court, where the same justices will take a second crack at the issue.

The justices will be the same, but the political situation will be dramatically different. For one thing, the Occupy movement has driven issues of wealth and income disparity into the public arena.

And there's a mighty “Movement to Amend” being built.

Under the banner of “United for the People,” 72 major organizations have adopted a “Statement of Common Purpose,” declaring that “although we have differences in scope and tactics, all of us are united in understanding that the

No fewer than ten resolutions calling for an amendment have been introduced in Congress. City councils in New York City, Duluth, Boulder and South Miami have passed resolutions in support of such an amendment.

And on January 21, the second anniversary of *Citizens United*, more

On January 21, the second anniversary of *Citizens United*, more than 150 protest actions took place at big banks, corporate headquarters and federal courthouses across the nation.

court's decision in *Citizens United* must be remedied by amending the Constitution to restore the democratic promise of America.”

A separate “Move to Amend” coalition numbers 65 supporting groups, from Code Pink to the Redwood Alliance, from the North Carolina AFL-CIO to the California State Grange.

Many Move to Amend affiliates are themselves coalitions. The Minnesota Alliance of Peacemakers, for example, represents 75 local peace groups.

than 150 protest actions took place at big banks, corporate headquarters and federal courthouses across the nation.

In Seattle, chilled hundreds rallied at Westlake Park, then – led by a Dixieland jazz band – marched to the Federal Building for a second boisterous rally to mark the anniversary of *Citizens United*.

The millions – the 99 percent – are stirring, recognizing that it's all one big struggle for the nation's democratic principles. And that a people's veto of *Citizens United* is at the heart of it.

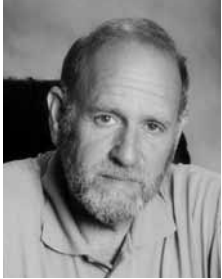
We'll see whether five reactionary judges can withstand the wrath of an aroused 99 percent.

Lessons from the Great Depression

By Robby Stern

Our state legislature is considering what advocates hope will be a \$2 billion jobs stimulus package that involves selling bonds to finance major infrastructure improvements in our state.

This approach fits well with an argument made by Joseph Stiglitz, a Noble prize winning economist, in the December 2011 Vanity Fair.



Robby Stern

Stiglitz wrote that while the “cynical lending” and “risk gambling” banks played a very

destructive role, the fundamental cause of the present hard times has to do with changes in the economy that significantly parallel the causes of the first Great Depression.

According to Stiglitz, “Even when we repair the banking system, we’ll still be in deep trouble because we were already in deep trouble.” The trouble is the “real economy.” It relates to the “kind of jobs we have, the kind we need, and the kind we are losing...”

During the first Great Depression, the banking system did not break down until 1933, a good four years after the Depression began. Stiglitz and his research partner Bruce Greenwald point out that more than 20% of Americans worked in agriculture. Between 1929 and 1932, agricultural workers saw their income decline between 30% and 60% as a result of greater productivity from mechanization.

Jobs and livelihoods were destroyed as output outstripped demand and prices fell sharply. With incomes declining, farmers borrowed heavily to maintain their living standards and production. The steepness of the price declines created a credit crunch with farmers unable to pay their debts. The avaricious banks got swept into the crisis.

As rural incomes fell (remember,

20% of the population worked in agriculture), there was less money to purchase goods produced in factories so workers were laid off, further diminishing demand for both agricultural goods and manufactured goods. Prices declined even more.

The New Deal made efforts to stimulate the economy but the programs were too small. In 1937, FDR gave in to the deficit hawks, significantly cutting back on programs that were already too modest. Meanwhile, state and local governments were forced to lay off workers.

“It was not until government spending soared in preparation for global war that America started emerging from the Depression.” Stiglitz wrote. “It is important to grasp this simple truth: it was government spending -- a Keynesian stimulus, not any correction of monetary policy or any revival of the banking system -- that brought about recovery.”

The economy was restructured from agricultural to manufacturing. Creating jobs in manufacturing moved people out of farming. Food supply and demand began to balance and food prices began to rise.

Stiglitz sees a similar transition in the economy today. As much as we dislike it, we are moving from a manufacturing to a service economy. Manufacturing jobs have declined from a third of the workforce 60 years ago to less than a tenth today. In the last decade the decline has been even faster.

Stiglitz argues that there are two major reasons for the decline: Greater productivity, similar to that experienced by agricultural workers in the 1920s and 30s; and globalization that has sent millions of jobs overseas to low-wage countries. The result is the same as in the 1930s: declining income and jobs. Consumer spending declines. There is a terrible human cost in the lives of millions of adults and children. The bubbles in the housing and lending markets masked this fundamental shift briefly, but the bubbles inevitably burst, so here we are.

How is government responding? By slashing budgets, causing havoc in our educational systems and health care programs. According to Stiglitz, nearly 700,000 state and local government jobs have disappeared in the past four years, again mirroring what happened in the Great Depression. And, as in 1937, deficit hawks are demanding balanced budgets and more cutbacks.

Stiglitz argues that we must embark on a massive investment program as happened “almost by accident 80 years ago -- that will increase our productivity for years to come, and will also increase employment now.” Investments should be directed at “improving the quality of life,” “infrastructure, technology and education.” Taxes on the top 1% should be increased. The federal government must help the states close budget shortfalls.

Finally, Stiglitz argues that we need to fix the financial system and get “banks out of the dangerous business of speculating and back into the boring business of lending.”

The states have limited tools to implement this economic agenda. Kudos to the legislators and advocates who are leading the effort to use the bonding capacity of our state to create a jobs stimulus and at the same time work on our crumbling infrastructure.

The federal government has the real tools to help us transition our economy and reduce the terrible human suffering it is causing.

Why are so many of our elected representatives so irresponsible? Could it be that nearly half the members of Congress are now millionaires? A recent New York Times story reports that the wealth gap between lawmakers and their constituents is growing. Wealthy lawmakers are largely insulated from the economic downturn. As the majority of our people became poorer, our lawmakers have become much richer.

Stiglitz is right. We need a government that’s responsible. A mass movement can make it happen.

Bain Capital: Mitt Romney's dirty little secret

By Mike Andrew

The story of Bain Capital is fascinating, not only because it sheds light on presidential candidate Mitt Romney and his values, but even more because it exemplifies American capitalism in the boom times of the 1990s.

Bain Capital was founded in 1984 by Bain & Company partners Mitt Romney, T. Coleman Andrews III, and Eric Kriss. Under Romney's leadership in the 1980s and 1990s, Bain became a top-performing private-equity fund.

According to an internal estimate done in 2000, the fund had achieved annual returns of an astounding 88% for its institutional investors, including state and corporate pension funds that invest the savings of millions of American workers.

It also made a fortune for Romney, whose net worth reportedly tops \$250 million.

At first, Bain Capital focused on venture capital opportunities, in other words providing financial backing for start-up businesses.

Bain invested \$37 million of capital in its first fund in twenty companies and by 1989 was generating an annual return in excess of 50%. By the end of the decade, Bain's second fund, raised in 1987, had invested \$106 million into 13 additional companies.

One of Bain's earliest and most famous venture investments was in Staples, Inc., the office supply retailer.

In 1986, Bain provided \$4.5 million to two supermarket executives, Leo Kahn and Thomas G. Stemberg, to open an office supply supermarket in Brighton, Massachusetts. The early funding helped Staples to expand from one store in 1986 to over 2000 stores in 2011.

Bain Capital eventually reaped a

nearly sevenfold return on its investment, and Romney sat on the Staples board of directors for over a decade.

While Romney likes to point to Staples as his greatest triumph, Bain Capital's acquisition of Ampad in 1992 was far more typical of the company's MO.

Beginning in 1989, Bain Capital, which began as a venture capital source, changed strategy to focus on leveraged buyouts of existing companies.

"Leveraged buyout" means that an investor – in this case Bain Capital – buys another company with borrowed money. Typically, the assets of the company to be bought are put up as collateral for the loan.

For the buyers, this is a no-lose situation. If the acquired company makes a profit, they use that to pay off the loan. If

the Williamhouse-Regency Division of Delaware, Inc. in October, 1995, Niagara Envelope Company, Inc. in 1996, and Shade/Allied, Inc. in February 1997.

For workers at SCM, acquisition by Bain was devastating.

Before Bain Capital bought the SCM factory in Marion, Indiana, it was running three shifts a day, making hanging file folders and other office supplies. After Bain took over, all 258 union employees were fired. Security guards hustled them out of the building.

Company officials told them they would be able to reapply for their jobs, at lesser wages and benefits, but not all would be rehired.

"We were told they bought the assets, not the union or the [labor] contract," recalls Randy Johnson, who at the time worked as a machine operator and was a union shop steward. The workers

– some the third generation in their families to have jobs there – eventually went on strike, and Bain

closed the factory 5-1/2 months after acquiring it.

When Ampad's revenue began to decline in 1997 that company also laid off workers and closed production facilities to maintain profitability. In January 1999, Ampad was de-listed from the New York Stock Exchange.

Ampad filed for bankruptcy in 2001 and the assets were acquired in 2003 by another private equity fund, Crescent Capital Investments, now Arcapita. In 2010 Ampad was acquired by yet another private equity fund, Esselte.

Bain's ownership of Ampad, is estimated to have generated more than \$100 million in profit for Bain.

In an analysis of Bain Capital under Romney, *The Wall Street Journal* estimated that Bain made \$2.5 billion in profits on \$1.1 billion invested in 77 separate deals. Of those 77 transactions, 22% ended with the acquired firms in bankruptcy within eight years of the Bain investment.



Mike Andrew

Bain Capital made a fortune for Romney, whose net worth reportedly tops \$250 million.

it doesn't, then its assets can be liquidated to satisfy the creditors.

Of course "liquidating assets" often means closing down facilities and laying off workers, and this is exactly what happened to Ampad, originally American Pad & Paper, a papermaking company founded in 1888.

In July 1992, Bain acquired Ampad from Mead Corporation, which itself had acquired Ampad in 1986.

Under Bain's ownership, Ampad initially enjoyed a significant growth in sales from \$106.7 million in 1992 to \$583.9 million in 1996, when the company was listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

Bain also used Ampad as a cash cow, financing a number of other acquisitions with Ampad assets.

Through Ampad, Bain acquired writing products company SCM in July 1994, brand names from the American Trading and Production Corporation in August 1995, WR Acquisition and

Tentative settlement in Longview

By Mike Andrew

Governor Christine Gregoire announced on January 24 that the ILWU had reached a tentative settlement of their dispute with EGT over the operation of an export grain terminal in Longview.

"I asked EGT and ILWU to come together in a good faith effort to overcome their differences," Gregoire said.

"Both parties should be commended for their willingness to work together and compromise. This framework reflects considerable effort to put the interests of the Longview community and the entire Columbia River Basin first. I am confident an agreement can be reached that will satisfy both parties and allow the new grain terminal to become fully operational."

Washington State Labor Council President Jeff Johnson thanked Gregoire for her "superlative efforts."

"Conditions in Longview were such that extraordinary efforts would be needed to bring the parties to the table in a way in which they could listen to each other," Johnson wrote Gregoire. "You provided the voice and the will to make it happen."

"This is a win for the ILWU, EGT and the Longview community," ILWU President Robert McElrath said in a statement released through Gregoire's office. "The ILWU has eight decades of grain export experience in the Northwest, and we look forward to the opportunity to develop a positive working relationship with EGT."

Some details remain to be worked out and the final agreement must be ratified by ILWU members, but it appears that the agreement will prevent the showdown looming as a grain ship approaches port. The ILWU and the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Labor Council had called for an all-out demonstration when the ship arrived, possibly at the

end of January. Occupy Longview had also called for demonstrations.

The ship was reportedly being escorted by Coast Guard vessels. Had it made port before a settlement, it would have been the first time in 40 years that U.S. armed forces intervened in a labor dispute.

The labor strife at Longview had gone on for many months. Last May EGT announced it would contract out work at its new \$200 million grain terminal, violating its lease agreement with the port of Longview and taking away work that had been done by ILWU members for 80 years. In July, EGT signed a five-year contract with General Construction to operate the grain

terminal with non-ILWU workers.

Shortly afterwards, several hundred workers blocked train tracks leading into the port, forcing a train

"This is a win for the ILWU, EGT and the Longview community."

— ILWU President Robert McElrath

delivering grain to the terminal to turn back.

When the ILWU blockaded trains again in September, the workers were met with riot police firing rubber bullets and tear gas. In response, some ILWU members and allies reportedly cut brake cables and dumped grain from train cars.



A Strong PSARA delegation braved a chilly day to salute the heroic contributions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at a rally at Seattle's Garfield High School. They then marched with our banner to the Jackson Federal Building for another rally. A small group of PSARA members joined with UNITE H.E.R.E. Local 8 at the downtown Hilton to support a boycott and their demand for economic justice for Hilton workers.

Feb. 23 is Senior Lobby Day

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issuing \$2 billion in bonds for Capital Budget projects.

• Calling on our legislators to end unjustified tax breaks that don't create jobs. Reform our loophole-ridden tax system to make it fairer, more transparent and more accountable.

SECOND, create a public option in the Washington State Health Care Exchange. The creation of the State Health Care Exchanges in 2014 will provide an estimated 32 million more U.S. residents with health care coverage. A public option in Washington's Health Care Exchange will force the private insurers to lower their premium rates to compete.

Washington residents need an alternative to private coverage that will drive down premiums for everyone.

And **THIRD**, PSARA supports the establishment of the Washington State Investment Trust as a proven, long term solution to help create revenue. America's first state bank was established in North Dakota in 1919. It has continually run at a profit and has ridden out the current severe economic downturn. Seventy percent of the Bank's earnings go to North Dakota's general fund. Public banks team up with local banks, credit unions and community development financial institutions to invest public

money at home, where it will:

- Create new jobs, spurring economic growth by lending to small businesses.
- Generate new revenue with job growth, with Bank revenues, and by bringing home public money the state currently sends to Wall Street.
- Strengthen local banks, even out credit cycles with participation loans and other services.
- Lower public debt costs for local governments. A public bank has access to Federal Reserve discounts and can lend directly to local governments at below-market interest rates.

Join us on Senior Lobby Day, February 23. Lobbying is democracy in action. Numbers count. See you there!

ALEC: Rodents at work in the states

By Rap Lewis

A secretive, sophisticated and sinister organization most of us have never heard of is injecting right-wing political poison into all 50 U.S. state legislatures, including Washington's.

Meet the innocuously-titled American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC.

Its carefully-screened membership is roughly divided, half and half, between representatives of corporate special interests and conservative, overwhelmingly Republican legislators. The website <ALECexposed.org> tells us that in Washington State, ALEC's membership includes eleven state representatives and twelve state senators. Of the 23, all but one senator and one representative are Republicans.

Big money, including the notorious billionaire Koch brothers of Kansas, lavishly funds ALEC's work. Its 2011 convention booklet carried advertising from British Petroleum, Walmart, the Walton Family Foundation, Chevron, ExxonMobil, VISA, PhRMA, Shell and many more.

Special task forces at ALEC meetings study model bills and review the actual experience of legislators working to pass them. In effect, ALEC provides a school where slick special-interest lobbyists and lawyers teach their legislator students the tricks of the trade. Many of the instructors are former legislative committee staff, or former staff of their state's governor.

Hundreds of model bills, ready for introduction, are produced. And they meet corporate needs: Weakening important regulations. Amending the tax code with profit-protecting loopholes. Undermining laws that protect workers. The model bills get introduced, often word for word in legislatures across the country.. And there's plenty of money to follow through with smooth, heavy-duty lobbying.

In 2010, Republicans won the governorship and control of both houses in 21 states. ALEC shock troops swung into high gear in Wisconsin, Ohio,

Michigan, Indiana, Maine and elsewhere. Hundreds of its pre-drafted model bills flooded into legislative committees.

The nation saw ALEC's work in

In Washington State, ALEC's membership includes eleven state representatives and twelve state senators. Of the 23, all but one senator and one representative are Republicans.

Wisconsin, where incoming Governor Scott Walker launched a savage assault on public employee unions.

Writing in the Nation magazine, John Nichols exposed ALEC's attack on the right to vote. ALEC, Nichols said, "wants to dismantle any barriers to corporate cash and billionaire bucks influencing elections" and at the same time "it wants to erect barriers to the primary tool that Americans who are not CEOs have to influence politics and the government: voting."

To sustain Planet Earth

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forward for negotiations, but we must be under no illusion – the outcome of Durban leaves us with the prospect of being legally bound to a world of 4C (degrees Celsius) warming. This would be catastrophic for people and the natural world.”

The consensus estimate of the scientific community is that eight more years without meaningful emissions reduction will almost surely bring the planet past the tipping point of 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. That’s the threshold beyond which climate patterns could be seriously destabilized, with chaotic results for all humanity.

Throughout the years of meetings, the UN climate talks have sought progress against unrelenting opposition from the profit-oriented corporate sector -- in the first place Big Oil. In the words of writer Naomi Klein: “Some very powerful players are going to have to lose if we ever decide to get serious about climate change.”

As the Durban conferees debated, the Global Carbon Project, an international collaboration of scientists, reported that emissions of carbon dioxide from fossil fuels had increased by 5.9 percent in 2010, the sharpest one-year rise on record. The scientists also reported that carbon emissions cumulatively had risen by a shocking 49 percent since 1990.

In December, the International Energy Agency (IEA) issued its latest report on rapidly increasing emissions from fossil fuel use. The IEA estimated that if the world continues on its present course, the “carbon budget” will be exhausted by 2017. The carbon budget identifies the limit on emissions that will keep global warming from exceeding the 2 degrees Celsius limit of safety.

“The door is closing,” said Fatih Birol, chief economist for the IEA. “If we don’t change direction now on how we use energy, we will end up beyond

what scientists tell us is the minimum (for safety). The door will be closed forever.”

As far back as 2007, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) sounded the alarm: “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level.”

The IPCC is a group of thousands of scientists who volunteer their time “to provide the world with a clear scientific view on the current state of knowledge in climate change.” Last

The Durban meeting leaves vital questions unanswered: Will decisive action be taken, especially by the U.S. and other major polluters? And will it be taken soon enough to save the Earth?

November, the IPCC released a new summary of its findings, clearly linking the changing climate to extreme weather events, such as drought, flash floods, hurricanes, heat waves and rising sea levels.

At a forthcoming “Planet Under Pressure” conference in London March 26-29, nearly 3,000 experts from around the world will present a report card on the health of the Earth and will make comprehensive recommendations on what must be done to avoid disaster. The International Conference for Science (ICUS), a coalition of national and international scientific bodies, is the sponsor.

A second conference, in Rio de Janeiro June 20-22, will be focused on sustainable development. Its goal is to set the stage for the moment in history when the nations come together to ensure “the very survival of humanity,” said Owen Gaffney of the International

Geosphere-Biosphere Program based in Stockholm.

“We need to have a ‘constitutional moment’ in world politics, akin to the major transformative shift in governance after 1945 that led to the establishment of the United Nations,” said Frank Biermann of VU University Amsterdam, director of the Earth System Governance Project.

Meanwhile, in Durban, many delegates condemned the postponement until 2020 of concrete steps to cut emissions.

“Eight years from now is a death sentence on Africa,” said Nigerian environmentalist Nnimo Bassey. African states are likely to be most vulnerable to multiple stresses, with up to 250 million people in areas likely to suffer from

water and food insecurity and, in low-lying areas, from a rising sea level.

A majority of Africans live in lower altitudes, including

the Sahel, the area just south of the Sahara, where the worst effects of water scarcity, hotter temperatures and longer dry seasons can be expected.

These same dynamics jeopardize many nations in Asia and the Americas, as well. The profound implications extend to developed countries, including the United States, which is already experiencing major weather events and prolonged droughts.

“Fueled by billions of tons of greenhouse pollution, a surge of record warmth has flooded the United States,” writes Brad Johnson in ThinkProgress, with serious economic disruption in prospect as a result. The total lack of snowcover in the Dakotas means wildfires are more likely. The seasonally cold air following the surge of heat will severely damage the winter crops that are usually protected by a blanket of snow at this time of year.

In love with Oaxaca and its people

By Alfredo Peppard

Pauline and I first came to Oaxaca in southern Mexico in 2007. We were interested in the ongoing struggle being carried out by the indigenous peoples and the unions against the hated governor, U. Ruis. In the summer of 2006 the indigenous peoples had occupied the city for a couple of months until the army and federal police perpetuated a massacre in which 21 people died and hundreds were beaten bloody.



Alfredo Peppard

We fell in love with the place and its wonderful people and after a second trip in 2008, decided to move here.

We came here in March 2009 to enjoy sunny winters, an affordable life style; and also we had the feeling if the revolution wouldn't come to us in Seattle we would go to it in southern Mexico. So here we are in tranquil Oaxaca and the overdue uprising of the 99% is going on in the streets of Seattle.

The only event of note here was a few months ago Mexican President Philippi Calderón came to speak to the people in the Zocalo, in the city square, and was stoned by members of the Teachers Union for having signed a bill for a voucher system aimed at the destruction of public education. Can you imagine anything like that in the streets of Seattle?

Pauline and I were on our way down to the Zocalo that day when we were told that there was a war going on there. We stopped and had a cup of coffee and waited for the tear gas to clear, then approached with caution. We are both too old to run from the cops on cobble stones.

As we approached, the army was leaving in their truck. The Federales were manning the barricades, but not wearing their ski masks; when they

show up with ski masks on, the situation can only deteriorate. The street to the east that we took on our way out of the Zocalo looked like a tornado had struck: twisted and broken steel police barricades, broken windows, over turned garbage cans, the whole nine yards.

That was the last event of note; the new governor, Gabino Que, has done all he can to bring peace. Que ran on a coalition ticket made up of parties of the left and right that beat the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution, the PRI, for the first time in 70 years of the turbulent politics of Oaxaca.

The police are still numerous and heavily armed, but the murderous Federal Preventive Police are gone and

the army no longer occupies the central valley. We've seen little of the Federales and none of the Army patrols that were common a couple of years ago. It appears that if we want to see any action we will have to go to Seattle.

The Occupy movement is the most exciting event in years. However it seems to be an American and European phenomenon. I have not read or heard of any such movements here in Mexico or elsewhere in Latin America. I hesitate to speculate on its final outcome, but at this point it is a remarkable demonstration of the power of non-violent struggle. It's also a powerful learning experience for the American 99%.

Sneak campaign to suppress the vote

There's a coordinated nationwide campaign to suppress the vote – especially of those voters who would support liberal and progressive candidates. The heart of that campaign is the introduction of legislation to impose rigid requirements for government-issued IDs to qualify as a voter.

The ID requirement targets African Americans, Latinos, youth, the poor and seniors. An analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice found that as many as five million eligible voters may find it significantly harder to cast ballots.

The NAACP reported that legislators in 34 states introduced bills imposing such requirements. Many of these bills were modeled after legislation drafted by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). See our story on ALEC, page 7.

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Meetings and Events

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 12:30 p.m. – 2 p.m. Tuesday, February 7, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Avenue, Rm. 226. Help plan PSARA's participation in the current legislative session and PSARA's supporting the Seattle City Council resolution endorsing the Caring Across Generations campaign. All PSARA members welcome.

PSARA Outreach Committee Discussion Group: 1 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 9th, Greenwood Community Senior Center, 525 North 85th in Seattle. Discussion on current events.

Seattle Care Congress: Join with PSARA and other allies as we launch the local version of the national Caring Across Generations campaign, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, February 11 at Greenwood Community Senior Center. Lunch will be provided. See article on page 2.

PSARA Executive Board Meeting: 1 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, February 16, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Avenue S., Seattle. All PSARA members are welcome.

Senior Lobby Day: 8 a.m. registration, 9 a.m. program begins, Thursday, February 23, United Churches, 110 11th Ave. SE, Olympia. Join with PSARA members and others from across the state to make our priorities known to our legislators. PSARA will be organizing car pools for our members. Please contact Chuck Richards, legaffairs@psara.org or call the PSARA office if you can drive or if you need a ride. See article on page 1.

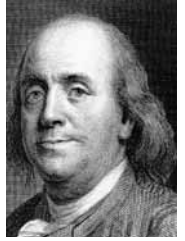
ARA 2012 Western Regional Conference, February 29 to March 2, Bally's Hotel, Las Vegas. Call 202-637-5399 for registration information.

PSARA Endorses Marriage Equality (*story in March issue*)

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Overheard

*"America's
destiny is not
power, but
light"*

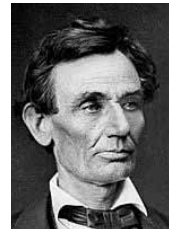


--Benjamin Franklin



Here's the new "Scrap The Cap" button. It will be available through PSARA.

"I have two great enemies..."



... the Southern army in front of me and the bankers in the rear. Of the two, the one at my rear is my greatest foe. Corporations have been enthroned, and an era of corruption in high places will follow. The money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until the wealth is aggregated in the hands of a few, and the Republic is destroyed."

-- Abraham Lincoln