Ryan’s Medicare: Poison for seniors

By Will Parry

In the May issue of The Retiree Advocate, PSARA President Robby Stern summarized the many ugly specifics of Paul Ryan’s proposed budget for 2013 – a budget endorsed by Mitt Romney.

In this article, we single out an aspect of that budget of critical importance to today’s seniors – and tomorrow’s. Our focus is on Medicare. We’ll spell out exactly how the Ryan budget would undermine Medicare’s protections, callously shifting health care costs to the older men and women who rely on it.

The beneficiaries of Ryan’s scheme? The big health insurance companies, the pharmaceutical giants, the medical device makers – in short, the powerful medical-industrial complex.

Ryan has now shelved his proposal of last year for the outright privatization of Medicare. He would still offer seniors a voucher, capped at a harshly inadequate rate, for use with a private insurer. But he would leave Medicare in place as an option that seniors could choose.

This would enable health insurance companies to cherry-pick younger and healthier seniors off Medicare into their appealingly-structured private plans (subsidized by the taxpayers). The sicker

City weighs support for ‘Caring’ campaign

By Robby Stern

Wednesday, June 13 at 1:30 p.m., PSARA members are asked to attend a meeting of the Seattle City Council Housing, Human Services, Health & Culture Committee at Seattle City Hall. The Committee will be considering a resolution that commits the City of Seattle to support the national Caring Across Generations campaign.

The resolution, if passed by the Seattle City Council, directs the City to bring the Caring Across Generations campaign to the National League of Cities for support. The resolution also directs the Seattle City lobbyists at the state and federal levels to advocate for legislation that advances the Caring Across Generations campaign.

If the resolution passes out of the Committee with no dissenting votes on June 13, it will be brought before the entire City Council at 2 p.m. on Monday, June 18. We will also ask PSARA members to attend the full City Council meeting where we will present more than 3000 post cards from Seattle residents (including many PSARA members) supporting the Caring Across Generations campaign.

There have been important developments for the campaign. Senators Tom Harkin and Jay Rockefeller introduced Senate Resolution 453. (S.R. 453) The introduction to the resolution states:

“Expressing the sense of the Senate that supporting seniors and individuals with disabilities is an important responsibility of the United States, and that a comprehensive approach to expanding and supporting a strong home care workforce and making long-term services and supports affordable and accessible in communities is necessary to uphold the right of seniors and individuals with disabilities in the United States to a dignified quality of life.”

We will be asking Senators Murray and Cantwell to sign onto S.R. 453 to demonstrate their support for the Caring Across Generations campaign.

Continued on page 3
Fun, delicious food, and Big Decisions:
It’s the June 21 summer Membership Meeting!

Thursday, June 21, from 12:30 –3 p.m., at the Greenwood Community Senior Center, PSARA will hold our annual summer membership meeting and potluck. The opportunity to socialize with other PSARA members, to hear an important speaker talk about the future of our state, and to help shape the future of PSARA are all bundled into one afternoon.

Our featured speaker, gubernatorial candidate Jay Inslee, will leave time for Q & A, offering a rare opportunity to question him about his vision for Washington in a more intimate setting. The race for governor promises to be hard fought and close.

The choice between the candidates is stark. Jay Inslee supported the Affordable Care Act (ACA). His opponent, Attorney General Rob McKenna, joined the lawsuit to overturn the ACA. If successful, the lawsuit could eliminate many of the improvements that were made to Medicare along with eliminating such reforms as barring exclusions for preexisting conditions, significant expansion of Medicaid, and coverage for kids under 26 through their parents’ healthcare.

Also at the meeting, you will learn about significant organizational changes PSARA will experience in the next several months. After twelve years of affiliation, the national ARA has determined that PSARA does not fit with their organizational model. After explaining what has occurred and what we need to do, the Executive Board will propose a new name for PSARA as well as several Bylaw changes.

The potluck, which displays the skill and creativity of our members, is always delicious and our membership is fun, lively and interesting! Please RSVP to adminvp@psara.org or call the office (206) 448-9646. If no one answers, please leave a message telling us what you will be bringing for the potluck. (See the flyer insert in this issue of the newsletter.)

Mark Twain said it... “Action speaks louder than words, but not nearly as often.”

Join PSARA today and you’ll have the opportunity for both bold action and thoughtful words.

In the last few months, PSARA has marched for immigrant rights on May Day, we rallied with port truckers fighting for decent wages and working conditions, we stood with postal workers facing workplace closures, we picketed with Macy’s workers fighting for a fair contract, and we were there for hospitality workers fighting for job security at the Space Needle and demanding a fair process for organizing at Hyatt at Olive 8.

But you won’t find PSARA members only on the picket line. We have helped to build forums on Social Security, the Caring Across Generations campaign, and a state bank, and we have relentlessly lobbied our elected representatives.

PSARA’s monthly Retiree Advocate wrote the story of Bain Capital four months before the President’s reelection campaign took it up. The Advocate has featured ongoing coverage of the Keystone Pipeline fraud, as well as reporting on all of PSARA's campaigns.

And you know what? You can help. Become one of our 2012 goal of 275 new members today.

Already a PSARA member? Is it time to renew your membership? Or maybe sign up a friend or neighbor. That can be as valuable as walking the picket line because our members make all our actions and our words possible.

Mark Twain would tip his riverboat pilot’s cap to you.
Ryan’s Medicare: Poison for seniors

Continued from page 1

seniors would then be marooned in an ever more costly Medicare program.

As George Zornick wrote in The Nation, “This is ironically perhaps a better deal for the health insurance industry than total privatization. They don’t have to deal with the expensive, unhealthy elderly folks.”

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that, under the Ryan scheme, seniors’ annual health care costs would be $1,200 greater by 2030, and $5,900 greater by 2050.

But that’s not all. The Ryan plan would raise the age of eligibility for Medicare coverage by two months per year, beginning in 2023 and continuing until reaching age 67 in 2034.

This two-year delay in eligibility isn’t mentioned anywhere in Ryan’s 99-page budget document. You have to go to the CBO report on the budget to find it. During the two years from age 65 to age 67, seniors, being not yet eligible for Medicare, would confront the higher out-of-pocket health care premiums, deductibles, co-pays and coverage limitations typical of the private insurance market, chiseling away at their Social Security checks.

Moreover, under the Ryan plan the private insurance industry, and not the federal government, would determine the level of expenditures for senior health care. Here’s how it would work.

All private insurance plans would participate in an annual competitive bidding process. The second lowest bid would establish what the government would pay for health insurance.

But private insurance rates have been climbing at three and four times the rate of today’s Medicare.

The insurance industry has shown no ability to restrain costs – and has no motive to do so. With budgetary control over this major government program in the hands of the very insurance companies that profit from it, Medicare as we have known it would be history.

City weighs support for ‘Caring’ campaign

Continued from page 1

The introduction of S.R. 453 is the first step in the national campaign to pass legislation that will:

1) Create jobs necessary to meet the growing demand for direct care;
2) Transform the quality of current direct care jobs – to include a living wage, access to health insurance and other benefits.
3) Create a career path and training programs that are linguistically and culturally relevant to improve quality of care and safety for care workers.
4) Provide a path to legal status and citizenship for undocumented care workers and their families that is tied to participation in training and certification programs; and
5) Support individuals and families who are hiring direct care workers by increasing access to Medicaid/Medicare, adding long term care as a Medicare benefit, creating a tax credit, and providing training and assistance on hiring and retaining direct care workers. The campaign also plans to support individuals and families who are providing unpaid kin care, through Social Security care-giving credits, paid family leave, and childcare subsidies.

PSARA has joined with Casa Latina, Washington Community Action Network and SEIU 775NW on the steering committee of the Caring Across Generations campaign in Washington.

Passage of the resolution by the Seattle City Council would represent the first such action by any city in the U.S. Help make history and start us on a path of getting ahead of the impending long term care crisis resulting from the aging of the baby boomer generation.

HOLIDAY RALLY: A delegation from PSARA with the banner on the workers’ holiday, May Day. Our members are on hand whenever there’s action in support of working people’s interests.
A two-fold strategy: ‘Inside’ and ‘Outside’

By Robby Stern

As the summer approaches, the election campaigns are heating up. PSARA has not historically endorsed candidates. We do not want to be inundated with candidates seeking our endorsement. The exhausting process of evaluating candidates would greatly diminish our ability to focus on the significant issues we work to influence. But as PSARA members, we share some fundamental values that draw us to PSARA and can serve as a screen for evaluating candidates and issues.

Elections do matter! While we have directed our activism to issues, the outcome of our efforts at the local, state and national levels is greatly impacted by elections. Take a look at the Budget Reconciliation bill that just passed the Republican-controlled House of Representatives. In supporting the Sequester Replacement Reconciliation Act, the majority in the House voted to restore the $55 billion that had been cut from military spending in last year’s debt ceiling deal and instead make many more cuts to vital programs that serve the poor, the elderly, the working class and the vulnerable.

The bill now goes to the Senate, where we are told it will go nowhere. However, we are also told that many of the majority Democrats in the Senate are also opposed to cuts in military spending. While the Democratic leadership in the Senate is promoting the "Buffet" proposal to raise taxes on the wealthiest among us, they will not have the votes to overcome the ridiculous filibuster rule that essentially gives control of the Senate to a minority of senators.

A deal will eventually be cut between the House and the Senate. It is likely that the deal will take care of the defense industry and lead to significant pain for many in the 99%.

What can we do?
We need an "inside and outside strategy." The "inside" strategy involves engaging in the electoral process with our time and, if we can, our money. We evaluate who is closer to our values and try to get them nominated and elected. Often, these are people who we can’t always rely on to stand with us on policy issues that are important to us. Often they are the least bad rather than the good. But the action going on in the House of Representatives demonstrates that we cannot stand aside. Elections do matter.

At the same time, we have to hold these elected officials accountable and demand that they do the right thing. We have to have an "outside" strategy and help build a movement that will politically strengthen the interests of the 99%.

For example, we know that in the next nine to twelve months, critical decisions will be made regarding Social Security and Medicare. With regard to Social Security, politicians like Senators Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray and Representative Adam Smith will be forced to make a choice. Will they support the Simpson-Bowles proposal to raise the retirement age and reduce the cost of living increases for those who rely on Social Security? Or will they support Scrapping the Cap? We have been seeking the support of these three elected officials for Scrapping the Cap. Representatives Jim McDermott and Rick Larsen and many Democratic candidates for the open seats have committed to support Scrap the Cap, but the two senators and Representative Smith have not.

We must be prepared if necessary to demonstrate to these elected officials that their failure to embrace an overwhelmingly popular stance (that is, Scrapping the Cap) will lead to public demonstrations that will target them for their failure. So far they have refused to embrace a solution that will allow the protection and strengthening of Social Security for the remainder of this century, rather than cutting the Social Security benefits that are becoming more and more critical to the 99%.

That is one example of an "outside" strategy that we can consider using in any local, state or national issue where it is required.

I remember fondly the demonstration PSARA held at KVI radio during the debate over health care reform, when nearly one hundred of our members turned out to demonstrate that we would not be scared off by the people who were trying to turn seniors against health reform. We received broad coverage and were able to make our point very clearly.

In the fight to preserve and strengthen Social Security, and in other critical battles down the road, we will need to show our determination again!
One simple step to keep Social Security strong

By Alex Stone

Re lease of the Social Security Trustees’ report in late April shows our Social Security program remains on sound financial footing for at least another generation.

The report also puts to rest the misconception that Social Security is in crisis. It is not. With $2.7 trillion in its trust fund, Social Security will pay full benefits through 2033.

After 2033, Social Security can still pay 75% of benefits, even with no action by Congress. And because of how Social Security calculates benefits, that “75%” of benefits in 2033 will be about the same (in inflation-adjusted dollars) as benefits today.

But we can, and should, do better than that.

Under the “Scrap the Cap” plan, Social Security can pay 100% of benefits after 2033, and even modestly expand benefits today. Congress need only make one simple change: Eliminate Social Security’s cap on taxable income (now set at $110,100) so that high income earners pay the same tax rate as middle class workers.

The additional funding could boost benefits for low-income earners, add credits for individuals (most often women) who take time from work to raise their family, and restore college student benefits that were cut in the 1980’s – all while maintaining the historic link between contributions and benefits.

Scraping the cap is the only solution that would both improve benefits now, and keep Social Security strong for future generations.

Scrap the cap!

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

90-day delay sought in office closures

By Steve Kofahl

Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell joined Congressmen Jim McDermott and Adam Smith May 17 in calling for a 90-day moratorium on the decision to consolidate the International District and Belltown Social Security offices into the Jackson Federal Building.

The purpose of the requested moratorium is to allow time to resolve outstanding issues, including the likely challenges and barriers to access presented by the agency’s choice of site for the more vulnerable and underserved members of the community. The congress members’ letter to SSA Commissioner Michael Astrue and Regional Commissioner Stanley Friendship requested a response by May 25. It stated that our elected representatives not only have their own serious concerns, but that they continue to hear concerns from community partners.

The Social Security Works Washington coalition, led by PSARA President Robby Stern, speaks for forty of those community partners. On April 25, twenty other organizations joined this coalition in the first request to Commissioner Astrue for a moratorium. The letter pointed out that over 300 people attended our January 13 community forum on the issue, and that 1200 petition signatures were delivered to SSA officials at that meeting. OneAmerica weighed in with a letter as well, and letters of concern have also been sent by Congressman Smith and by Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn.

Prominent community leaders and new PSARA members Sharyne Shiu Thornton and Diane Narasaki have shown great leadership in continuing to rally advocates for the affected communities. Their activism and strong resolve has been critical in getting our senators more engaged.

Meanwhile, the claimed savings from the consolidation grow more questionable. The agency will hire a private security guard to escort visitors who lack valid state or federal picture identification, and rather than move what’s in the old offices, it is buying new furniture.

The one consistent message from SSA is that visitors don’t have to come to an office to do most business any way, but can utilize Internet self-service instead. Of course, this is no answer at all for the many people who need easy access to an office to receive personal assistance with the Agency’s complex programs. This includes those who are aged, have physical and mental disabilities, or are non-English speaking.

Our struggle has drawn national attention. The American Federation of Government Employees, the union representing Social Security staff, is working with Congress to ensure that future closures and consolidations come only after SSA tells Congress what criteria will be used, and after the public has been guaranteed the opportunity to voice its concerns and to suggest alternatives.

If no delay is granted, SSA plans to close the existing field offices on June 8, and open the Seattle Metro Jackson Federal Building office on June 12.
European voters reject austerity

By Mike Andrew

In a series of May elections, European voters rejected the austerity policies that have brought the continent’s working families to the brink of catastrophe.

On May 6, Socialist Francois Hollande was elected President of France, defeating Nicolas Sarkozy, the co-architect of European austerity with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. "Europe is watching us, austerity can no longer be the only option," Hollande said in his victory speech. Instead, Hollande promised to refocus European fiscal priorities from budget-cutting to "growth.

During the campaign, Hollande promised to raise taxes on big corporations and people earning more than one million euros a year.

He also wants to raise the minimum wage, hire 60,000 more teachers, and lower the retirement age from 62 to 60 for most workers.

Sarkozy had promised to balance the French budget by 2016 by raising social security taxes and the regressive VAT tax – essentially a sales tax. Sarkozy had raised the retirement age from 60 to 62 in 2010, with the predictable result that unemployment among young workers increased to 23%.

Sarkozy was also in favor of limiting immigration into France from Southern Europe and North Africa.

In Greece – ground zero of the European economic crisis – voters also went to the polls May 6, rejecting the draconian austerity program forced on them by the EU in return for a “bailout” of the faltering Greek banking system.

The two mainstream parties that had forged a “national unity” government to implement the EU-backed austerity program – right-wing New Democracy and socialist PASOK – were rejected by voters, and found themselves without enough seats in parliament to be able to form a new government.

Instead, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), once considered a marginal party, vaulted into a second place finish by promising to reject the EU’s austerity package.

SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras is now considered the odds-on favorite to become Prime Minister after new elections in July.

If the "disease of austerity destroys Greece, it will spread to the rest of Europe," Tsipras warned in a BBC interview after the election.

Banks were profiting at the expense of thousands of European workers – in Spain and Italy, as well as Greece – leaving them in poverty and hardship, he said.

"Therefore the European leadership, and especially Mrs Merkel, need to stop playing poker with the lives of people," Tsipras said.

SYRIZA rejected the idea that if Greeks fail to adhere to the austerity program that has led to 22% unemployment – and over 50% unemployment among workers under 25 – they will have to go it alone outside the EU.

"Our choice is to stay in Europe without austerity policies," Tsipras said. "We are in favor of the euro without the austerity that is destroying it. We are convinced that if the austerity policies continue then the eurozone will be destroyed."

Only three days before the French and Greek elections, British voters slammed the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in elections for municipal council members. The opposition Labor Party, which campaigned against the government’s all-cuts budget, kept the majority in every local council they controlled and picked up majorities in 22 others. The Lib Dems were especially hard-hit, losing majorities in every local council they previously controlled.

Even Angela Merkel suffered a significant defeat, when voters in Germany’s most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia, chose the opposition Social Democrats to lead the state government.

"This is a crashing defeat for Mrs. Merkel and her minister," Social Democrat party leader Andrea Nahles said. "The likelihood has become significantly greater that the next chancellor will be a Social Democrat."

Merkel said on May 16 that she was ready to discuss stimulus programs to get the Greek economy growing again and that she was committed to keeping Greece in the euro zone.
Saving Route 42 for the people who need it

By Will Parry

The King County Council’s decision to eliminate the 42 bus route rather than to restore most of its original route next year, if it stands, will rob the people of Seattle’s most transit-dependent neighborhoods of ready access to the many destinations that are essential to their lives.

The decision has drawn an outpouring of protest and strong community support for Route 42’s original service area, which includes downtown, the International District and neighborhoods along Rainier Avenue and Martin Luther King, Jr. Way South, on to Rainier Beach and Skyway.

Over the past three years, postcards and petitions have flooded King County Council offices, and a crowd of about 300 packed a hearing on the issue. The Puget Sound Alliance for Retired Americans has pledged its full support for retaining the long-standing service hours of Route 42.

The neighborhoods that depend on the 42 are the city’s most diverse, with the lowest incomes and the most troubling health indicators. They have the highest concentration of people of color, immigrants and refugees, households where English is not the primary language, students, seniors and persons with disabilities.

Riders who depend on the 42 bus, include people who live in the most diverse zip code in the nation. These communities have a very compelling need for reliable, affordable transit service.

People use Route 42 to reach ethnic shops, grocery stores and food banks, culturally sensitive and linguistically accessible medical, behavioral health and social services, community centers, churches, temples, schools and jobs.

Light rail is no substitute. Light rail’s mission is to provide rapid service to commuters, moving people through neighborhoods, without local neighborhood stops. Light rail stops are more than a mile apart, not a walkable distance for many patrons. The system is difficult to access, especially for persons with limited or no English, as well for persons with disabilities.

When the 42 bus was originally proposed for elimination in 2009, a Metro official confirmed that the service hours were to be shifted to the South Lake Union trolley, which serves an area with none of the critical needs that characterize Southeast Seattle.

Bus route 42 has historically served dependably the transit dependent people who need it. Metro needs to cut expenditures, but eviscerating Route 42 is the worst place to start.

PSARA joins the world’s huge May Day marches

By Mike Andrew

PSARA members joined a crowd estimated at a thousand for Seattle’s annual May Day immigrant rights march and rally.

While May Day has its historic roots in the struggle for the eight-hour day in the United States, it has always been an international workers’ day, and Seattle’s marchers joined with tens of thousands of working people in other countries to mark the day.

In Athens, thousands of Greeks protesting government austerity measures marched to Syntagma Square in front of the parliament building in the center of the city.

They were joined by tens of thousands in Madrid, also protesting government-backed austerity and depression-level unemployment. Huge rallies also took place in Paris, Rome, and Turin.

In Hong Kong, about 5,000 workers marched demanding a rise in the minimum wage. In Jakarta, Indonesia, more than 9,000 workers marched to the state palace calling for better pay and job protection. In Manila, some 8,000 workers rallied near the Malacanang palace to call for pay increases.

Seattle’s march and rally were organized by El Comite pro Amnistia General y Justicia Social and endorsed by the Martin Luther King County Labor Council and a number of Seattle area unions and social justice groups.

The march demanded “Immigration reform now!” along with “human rights, labor rights, and access to education for everyone.”

Beginning from Judkins Park at 20th Place S and S Dearborn Street, the marchers proceeded to the Federal Building downtown for a rally.

As always, the march was remarkable for its diversity, with priests, ministers, and imams joining union members, retirees, and unemployed workers of every conceivable nationality.

En route they were joined on 4th Avenue by marchers from an Occupy Seattle rally earlier in the day, swelling the crowd to more than 2,000.

According to El Comite organizers, the immigrant rights march was smaller than in previous years, because of police warnings that May Day events organized by other groups might turn violent.

In fact, about noon that day, a group of about 50 so-called “black bloc” protesters split off from an otherwise peaceful Occupy Seattle march and broke windows at the Federal Courthouse and several downtown banks and businesses.

At least eight people were subsequently arrested by Seattle police.

There were noticeably fewer families in attendance, organizers said, and many immigrants felt intimidated by the heavy police mobilization occasioned by the “black bloc” vandalism downtown.
Leah Bolger speaks out for us

(Editor’s note: The following is the statement to the court of Leah Bolger, one of us, a regular citizen, who courageously spoke for us before the so-called Super Committee of Congress, and who was then charged with disruption of the committee.)

I joined the U.S. Navy in 1980 and served on active duty for the next 20 years relatively ignorant of the vastness of the U.S. military machine. I had little understanding of the "military-industrial complex" that President Eisenhower warned us about 50 years ago.

Now I am beginning to understand the enormity of the power that the U.S. military machine holds. It doesn't matter to the government that wars are immoral, illegal or ineffective. Government policies are shaped by the will of the corporate interests.

And so it was in the case of the Super Committee -- a hand-selected committee of 12 senators and representatives who were given extraordinary (some say extra-Constitutional) powers, met in secret, and solicited testimony from not one citizen. My own Congressman did not have access to this committee, but over 250 lobbyists did. I have come to understand what millions of Americans already know -- that the will of the people is of little concern to those in power.

It takes an enormous amount of money to be elected to Congress, and Congress quickly becomes beholden to the interests who financed their elections -- not to the people they are supposed to be representing. The American people rank military spending as their #1 priority, according to the National Opinion Research Center. Health care and education are the top two priorities of the American people by far, yet the allocation of our tax dollars is completely opposite that of the people's desires.

Our elected government repeatedly and consistently ignores the will of the people. So, when I saw an opportunity to literally stand up and speak out on behalf of the American people -- I seized it. I knew I would be arrested, but I also knew that it was a unique and rare opportunity to make sure that the voice of the people was heard. It seems the only way for the average citizen to be heard is through an act of civil disobedience, and indeed, I am the sole citizen who was heard by the Super Committee.

I am pleading guilt, because I readily admit what I did. But in pleading guilty to what I did, I am also pointing an accusing finger at our government, which is completely failing its people.

I have been charged with "Unlawful Conduct -- Disruption of Congress." I only wish that my 52-second interruption could have truly "disrupted" the status quo, because if anything needs to be drastically altered, it's Congress.

I think Your Honor understands that I committed this act out of a sense of responsibility and obligation. I am aware that the potential penalties include community service and fines. I do not intend to pay a fine beyond the victims of violent crimes fund assessment. To do so would violate my personal values. One of the main reasons I committed this act is my objection to the reality that one must pay money to have the ear of Congress.

I would also object to the awarding of community service as a punishment. I consider the work that I do every day as a full-time volunteer antiwar activist to be a service to the community.

The $16 trillion heist

By Will Parry

Between December, 2007 and June, 2010, the Federal Reserve distributed more than $16 trillion in financial support to some of the world’s largest banks and corporations, here in the U.S. and abroad.

Take a minute to absorb that figure: Sixteen trillion dollars.

The gross domestic product of the U.S. is only $14.12 trillion. The entire debt of the U.S. government over its 200-plus year history is only $14.5 trillion. The budget deficit that the austerity nuts are going bananas over is a mere $1.5 trillion.

Yet the Federal Reserve, an entity with no oversight and no accountability, handed out $16 trillion in loans -- at 0% interest, to members of the financial elite. Virtually none of it has been returned.

Remember the TARP bailout bill of 2008? Loans totaling $800 billion were publicly announced, argued over, defended and attacked. Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve, without authority, without consulting anybody, was shoveling $814 billion to Goldman Sachs alone.

And $2.5 trillion to Citigroup. And $2.04 trillion to Morgan Stanley. And another trillion split between Deutsche Bank and the Royal Bank of Scotland. The banking fraternity from Canada to Korea lined up for the big handouts. None of it had been authorized by anybody outside the Federal Reserve. And, but for the audit ordered by Congress, we still wouldn’t have known about it.

And where were the media on this $16 trillion story? With honorable exceptions, they were absorbed in the trivial. How big does a story have to be to get covered in the press and on TV?
The 50 years from the 1880s to the early 1930s saw extraordinary changes in American life. Rapid urbanization, massive immigration and the decades-long “Great Migration” of millions of African-Americans from the South to the North created teeming cities. Rapid industrialization coupled with the world’s largest railroad network made us the leading industrial power in the world. Technological innovations such as the telephone, motion pictures, electrification of factories, cities and homes, automobiles, and the radio revolutionized how many people lived and their views of the future.

Amidst the great changes, the country seethed with discontent as powerful corporations and spectacularly wealthy people amassed unimagined wealth. At the same time, millions of workers and farmers performed grueling work and lived in chronic fear of hard times. People’s standards of living were rising and yet massive poverty remained.

Throughout these decades, the people struggled mightily for a more just system. In very human terms, people wanted an adequate income when they were unemployed, unable to work or too old to work. They wanted their families adequately fed, clothed and housed. They wanted an end of abusive child labor and free compulsory quality education for their children. They wanted a more secure, just and hopeful future free from fear of want and deprivation in the land of plenty. They wanted the right to organize unions, rights and dignity on the job, and safe and healthy workplaces. They wanted a greater voice in political and economic life.

The demands for economic justice were largely thwarted for decades as Corporate America dominated economic and political life throughout most of the period. Frustrated by the two major political parties’ unwillingness to address their great grievances, many people turned to new third parties. Greenbacks, Populists, Socialists, Progressives, Communists and other organizations advocated broad changes.

At the same time, millions of workers struggled to organize unions and create a more democratic workplace in which they earned a fair wage in safe conditions. Lacking legal rights to form unions and facing massive repression from governments supporting corporations, organized labor remained weak.

The growing people’s demands for expanded economic and political justice and rights were severely undercut by deep divisions among the people. First and foremost, widespread racism and anti-immigrant hostility harmed millions and served the “divide and conquer” strategy of corporate America. Culture wars against women’s rights, including the right to vote, deepened the splits among working people, as did issues of prohibition, evolution and religious bigotry against Catholics and Jews. Last but not least, government repression of radical organizations and unions deepened these divisions.

Despite corporate domination and deep divisions among the people, significant people’s victories were won.

Federal constitutional amendments for direct election of senators, a progressive personal income tax, and women’s right to vote were won. Banning corporate campaign contributions was a first step in weakening the corporate stranglehold on national elections. Many state worker compensation and child labor laws were won and free compulsory education spread across many states, although racism denied millions of black children equal quality education.

At the end of the 1920s, corporate America and its political allies seemed firmly in control. Their world view that largely unregulated free enterprise without interference from government, unions or other political movements was best for the people was deeply entrenched in American life. The people were told that an economic and social safety net was not needed.

Six months later, the stock market collapsed and the Great Depression began. It was a truly dark period, yet the seeds of fifty years of fighting for justice were growing in harsh soil and conditions.

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Meetings and Events

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 12:30 p.m. – 2 p.m. Wednesday, June 6, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Avenue, Rm. 226. Discuss PSARA's participation in Seattle City Council resolution supporting Caring Across Generations campaign, developments on the Scrap the Cap campaign and other issue areas including plans for our forum in Sept. on the creation of a State Bank. All PSARA members welcome.

PSARA Outreach Committee Discussion Group: The Greenwood Community Senior Center discussion group is on vacation until the Fall.

Seattle City Council Housing, Human Services, Health & Culture Committee considers Resolution regarding Caring Across Generations campaign: 2 p.m., Wednesday, June 13, in City Council chambers, 600 Fourth Ave, 2nd floor. Please arrive at 1:30 p.m. There is an opportunity for public testimony at the beginning of the committee meeting. (Article & cartoon on page 1)

Seattle City Council considers Caring Across Generations Resolution: 2 p.m., Monday, June 18, City Council Chambers, 600 Fourth Ave, 2nd floor. Provided the City Council Committee passes the resolution on June 13 without a dissenting vote, the full council will consider passage on June 18. (So far we are unaware of any opposition.) Please arrive at 1:30 p.m.

PSARA Summer General Membership Meeting & Potluck: 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. Please rsvp to Administrative V.P. Maureen Bo at adminvp@psara.org, or call the office, (206) 448-9646. Let us know what you will bring for the potluck. (Article on page 2)

PSARA Outreach Committee Discussion Group: June meeting cancelled. Next meeting of discussion group on Thursday, July 12, at Green Lake Public Library, 7354 East Green Lake Drive North, Seattle. PSARA leads senior and near senior discussion group on issues determined by participants. Topic of July discussion will be updates on Citizens United and/or the Affordable Care Act and Campaign Finance.

2012 Seattle Gay Pride March: Sunday, June 24th, gather around 10:30 a.m., march departs around 11 a.m. Meet at 4th & Columbia in downtown Seattle. PSARA will march with the Pride at Work contingent.

“Anything one does every day is important and imposing and anywhere one lives is interesting and beautiful.”
- Gertrude Stein

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

Alex Loorz, 17...

...is the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit filed by teenagers to compel the government and corporate interests to prevent further pollution of the atmosphere and to reverse global warming. The lawsuit relies on the “public trust doctrine,” dating from Roman times, that requires the protection of nature for future generations.