Battle in Congress over Postal future

By David Yao

A bill to address the financial crisis of the U.S. Postal Service has passed in the United States Senate. The House of Representatives, under Republican Party control, is considering another bill and agreement has to be reached by May 15 to avoid the shutdown of many postal facilities.

At stake are the quality and availability of postal services to the American public. At risk as well are the jobs and benefits of postal workers, blamed by some in the mailing industry and their ideological allies for the recent financial shortfalls.

To blame unionized workers for industry woes is an old trick. Up until 2006, the Postal Service was financially healthy, productivity had continued to increase, and mail volume hit its all-time peak. So what happened?

Three factors changed everything. First, the country began its slide into a long recession. Second, online bill-paying cut sharply into the Postal Service’s most profitable product, first-class mail.

But the most serious component of the postal crisis was created by Congress – the 2006 Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA). It put a cap on rate increases of no more than the rate of inflation for most categories of mail. This was done at the behest of the

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An agonizing legislative session

By Mike Andrew

The long legislative session of 2012 – which featured not one, but two “special sessions” – finally came to an end in the early morning hours of April 11.

It was a session that featured high drama – Senate Republicans high-jacking the budget process with the help of Democratic defectors Jim Kastama, Rodney Tom, and Tim Sheldon – and frustrating bickering.

Washington State Labor Council President Jeff Johnson gave the session a mixed review.

“There were great highs: the passage of the Marriage Equality Act and the eventual passage of the infrastructure jobs bill – ‘Jobs Now Bill,’” Johnson wrote. “There were also great lows: eliminating the early retirement pension factors for new public employees who have put in 30 years or more of public service, and the way in which school employee health benefits was dispatched.”

Johnson dismissed self-congratulatory reports of a bi-partisan legislative breakthrough as “a load of hooey!”

The Jobs Now Bill allocates $1.6 billion, with federal matching funds, to create some 18,000 jobs in the construction industry and other sectors of the economy to help strengthen the state’s infrastructure.

“Representative Hans Dunshee tirelessly fought for and led this effort,” Johnson said.


For the most part, the Republican attempt to rule by backroom deal was defeated, but not without setbacks for working people.

“It’s not just about balancing the budget,” Republican Senator Joe Zarelli

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PSARA Annual Membership Meeting and Party

Guest speaker: Rep. Jay Inslee, candidate for Governor
Review of past 6 months and future actions.

12:30 to 3:00 pm, Thursday, June 21, 2012

LOCATION: Greenwood Community Senior Center, 525 North 85th Street, Seattle. On Bus line # 48.

RSVP to office phone and let us know the food item you can bring: 206-448-9646 or e-mail to adminvp@psara.org.

12:30 pm Potluck lunch and socializing.

Please bring a main dish, salad, fruit, dessert or soft drink to share at the party.

1:00 pm Presentation by former Rep. Jay Inslee with Q&A. Time to get to know Jay Inslee better and make our issues heard.

2:00 pm Business meeting.

‘Step by Step’

I’d like to nominate a hymn-like anthem from the labor movement as our theme song for the 2012 Membership Campaign.

It’s called “Step by Step,” and the words are taken from the preamble to the constitution of the United Mine Workers of America.

The song begins: “Step by step the longest march can be won. Can be won. Many stones can form an arch. Singly none. Singly none.”

Think of every man or woman who signs up as a “step” bringing us closer in our “march” toward our goal of 275.

Or as an indispensable “stone” in building our “arch” of increased membership strength.

The Mine Workers’ anthem concludes with this expression of the power generated by people working together toward a goal:

“...by union what we will can be accomplished still. Drops of water turn a mill. Singly none. Singly none.”

No one member is going to get those 275 new members. But “by union what we will can be accomplished still.” Each new member we sign up is that “step,” that “stone,” that “drop of water” that will make all the difference.

- Will Parry

EXUBERANT: Executive Board members share a cake at Will Parry’s 92nd Birthday.
Agonizing legislative session

Continued from page 1

said at one point in the debate, for once telling the truth – his side was much more interested in defunding benefits for public employees than in finding a way to pay for vital state services.

The so-called “pension reform” passed by the legislature was not as draconian as Republicans wanted, but it would still roll back early retirement benefits by as much as 50% for newly hired state workers, most of them teachers.

In fact, the measure was fiscally unnecessary, since most state pensions are currently over-funded, and therefore among the most financially sound in the nation.

The second measure where Republicans saw some success was a proposal to move health insurance for K–12 teachers into the same state-run pool with other state workers.

The Republican Senate coup also aimed at making bone-deep cuts in social spending. It was, Johnson said, “a preview of what a Rob McKenna administration would look and act like.”

The legislature rejected a proposed $44 million of cuts from K–12, and $30 million from higher education.

Disability Lifeline, the Alcoholism and Drug Addiction Treatment and Support Act, Housing and Essential Needs, State Food Assistance, and other social programs Zarelli wanted to eliminate were all funded in the final budget, although at lower levels than previously.

Funds for indigent patients, or “charity care,” allocated to 50 small or non-rural hospitals were cut by $26.3 million, half of it federal and half in state dollars.

The budget also cuts $50 from the state’s monthly per-worker contribution for health care and other insurance benefits, and eliminates 1,266 jobs from the state payroll. More than 900 of the job cuts are the result of Initiative 1183 taking the state out of the liquor business.

Not much happened on the revenue side.

The final budget includes the elimination of a $16 million tax loophole enjoyed by out-of-state banks, although this new revenue was zeroed out by the extension of a couple of existing corporate tax breaks.

Battle in Congress over Postal future

Continued from page 1

mailing industry, which wanted to keep its costs from rising too quickly. The cap on rate increases left no allowance for the huge increases in fuel prices – a huge cost component of the USPS.

Worse than the rate cap, roughly $5.5 billion per year was to be siphoned out of postal coffers in federal treasury accounts, ostensibly for future use to pay for retiree health care for the next 75 years. Such a bizarre financing scheme has not been laid on any other private or public entity.

This pre-funding burden has sucked over $22 billion from the Postal Service since 2007, into an already overfunded account. Since this money shows up on the plus side of the federal budget, Congress has been reluctant to reverse this flow of money.

On April 17, Tax Day, postal workers and mailhandlers throughout the country rallied to retain high levels of service and to save jobs. Our message: Congress took too much money, we want a refund. For the Postal Service, that is.

In Tacoma, postal workers lined the street by the mail processing plant, which also has a retail unit where we leafleted customers. Our signs said: “Phony Crisis Caused by Congress,” “We Say No to Cuts in Service,” and “Congress Bled the P.O. $22 Billion.”

A few days earlier, the letter carriers union (NALC) held a rally where Rep. Dennis Kuchinich spoke on behalf of my local, saying that “your fight is our fight. Saving jobs and service is our common goal.”

The debate focus was on the Senate proposed amendments to S. 1789. The current bill would maintain overnight delivery standards for three years, and prevent most plants from closing. But it authorized an end to door-to-door delivery, and approved a reduction in delivery days (to five). It also contains a section that would sharply cut and degrade workers’ compensation benefits for ALL federal and postal workers.

Postal unions are being joined by federal worker unions in pushing an amendment by Senator Akaka that would substitute much better language on workers’ compensation, that has already passed in the House. Other good amendments would protect door-to-door and six-day delivery, and increase protections against closures of processing plants and post offices.

Of course, there were also negative amendments – even one to end collective bargaining rights of postal workers. Sixty votes were needed to pass any amendment, as well as the final package. Now the focus moved to a less favorable chamber and a much worse bill in the House.

There are so many important threads to this struggle – the preservation of public services, protection of workers’ rights, and the protection of decent jobs from the attacks of right-wing ideologues. We appreciate all the support extended by PSARA and by our other allies in the labor movement.

(David Yao is vice president of Seattle Area Local, American Postal Workers Union and a member of PSARA.)
What exactly is this House Republican budget plan authored by Representative Paul Ryan, passed by the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, and endorsed by Mitt Romney?

The following information is provided by the national Alliance for Retired Americans.

The House Budget plan:
• Ends Medicare as we know it.
• Repeals the Affordable Care Act.
• Decimates Medicaid and cuts Social Security.
• Cuts and/or eliminates most low-income programs.
• Provides tax cuts for the wealthiest.
• Increases military spending.

Here are some of the details:
• Makes all Bush tax cuts permanent.
• Maintains the capital gains tax rate at 15% - no Buffet Rule.
• Maintains the current FICA cap at $110 thousand dollars – no scrapping the cap.
• Reduces tax rates for the wealthy to 25%.
• Reduces other tax rates to 10%.
• Cuts the corporate tax rate to 25%.
• Eliminates taxes on overseas profits

The total reduction in revenues over 10 years is $10 trillion with huge savings to the wealthy 1% - estimated at $400,000 per year.

The spending cuts in the Ryan Budget plan are overwhelmingly applied to low-income programs. They are estimated to include over ten years:
• $2.4 trillion in cuts to Medicaid and health care
• $134 billion in cuts to food stamps
• $463 billion in cuts to other mandatory programs for low-income.
• $291 billion in cuts to low-income discretionary programs
• $2 trillion in cuts to other social programs

And what are the human costs of the Ryan/(Romney supported) budget?
• 17 million low-income people lose access to health care through the Affordable Care Act.
• 14 million to 27 million low-income Americans lose Medicaid coverage by 2021.
• 2 million eligible children are denied access to Head Start.
• 1.8 million women, infants and children lose food and healthcare support through WIC.
• More than 1 million students lose access to Pell Grants.
• More than 400,000 low-income families lose housing vouchers.

The Ryan House-approved budget cuts Social Security benefits; cuts funding for the Social Security Administration; makes Medicare a voucher program; delays Medicare eligibility from age 65 to age 67; and slashes Medicaid, including nursing home care for the frail elderly and people with disabilities.

This proposal passed the House on March 29. Ten Republicans (none in Washington) and all Democrats voted “no.”

The proponents of this budget are engaged in out-and-out class warfare. We in PSARA have the task of educating everyone we can about what these defenders of the 1% are doing.

Join us at our interactive workshop, let’s learn together... and then let’s act together.

Monday, May 14th,
UFCW 21
1:30 - 3:30 pm
5030 First Ave S
Seattle, WA
It’s ‘Yes!’ on Ref 74 (If they get the signatures)

By Mac McIntosh

Opponents of gay marriage were gearing up to overturn the state’s new Marriage Equality Act even before Governor Chris Gregoire signed it into law. Organizing the opposition was the Family Policy Institute of Washington, which is backed by the National Organization for Marriage.

The latter organization financed the campaigns to overturn marriage equality in California and Maine. They are reported to have a million dollar war chest to refer the Washington law to the November ballot and then campaign for a “No” vote.

This is the organization that has been quoted as saying, “The strategic goal for this project is to drive a wedge between gays and Blacks.”

The Catholic Church is also fighting against marriage equality. The archbishop of Seattle has asked the Catholic churches in Seattle to have their parishioners circulate petitions to get Referendum 74 on the ballot.

Seven priests have refused. “Doing so would, I believe, prove hurtful and seriously divisive in our community,” said Father Michael Ryan of St. James Cathedral, Archbishop Sartain’s church. Father John Whitney of St. Joseph Parish on Capitol Hill took an even stronger position: “No petitioning will be permitted anywhere on the campus of St. Joseph Parish.”

Some say that because Washington voters supported Referendum 71 (the Everything but Marriage Act) and it passed, we will be able to do the same with Referendum 74. Because of the money and organization against it, this is going to be a bigger fight. The organization supporting marriage equality, Washington United for Marriage, will need all the support they can get. You can help by contributing money, by working on the campaign, or both. Pledge support at www.washingtonunitedformarriage.

Another threat to marriage equality is the possibility of Initiative 1192, defining marriage as between one man and one woman. Proponents of I-1192 are in the signature gathering stage.

Please join PSARA in this campaign to support marriage equality in Washington State. We can be successful in November if Referendum 74 is passed and Initiative 92 is voted down.

Kucinich stirs the crowd at Highline

Dennis Kucinich raised the rafters at Highline Community College April 12 with a ringing call to defend and strengthen Social Security by “scrapping the cap” on taxable earnings.

The arbitrary limit of $110,100 on annual earnings subject to the 6.2 percent tax enables everyone earning more than that arbitrary figure to escape contributing a fair share toward funding the program, Kucinich pointed out at the rally, sponsored by Social Security Works Washington. The Ohio Congressman assured an enthusiastic crowd of more than 250 that “Social Security is not going broke...Its $2.6 trillion trust fund can pay 100 percent of benefits through 2036 without any changes whatsoever.”

Neither benefit cuts nor a raise in retirement age are necessary, Kucinich said. With a job-creating national manufacturing policy, a single payer health care system, and an end to the waste of trillions of dollars in destructive wars, Social Security’s solvency would be guaranteed far into the future, he said.

Other rally speakers were Pramila Jayapal, executive director of OneAmerica; Marilyn Watkins, policy director, Economic Opportunity Institute; Magdalena Rose-Avilia, executive director, The Latino Equality Initiative; and Deanna Kirkpatrick, a victim of multiple sclerosis who relied on Social Security while fighting the disease.
Learning from the past to build a brighter future

By Mark McDermott

We live in difficult times. For more than three decades, poor, the young, people of color, women, immigrants and people with disabilities have faced growing threats to our economic well-being and security. Our nation is one of the wealthiest countries in the world and yet tens of millions of us live in poverty, face hunger, fear the loss of our homes or homelessness, worry about affordable quality health care, and hope that our children and grandchildren will receive a quality education. Growing old brings new fears of economic hard times even though we and our ancestors worked for generations to build the great fortunes of our great and wealthy nation. Why?

How can it be that the past three decades of increasing national wealth has resulted in greater economic insecurity and needless suffering? Our country is filled with highly profitable corporations and immensely wealthy individuals, yet we are told that our nation cannot afford to ensure that all of us can live and prosper in genuine economic security and opportunity and in harmony with a healthy environment. Really? This is a lie.

These fears and the people’s struggles to secure a better present and future are not new. Since the 1870s our ancestors and we have faced the economic and political power of corporate America and the wealthy. We have demanded justice, fairness, and economic opportunity and security. It is a relentless battle between two groups of “persons” over how we, the people, will share in our growing national wealth that we help to create. One group is flesh-and-blood human beings who successfully demanded the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness stated in our Declaration of Independence.

In the next three issues of The Advocate, we will explore three periods of American economic and political history: The 1880s to the early 1930s; the early 1930s to the late 1970s; and the late 1970s to the present. We need to better understand the successes and failures of working people and their allies in each period as they worked to build a brighter future filled with growing economic security, opportunity and fairness. We need to learn these critically important lessons of history to help us develop more effective short and long-term strategies to reclaim the American Dream for all people in our nation.

These periods are filled with stories of great people’s victories and defeats. Each period saw the nation’s wealth grow over time, but the periods of the 1880s to the early 1930s and the late 1970s to today were dominated by corporate America. They were plagued by extraordinary levels of income and wealth inequality coupled with high levels of needless economic insecurity and suffering. The early 1930s through the late 1970s saw strong economic growth shared more equitably and growing economic security.

Understanding how our nation moved from a long period of economic injustice to four decades of growing economic justice and then swung back to our current period of growing economic injustice and insecurity is critical to building a better future for ourselves and future generations. These articles are intended to stimulate debate about the road back toward economic justice and a brighter future for all.

Support to remain in ‘home sweet home’

The federal Department of Health and Human Services is creating a new organization, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) to help older Americans and persons with disabilities remain in their homes.

“For too long, too many Americans have faced the impossible choice between moving to an institution or living at home without the long-term services and supports they need,” Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said.

The ACL will bring the Administration on Aging, the Office on Disability and the Administration on Developmental Disabilities into a single agency. It will develop programs to meet the special needs of individual groups such as children with developmental disabilities, adults with physical disabilities, or seniors with Alzheimer’s.

It will also develop the range of community supports that enable all seniors and persons with disabilities to remain in their own homes.

“The goal of the new Administration for Community Living will be to help people with disabilities and older Americans live productive, satisfying lives,” Sebelius said.
ALEC exposed, feels the heat

By Will Parry

“ALEC” – it sounds like a stick caught in your throat. And it’s even uglier than it sounds.

ALEC is short for American Legislative Exchange Council. We profiled it as “a secretive, sophisticated and sinister organization” in the February Retiree Advocate.

Well, it’s still sophisticated and sinister, but it’s a good deal less secretive now than it was a few months ago.

Founded in 1973 by the ultra-conservative Paul Weyrich, ALEC has always operated in the shadows. It claims nearly 2,000 state legislator members (only 69 of them Democrats) who pay a token $100 in dues. But its big money comes from 110 corporations, 40 trade associations, 67 nonprofits and 23 corporate law firms, each of which pays annual dues ranging from $7,000 to $25,000.

As we reported in February, ALEC brings together fat-cat corporate sponsors and right wing legislators to inject political poison into all 50 state legislatures. The poison takes the form of model legislation drafted by ALEC task forces and introduced in one legislature after another, often word for word.

ALEC is the source of more than a thousand bills during every legislative cycle. They claim that about 17 percent of those bills become law. The average lobbyist would sell his soul for that batting average.

Here’s the good news. Thanks to a whistleblower, a slew of internal ALEC documents have reached the Center for Media and Democracy (CMD), a non-profit interest group. As a result we now have lists of current and former ALEC members and copies of more than 800 model bills. A special CMD website, ALEC Exposed, has made all this material accessible to the public.

By Will Parry

Trayvon’s death:
The catalyst for ALEC’s exposure

Trayvon Martin
George Zimmerman

The Florida killing of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by self-appointed vigilante George Zimmerman has focused national attention on the “Stand Your Ground” laws promoted by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). Zimmerman is expected to rely on this law to avoid prison time for second degree murder.

That task force was chaired by a Walmart executive. Walmart is the nation’s No. 1 seller of guns and ammunition. Sure enough, in September, 2005, the “Stand Your Ground” bill created by the task force was adopted by ALEC’s board of directors.

Over the objections of law enforcement groups, the NRA in 2005 ramm the Stand Your Ground law through the Florida legislature, and it was signed by Governor Jeb Bush.

Florida law enforcement officials report that since 2005 the number of that state’s “justifiable homicides” has nearly tripled. In those seven years more than two dozen states have passed similar laws.

The heat ALEC has taken since the Trayvon Martin killing led it to quietly dissolve its Public Safety and Elections Task Force. ALEC is still powerful and dangerous, a political behemoth. But it’s not impervious to pressure from an aroused public.
The Retiree Advocate

May 2012

New laws curb voter registration

By Mark McDermott

Voting laws passed by Republican legislatures in a dozen states during the past year have sharply restricted voter-registration drives that typically target young, low-income, African American and Hispanic voters — groups that have backed the Democratic president by wide margins.

Another 16 states are considering bills that would end voter registration on election days, impose a range of limits on groups that register voters, and make it more difficult for people to sign up, according to the Brennan Center for Justice in New York University Law School.

Analysts say that the new laws — many of which include measures requiring voters to show a photo ID at the polls — could carve into Obama’s potential support in Florida, Ohio and other politically-divided states likely to be crucial in the November 6 election.

Many if not most of these new laws follow model statutes developed by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the secretive, corporate-funded organization that gives direction to right-wing state legislators. (See our story on page 7.)

Massive registration drives in 2008 helped put millions of people aged 18 to 29 on voting rolls, and that age group — which makes up roughly one quarter of the U.S. electorate — voted 2-to-1 for Obama, helping propel him to victory.

Rock the Vote, a nationwide organization that mobilizes young voters, said the new laws would make it more difficult to educate people on how to sign up to vote.

“The types of laws have varied, but state by state they’ve added up to the fact that it’s going to be harder for young people to get registered and vote in this election cycle,” said Heather Smith, president of Rock the Vote.

The League of Women Voters and other groups have suspended voter registration in Florida as they challenge the new restrictions in court.
Hospitality workers demand fair treatment

By Mike Andrew

Eight people were arrested in a sit-in outside the Space Needle’s 50th Anniversary celebration on April 21.

While the eight, who included Space Needle workers and union activists, blocked the Space Needle driveway, more than 100 supporters chanted “U-N-I-T-E! We want job security!”

Atop the Space Needle, Seattle’s elite celebrated the anniversary of the iconic monument, the symbol of the 1962 World’s Fair, and looked forward to another 50 years of an expanding tourist industry.

Each year the Space Needle attracts over a million visitors making it one of the top tourist destinations in the region.

The Needle’s Sky City Restaurant is the most patronized in Seattle, with dinners costing as much as $60 a plate.

Among those arrested were Lynne Dodson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Washington State Labor Council, and Erik Van Rossum, principal officer of UNITE HERE Local 8, the union that represents Space Needle workers.

Space Needle management has been negotiating with workers since May 2011.

In February, workers rejected a so-called "last and final" proposal by management that failed to include job security provisions.

“I could be replaced any day with temporary workers making lower wages and no benefits,” said Space Needle server Sanjeet Thebe. “Living under this stress has not been good—for me and for my family.”

Workers have said they will not accept a new contract unless the employer pledges not to contract work to outside companies.

The Space Needle sit-in was the second action by hospitality workers in April.

On April 3, workers from the Hyatt at Olive 8 Hotel paid a visit to their management office to demand that management remain neutral in their efforts to organize a union.

The workers’ organizing committee was accompanied by 20 community supporters, including County Council President Larry Gossett, County Council member Joe McDermott, City Council member Nick Licata, and Port Commissioner Rob Holland.

PSARA President Robby Stern and other PSARA members were part of the delegation.

Mayor Mike McGinn sent Hyatt management a letter supporting the hotel workers’ demand for a fair process to move forward with organizing.

“I believe workers should have the right to decide whether to join a union, free of intimidation or improper interference,” McGinn wrote. “As this process moves forward, I am asking you to respect workers’ rights to freely choose whether to join a union.”

UNITE HERE 8 said the organizing drive at the Hyatt at Olive 8 was its first new grassroots unionization effort in many years. The Arctic Club Hotel was unionized in 2009 through a prior “card check” agreement with management.

“Card check” means that an employer agrees to recognize a union once a majority of the employees sign cards authorizing the union to represent them.

If an employer does not agree to remain neutral in the organizing drive and to accept card check, workers have a much harder time winning the right to unionize.

Hostile employers can and do resort to all sorts of tactics – compulsory anti-union meetings, one-on-one meetings to pressure employees, threats of being fired – to intimidate employees and try to prevent them from joining a union.

Although Hyatt at Olive 8 manager Michael Stephens promised the delegation that “of course we’ll remain neutral,” documents released by management the next day indicated they would not accept card check at the property. Organizers say that Stephens was involved in heavy-handed anti-union tactics when he managed the Hyatt property in Scottsdale, Arizona.

On April 18, Puget Sound SAGE released a new report titled “Our Pain, Their Gain: The hidden cost of profitability in Seattle’s downtown hotels.”

While Seattle’s hospitality industry is one of the cornerstones of the local economy, industry practices keep workers in poverty with low wages and sketchy health benefits that require public money to subsidize their health care costs, as well as their food and housing, the report reveals.

“We found that hotel workers, who are mostly people of color and family breadwinners, not only earn wages at poverty level,” said Howard Greenwich, research director for Puget Sound Sage and author of the report, “they endure pain and injury at higher rates than almost any other industry — some that may surprise you, such as construction or coal mining. Meanwhile, industry profits are rapidly growing.”

Photo by Garet Munger

THEY’RE SERIOUS: Heading into contract talks with Space Needle management, these VFCW members were arrested for standing up for job security.
The scientists are right

By Will Parry

Yes, there was a heat wave in March, running in a broad swath across the United States, from the Upper Midwest to the Northeast. Weather stations reported that by March 21, more than 2,200 daily high temperature records had been broken.

International Falls, Minnesota, “the Icebox of the Nation,” exceeded its all-time historic high March temperature by 22 degrees. Weather historians say this may be the largest margin ever for any U.S. station with a century’s worth of records.

Veteran Minnesota weatherman Paul Douglas blogged that “this is OFF THE SCALE WEIRD, even for Minnesota.”

Mother Earth has a message for us: SCALE WEIRD, even for Minnesota.”

Douglas blogged that “this is OFF THE SCALE WEIRD, even for Minnesota.”

Historians say this may be the largest margin ever for any U.S. station with a century’s worth of records.

Veteran Minnesota weatherman Paul Douglas blogged that “this is OFF THE SCALE WEIRD, even for Minnesota.”

Douglas blogged that “this is OFF THE SCALE WEIRD, even for Minnesota.”

McKibben calls our attention to the profound significance of the hot weather in March, “an early season outbreak of heat completely without precedent in its scale and spread.”

April and May frosts may kill off the plants that have budded early. Soil exposed by the retreat of snow will dry out much earlier, raising the risk of drought and forest fires. Reservoirs will start evaporating early.

“But the real fears are things we can’t anticipate, simply because we’re moving into uncharted territory,” McKibben says. “We’ve never seen anything like what we’re seeing in March.”

On May 5, McKibben and 350.org are planning a day for people on all continents to testify to the effects of climate change.

“There will be Pakistanis forced from their homes in the worst flooding the country’s ever seen, and Somalis dealing with a drought horrible even by the standards of the Horn of Africa. Thais, who watched flood do damage last fall equal to 18 percent of the country’s gross domestic product, and El Salvadorans who watched 15 years’ worth of development wash away in a week of record rains,” McKibben says.

“We in PSARA should find the ways to enlist in Bill McKibben’s valiant crusade to save our planet – for our own children, and for all the children of the world.

Emergency rooms confront chaos

By Rap Lewis

Hospital emergency rooms across the country are dealing with a spike in psychiatric emergencies – attempted suicide, severe depression, psychosis – as states slash funding for mental health services while the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression takes its toll.

The harrowing story is spelled out in a three and a half page report by Reuters correspondents Julie Steenhuisen and Jillian Mincer.

Emergency rooms have long been overburdened by uninsured patients who wait until their ailments become critical before seeking care.

What ER physicians are encountering now offers grim testimony about the ways that economic hardship is deepening the mental health crisis.

“There are people without a previous psychiatric history who are coming in and telling us they’ve lost their jobs, they’ve lost their homes, they can’t provide for their families, and they are becoming severely depressed,” said Dr. Felicia Smith, director of the acute psychiatric service at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

Visits to the hospital’s psychiatric emergency department have climbed 20 percent in the past three years, and “we’ve seen actually more very serious suicide attempts in that population,” Dr. Smith said.

Patients with chronic mental illness have no place to go because of the severe cutbacks in mental health facilities. Doctors report seeing people whose most critical need is a warm bed.

Hospitals are not prepared for increased numbers of psychiatric patients, said Randall Hagar, director of government affairs for the California Psychiatric Association. Over the past two years, California cut $587 million in state-funded mental health services.

“They don’t have secure holding rooms. They don’t have quiet spaces. They don’t have a lot of things you need to help calm down a person in an acute psychiatric crisis,” Hagar said.

Back in 2006, the Institute of Medicine reported that U.S. emergency departments were already overtaxed and overcrowded.

“And now you are adding in patients who are unsafe to leave but have nowhere to go,” said Dr. Bret Nicks, an emergency physician at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem.

Photo: Will Parry
Festival honors Bread and Roses strikers

By Lynne Dodson

The first ever US MayWorks festival is being launched in Washington State including art, video, theater, workshops and lots of music. And this inaugural celebration is dedicated to and inspired by the 100th anniversary of the Bread and Roses strike and victory.

In 1912, Lawrence, Massachusetts textile workers launched a militant strike that popularized the slogan “Bread and Roses.” The workers, mostly immigrant, mostly women, organized and fought for higher wages, but also for dignity, respect, and better working conditions. The pivotal strike called into sharp focus the problems, child labor, workplace safety, and an increasingly unequal distribution of wealth. Though they faced formidable, well-funded opposition, the strikers united workers across the northeast to win major victories. For bread, and for roses too.

For our first MayWorks celebration in Washington, we have the inspiration of the “Bread and Roses” strike to remind us that we are more than the jobs we do.

Our MayWorks commemoration of the Bread and Roses strike starts with a short film contest, “We do the work”. We’ll have a significant presence at the PNW Labor History Association Conference, theater and musical performances, an exhibition at the South Seattle Community College library, labor movie night, and a Bread & Roses float to be debuted at the May Day Immigrant Rights March in Seattle.

MayWorks culminates at the FolkLife Festival with the Bread & Roses theme reflected in exhibits from artists Beverly Naidus, David Bacon, John Stamets, and students; screenings of the winners of our film contest; workers talking about their experiences building Seattle Center 50 years ago; oral histories; a discussion of current struggles that bring the lessons of the Bread and Roses Strike to today; and Labor, Occupy, and Bread and Roses performances.

(Lynne Dodson is Secretary-Treasurer of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, and a PSARA member.)

A bill to revitalize America

By Alex Stone

Enactment of the “Rebuild America Act”, introduced by Iowa Democratic Senator Tom Harkin, would do more to help the American economy and revitalize the middle class than any other bill currently before Congress.

This sweeping legislation would boost employment by investing in infrastructure upgrades, promoting U.S. manufacturing, and ending tax breaks that encourage U.S. firms to move production offshore.

It would also have immediate and positive impacts for the middle class by increasing access to affordable, quality child care; establishing a fair national minimum wage; allowing all Americans to earn paid sick leave; and strengthening and protecting Social Security, among other things.

It’s clear this legislation would provide considerable help to the American middle class, but its provisions to strengthen and protect Social Security are particularly noteworthy.

For Social Security beneficiaries, the "Rebuild America Act" would increase benefits by about $60/month for the average beneficiary - a boon for seniors, disabled workers and survivors living on fixed incomes. It would also change the way the Social Security Administration calculates benefits from the current Consumer Price Index for workers (CPI-W) to the Consumer Price Index for Elders (CPI-E), which more accurately reflects inflationary health care and other costs faced by seniors.

To pay for these changes, and to ensure Social Security is solvent and soundly-financed well into the future, Senator Harkin proposes “scrapping the $110,000 cap” on taxable wages, ensuring all Americans pay into Social Security at the same tax rate. High earners - who currently pay a much lower tax rate into Social Security than middle class earners - would then pay the same rate of 6.2%.

The "Rebuild America Act" is legislation that would address some of the most critical issues affecting middle class families today. Its provisions to strengthen and protect Social Security deserve special attention.

(Alex Stone is Communication Manager for the Economic Opportunity Institute and a PSARA member.)

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Please check the address label on the back page of your Retiree Advocate. See the date on the label? **When that date is printed in red, it’s time to renew your membership.** Your prompt renewal saves us the cost of mailing reminder letters.

Thank you!

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**PSARA Government Relations Committee:**
12:30 p.m. – 2 p.m. Wednesday, May 9th, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Avenue, Rm. 226. Discuss PSARA’s participation in Seattle City Council resolution supporting Caring Across Generations campaign, developments with our Scrap the Cap campaign and efforts to stop the Social Security field office consolidation. All PSARA members welcome.

**PSARA Outreach Committee Discussion Group:**
1 p.m., Thursday, May 10th, Greenwood Community Senior Center, 525 North 85th in Seattle. Discussion on current events.

**“Reclaiming the American Dream – Learning From the Past to Build a Better Future”:** 1:30 – 3:30 p.m., Monday, May 14th, UFCW 21, 5030 First Ave S., Seattle. Sponsored by PSARA and Progress 21. Interactive workshop intended to help participants learn valuable lessons from our history that we can use to win a better future for us all. Please RSVP (206) 448-9646 or email president@psara.org.

**PSARA Executive Board Meeting:**
1 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, May 17th, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Avenue S., Seattle. All PSARA members are welcome.

**PSARA Outreach Committee Discussion Group:**
1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m., Thursday, May 24th, Green Lake Public Library, 7354 East Green Lake Drive North, Seattle. PSARA-led senior and near senior discussion group on issues determined by participants. May discussion will be about the Affordable Care Act, Health Care & Medicare.

**PSARA Summer General Membership Meeting:**
12:30-3:00 p.m., Thursday, June 21, Greenwood Community Senior Center, 525 North 85th in Seattle. Guest speaker former representative and governor candidate Jay Inslee. Great potluck...Help determine the future direction of PSARA. Please RSVP to Administrative V.P. Maureen Bo at adminvp@psara.org, or call the office, (206) 448-9646. Please let us know what you will bring for the potluck.

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Puget Sound Alliance for Retired Americans
2800 First Avenue, Room 262
Seattle, Washington 98121
(206) 448-9646

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**While millions...**

... of working Americans get sick and suffer and many face bankruptcy because they have no insurance, no doctor, no money for prescriptions, nothing but staggering medical debt... a few – let’s call them the 1% -- have come up with a new strategy to prolong their parasitic lives.

For a mere million bucks or so, these privileged folks can have installed in their luxurious homes a fully-equipped emergency room with all the gear the White House might have for the President. For an extra few thousand a month, they can get immediate anytime teleconferencing access to top-notch private physicians.