The media appear fixated about when and if a so-called “grand bargain” on our economy will be reached. Wrong question! The question we should be asking is: What should be in a “grand bargain” that works for the average American?

At a time when the middle class is disappearing, 46 million Americans are living in poverty and the gap between the very rich and everyone else is growing wider, we need a “grand bargain” that protects struggling working families, not billionaires.

With corporate profits at record-breaking levels while the effective corporate tax is at its lowest level since 1972, and 1 out of 4 profitable corporations pays nothing in federal income taxes, we need a grand bargain that ends corporate loopholes and demands that corporate America starts helping us with deficit reduction. We must not balance the budget on the backs of the elderly, the children, the sick and the poor. We must not cut Social Security, disabled veterans’ benefits, Medicare, Medicaid, education and other programs that provide opportunity and dignity to millions of struggling American families.
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, or visit PSARA on Facebook.

Need to reach us?
Here’s a directory of Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action email addresses:
PSARA or its President,
Robby Stern: president@psara.org
Administrative Vice President,
Maureen Bo: adminvp@psara.org
Outreach Vice President,
Susan Levy: outreachvp@psara.org
Secretary, Frieda Takamura
Treasurer, Edyth Koch: treasurer@psara.org
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Chuck Richards & Tom Lux: govrelations@psara.org
Retiree Advocate Acting Editor,
Mike Andrew: msand76@hotmail.com
Our web page: www.psara.org
Web Master, Reed Wacker: info@psara.org
Or phone our office at (206) 448-9646.
If necessary, leave a message and your phone number. We’ll call you back.

SPECIAL EVENT: Greenlake Discussion Group

By Susan Levy, PSARA Outreach Vice President

Come hear PSARA President, Robby Stern, talk about Caring Across Generations, -- a major focus of PSARA's work. The forum will take place Wednesday April 24th at the Green Lake Library from 1:00 to 2:30 in the downstairs meeting room.

Caring Across Generations is a national movement making sure people with disabilities and seniors get the support they need to continue to live in their homes, that the workers who provide that support have quality jobs, and that workers and consumers are treated with dignity and respect.

In Washington, our state-wide coalition of 27 organizations representing seniors, people with disabilities, caregivers, domestic workers, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and family members is working together for dignity and respect. PSARA serves on the Steering Committee for this state-wide coalition.

For further information contact Susan Levy, PSARA Outreach Vice-President at sjlevy.01@gmail.com.

Introducing PSARA’s new Environmental Committee

By Tom Lux and Kristen Beifus, Co-chairs of PSARA’s Environmental Committee and PSARA Executive Board members

PSARA inaugurated our new Environmental Committee at its first meeting Thursday, March 14th. Why should PSARA have an Environmental Committee when we are already very active in so many economic and social justice issues?

Many in PSARA feel that climate change is an economic and social justice issue and that PSARA is in a good position to lend its voice to the environmental discussion. A number of our members are or have been very active in the Labor Movement. We know what it is like to be out of work, we know what it is like to fight for family wage jobs, we know the difference between a good job and a bad job, and we also know that we as workers deserve a healthy environment and a sustainable future for our children and grandchildren.

All too often we are given a false choice by the fossil fuel industry and others between jobs for our unemployed brothers and sisters and having clean air and water and doing something about climate change. This is divisive of our collective movement which works together to scrap the cap, and improve social security, support labor rights, and work together to strengthen Medicare, and Medicaid. On climate change just as on these other issues, we need to put our heads together to encourage good, sustainable jobs in Washington State.

At our meeting PSARA members discussed ways we can contribute to this dialog. We started to put together a strategy that includes allies, resources, and research to help us identify and mobilize around sustainable jobs that are needed now and will not be a threat to our environment.

We know that everyone is not going to agree on every issue, however we need to first promote understanding of the real issues we are facing. PSARA’s goal is to work with our allies in the labor and environmental communities to support concrete programs whose goal is to create good family wage jobs that are consistent with the need to confront the challenges of climate change.

PSARA’s Environmental Committee’s next meeting is Thursday, April 11th at 10am in the Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226. For more information about this committee please contact Tom or Kristen at envirocommittee@psara.org

Please join this dynamic committee -- open to everyone who lives on our shared planet!
Raising the age for Social Security

Continued from Page 1

19.6 years. That’s just 6 years longer than in 1939, and less than 2 years longer than in 1979 – and even that number over generalizes, because it ignores other factors that affect life expectancy, including gender, race, and income. A Social Security Administration study found income inequality plays a big role in life expectancy. For workers in the top half of the earnings distribution, average life expectancy is 86.5, but for those in the bottom half it’s just 81 — a gap of more than 5 years that continues to grow.

Race is another important factor for life expectancy at age 65. The most recent data show black men reaching age 65 have an average life expectancy of just 81, three and-a-half years less than the average for the total U.S. population. Total life expectancy for African Americans is 74.5, while it is 78.8 for white Americans.

American workers that are living longer are, on average, better educated, more affluent, and white. Further raising the retirement age will undoubtedly have a profoundly negative impact on millions of Americans, primarily those with less education, lower earnings, and racial minorities.

Alex Stone is Communications and Technology Manager at Economic Opportunity Institute and a PSARA member.

Grand Bargain, Grand Sellout

Continued from Page 1

Before we pass a grand bargain, we have got to take a hard and sober look at what’s happening economically in our country today. In doing so, we must acknowledge that the United States has the most unequal distribution of wealth and income of any major country on earth and that inequality is worse today than at any time since the late 1920s. Today, the wealthiest 400 individuals in this country own more wealth than the bottom half of America - 150 million Americans. The top 1 percent owns 38 percent of all financial wealth, while the bottom 60 percent owns just 2.3 percent. Incredibly, the Federal Reserve reported last year that median net worth for middle-class families dropped by nearly 40 percent from 2007-2010. That’s the equivalent of wiping out 18 years of savings for the average middle-class family.

The distribution of income is even worse. If you can believe it, the latest study on the subject showed that all of the new income gained from 2009-2011 went to the top 1 percent. ALL of the new income!

In America today, the average middle-class family has seen its income go down by nearly $5,000 since 1999, adjusting for inflation. Real unemployment is not 7.7 percent, it is 14.3 percent, counting those workers who have given up looking for work or who are working part time when they want to be working full time. While youth unemployment is exceptionally high, millions of young people are struggling with student loans they can’t afford to pay back. While we talk about the need to strengthen the middle class, we have to understand that more than half of the new jobs that have been created since 2010 are low-wage jobs paying people between $7.80 and $13.80 an hour.

That’s the economic reality facing a large majority of our people, and that’s what has to be taken into consideration when we discuss deficit reduction and a “grand bargain.”

As a member of the Senate Budget Committee, here are my priorities:

We need a budget that puts millions of Americans back to work in decent-paying jobs by rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure and transforming our energy sector away from fossil fuels and into renewable energy and energy efficiency.

We need a budget that keeps the promises we have made to our seniors, veterans, and the most vulnerable by protecting Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid benefits.

We need a budget that makes sure that the wealthiest Americans and most profitable corporations pay their fair share of taxes. We must end corporate loopholes that allow Wall Street banks, large corporations and the wealthy to avoid more than $100 billion a year in federal taxes by stashing their profits in the Cayman Islands and other tax havens.

A federal budget is not just a set of numbers. It is a value statement of what we, as a nation, stand for. We must fight for a grand bargain that stands for justice, opportunity and the needs of our middle class. We must reject any approach that continues the economic assault on working families.

Sen. Sanders is a member of the Senate Budget Committee that Sen. Patty Murray chairs.

Low income transit fares

Continued from Page 1

fare and PSARA is supporting this effort. In December 2012, a coalition of organizations, led by the Transit Riders Union, delivered a letter to the King County Council signed by 28 organizations including PSARA, supporting a strong low income fare program. We met with King County Council Chair Larry Gossett who expressed support for our effort.

The King County Council created a

Low Income Options Advisory Committee to study the issue and make recommendations. The author of this article, representing the Transit Riders Union, is a member of that committee. The TRU and the Low Income Transit Fare Coalition is working to make sure the recommendations of the Advisory Committee are as good as possible. We are also working to identify a funding source to subsidize the low income fare.

Ultimately it will be the King County Council that decides whether to act. That’s why the Transit Riders Union is asking all transit riders and supporters of a low income fare to sign the petition to be delivered to the Council on July 1. On that date, the Advisory Committee will submit its recommendations. We need to show our elected representatives that we care about keeping public transit affordable for everyone.

Katie Wilson is General Secretary of the Transit Riders Union and a PSARA member.
They Can Do Better (or Worse!)
By Robby Stern

The first big “cut off” in the 2013 legislative session has occurred. It marks the deadline for passing bills from the chamber in which legislation originated. It is a good opportunity to do an initial evaluation of the work of the House and Senate.

If anyone had doubt that the betrayal by “Democratic” Senators Tom and Sheldon has led to firm Republican control of the Senate, the legislation passed by the Senate leading up to the cut off should dispel that doubt. Here are a few of the bills.

The Senate approved SB 5726 undermining Seattle’s Paid Sick Days ordinance. It exempts employers not headquartered in Seattle. The effect would impact thousands of workers in Seattle whose employer headquarters is outside the city. Sadly, four Democrats voted with the Republicans including Senators Steve Hobbs, Tracey Eide, Jim Hargrove and Brian Hatfield. Hopefully the House will kill this legislation.

The Senate attacked the wages of construction workers by passing legislation undermining the “prevailing wage” standards of our state. Prevailing wage law requires contractors to pay the industry standard when public funds pay for construction projects. The Republicans plus Senators Tom & Sheldon were joined by Sen. Mullet from Issaquah in passing SB 5107.

The Senate also passed SB 5158 which weakens our state law on payment of minimum wage and overtime. The vote was 25 – 24 with no Democrats other than Senators Tom and Sheldon joining the unanimous Republicans.

Fortunately, two bills, one creating a subminimum wage and the other repealing the Family and Medical Leave Act, did not reach the Senate floor for a vote.

As the Senate begins to craft their proposed budget for the next two years, their leadership, including Senator Tom, has stated there is no need for new revenue...no tax loop hole closures and no extension of existing temporary taxes. This sounds very much like the Republicans in the U. S. House of Representatives. If the Washington State Senate majority caucus has their way, we will have a state version of federal sequestration with vital programs being cut to the bone and many workers either losing their jobs or suffering reductions in their compensation.

What about the Washington House of Representatives? They are under Democratic control. What did they do and what did they fail to do?

They passed some good bills.

HB 1413, the Washington Voting Rights Act, prime sponsored by PSARA member, Rep. Luis Moscoso, won approval. It prohibits election districts that are drawn or maintained in a manner that denies an equal opportunity for members of a race, color, or language group to elect candidates of their choice or influence the outcome of an election. It also establishes the right to sue to correct such discrimination.

There were several bills that were favorable to education workers. For example, community and technical college faculty, particularly part-time faculty, asked for the opportunity to achieve higher wages. HB 1348 represents progress toward achieving that goal.

HB 1840 bars people with no-contact orders, protection orders or restraining orders from possessing guns.

HB 1631 established a Joint Legislative Executive Committee on Aging and Disability Issues. That Committee is to profile Washington’s current elderly and disabled population and its needs. They are to establish an inventory of the available services and supports. The Committee must also establish a profile of the state’s elderly and disabled population in 2025, develop an anticipated inventory of future services and supports that will be needed. The Committee is also to develop a strategy of actions that the state may take to prepare for future demographic trends of the elderly and disabled populations and propose legislation to meet their demands. Part of the Committee’s mandate is to propose resources for housing and transportation programs to help persons who are elderly or disabled to maintain their independence. The Committee is to propose options for the financing of long term care.

These pieces of legislation are good but the House failed to tackle some really important issues.

HB 1313, one of PSARAs legislative priorities, would have expanded Paid Sick Days statewide. It failed to pass from the House. It would have been a perfect counter measure to the Senate attack on Paid Sick Days. It could have helped millions of Washington workers who have to decide whether to go to work sick and put others at risk or suffer a financial loss and stay home. It would have assisted family members who want to stay home with a sick family member but are unable to afford a loss of pay. This should have been a no brainer for Democrats who maintain they stand up for progressive values.

HB 1457, another PSARA priority, would have expanded and funded the Family and Medical Leave Act. It would have provided up to 12 weeks of paid leave to care for a new child, a sick family member or a worker’s own serious health condition. A fund administered by the state would have been created by a small payroll contribution from workers and employers. The Democratic controlled House failed to act on this progressive piece of legislation.

Other worthy bills upon which the House failed to act include legislation establishing safe staffing levels in hospitals, assuring meal and rest breaks for hospital employees, and regulating mandatory overtime for hospital staff.

Continued Page 11
Hospital mergers threaten reproductive choice and end-of-life care

By Mike Andrew

In the past year, ten hospital mergers have been initiated in Washington state, which may result in private Catholic healthcare organizations taking over formerly public hospitals.

Concentration of medical services in the hands of fewer and fewer providers is never a good thing, and in this case the mergers threaten basic patient rights, including reproductive choice and end-of-life care.

The ACLU has threatened to file suit to block the latest merger, reported in February, on the grounds that hospital policies should “be based on medical ethics and state law, not religious doctrine.”

At issue is the decision of Skagit County hospital commissioners to hand over operations of their United General Hospital to the Catholic PeaceHealth group for the next 50 years.

“We are deeply concerned that PeaceHealth’s religiously-based policy of restricting access to reproductive and end-of-life healthcare services violates the Washington constitution and state law,” ACLU says in a letter to the Skagit commissioners dated February 8.

“As a government entity, the Skagit Public Health District No. 304 is bound by the Washington Constitution. The Washington Constitution provides that no public money or property shall be used to support any religious establishment.” (Article 1, Section II) The letter goes on to say, “By providing an annual subsidy to PeaceHealth and charging only nominal rent to lease United General Hospital and other public health facilities to PeaceHealth, the Hospital District is impermissibly supporting the religious restrictions on reproductive and end-of-life services.”

The letter also states that the United General Hospital merger would violate the state’s Reproductive Parity Act, which empowers every individual “with the fundamental right to choose or refuse birth control,” and every woman the right to have an abortion.

Catholic hospitals now account for more than 12% of health-care institutions in the United States, according to the Catholic Health Association of the United States, which means that roughly one in eight Americans seeks treatment at one. In the Northwest, our percentage of Catholic hospitals is much higher — 44% and growing.

Three of the largest health-care systems in the Northwest — PeaceHealth, Providence Health and Services, and Franciscan Health System — are Catholic entities, and they’re busy making new deals in our state. According to MergerWatch, a nonprofit that tracks Catholic hospital mergers across the country, PeaceHealth currently operates nine Northwest hospitals and 73 medical centers.

Already, nearly half of all patients who seek hospital treatment in this state will go to a Catholic hospital, whether they know it or not. For example, Swedish Medical Center, Seattle’s largest non-profit health care provider, has been working in partnership with Providence, a Washington-based Catholic institution, for the last year. Providence now operates 32 hospitals in Alaska, California, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.

As a condition of this relationship, Swedish agreed to stop performing abortions except in emergency situations where the mother’s life is at immediate risk. Fortunately for Seattle women, Swedish will refer patients to a Planned Parenthood clinic in a neighboring building, but not all Catholic-operated hospitals are so liberal.

The problem is not that Catholics have religious views that may or may not be shared by patients who seek treatment at Catholic hospitals. The real problem is that, unlike public hospitals, church institutions incorporate their religious views into Ethical and Religious Directives (ERDs), drafted not by medical professionals but by Catholic bishops, that determine who gets what kind of treatment.

The church monitors the implementation of these directives through hospital ethic committees overseen by regional bishops like Seattle Archbishop Peter Sartain, and doctors are required to accept his direction.

“Any partnership... must respect church teaching and discipline,” one directive states.

“Catholic health institutions may not promote or condone contraceptive practices;” another directive says, and “Abortion... is never permitted.”

Common medical procedures like vasectomies and tubal ligations are also prohibited. Egg and sperm donors are deemed “contrary to the covenant of marriage;” surrogate motherhood is prohibited because it denigrates “the dignity of the child and marriage;” and doctors at Catholic hospitals cannot help infertile couples conceive artificially — using their own eggs and sperm — because test-tube babies “separate procreation from the marital act in its unitive significance.”

PeaceHealth CEO Nancy Steiger also stated flatly that she would not assist terminally ill patients who ask for help in dying with dignity and a minimum of pain.

“Patients experiencing suffering that cannot be alleviated should be helped to appreciate the Christian understanding of redemptive suffering,” Steiger said.

These regulations not only contradict standard medical practices and the rights of patients, but also the clear will of Washington citizens. In 1970 Washington voters decided to legalize abortions, three years before Roe v. Wade, and we have consistently upheld a woman’s right to access abortion services since then.

In 2008, 59% of Washington voters approved a statewide “Death with Dignity” initiative.

Sen. Kevin Ranker has introduced a bill that would require new or expanding hospitals to prove that they provide for all women’s health care, family planning, and end-of-life services. SB 5586 has 11 co-sponsors.
We, the Undersigned, support a Low Income Reduced Fare

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To sign this Petition, you do not need to be a registered voter. You need only be a King County resident who supports a Low Income Reduced Fare program and believes that public transit should be affordable for all.

RETURN PETITION SHEETS TO: PSARA, 2800 First Avenue, Room 262, SEATTLE, WA 98121
The Stand: Your source for daily labor news
By David Groves

There once was a time when labor issues and progressive causes were not only extensively covered in the local media, they appeared in newspapers published by the unions themselves.

The University of Washington's Labor Press Project documents the union newspapers in the Pacific Northwest that were a critical part of the labor movement in the 1900s. Newspapers like the Seattle Union Record, The Industrial Worker and the Washington State Labor News – published by the Washington State Labor Council from 1924 to 1965 – thrived by offering a progressive populist source of information that was a welcome alternative to the commercial newspapers.

Over the second half of the 20th Century, those newspapers gradually disappeared. They were sometimes replaced by labor reporters at the commercial newspapers who covered the union beat. Eventually those reporters disappeared, too. And now, the commercial newspapers themselves are shrinking and disappearing.

That leaves those of us who care about unions and progressive issues with very few news outlets to learn about what’s happening in the labor movement. You’re reading one of the good ones right now, your monthly Retiree Advocate newsletter.

But now, there is a new daily labor “newspaper” available online in Washington State called The Stand – www.TheStand.org – that offers interactive news and opinion from across the state that hasn’t gone through the corporate filter of the for-profit media.

A project of the Washington State Labor Council and its affiliated unions, The Stand was launched on May Day 2011 to restore the kind of progressive populist source of information that once thrilled, but has disappeared. It features daily news about and for working people. Its reports and opinion columns focus on creating and maintaining quality jobs, improving our families’ quality of life, promoting public policies that will restore shared prosperity, and other things that the rest of us care about. Plus, The Stand’s Calendar of Events lists labor rallies, conferences, workshops, and other events across the state.

In one week, The Stand featured news coverage of the paper workers Nippon Paper strike in Port Angeles, United Grain’s lockout of longshore workers in Vancouver, federal government workers National Day of Action to oppose federal sequestration budget cuts, Boeing technical workers approving the Boeing contract, letter carriers “Save 6-Day” rallies to preserve Saturday mail delivery, proposed legislation in Olympia that would undermine our state minimum and prevailing wage laws, a new report that finds Sea-Tac’s workforce standards are lower than those of other West Coast airports, and much more.

And that was just one week. Who knows what will be next!

The Stand is a free service and accepts no advertising. You can read it by visiting the website or by subscribing to receive it via email every weekday morning by 10 a.m. (Just click on “Join Our Email List” on the right side of the home page at www.TheStand.org to subscribe.) You can also “like” it on Facebook or follow it on Twitter for links to every new story as it is posted.

The Stand has quickly become a national model for electronic union publications. It swept the 2012 International Labor Communications Association awards in its category, winning First Awards honors for Best Content, Best Design and General Excellence.

I’m the Editor of The Stand. I have been writing and publishing news and opinion about Washington State since joining the WSLC staff in 1992. But there are many other progressive voices — both inside and outside the labor movement — who contribute content to The Stand.

So what are you waiting for? Go check out The Stand right now and subscribe to receive it every weekday via email. If you have any questions about it, or would like to submit a news article or opinion column, email me at david.groves@thestand.org.

David Groves is Editor of The Stand and a PSARA member.
Three years ago, on March 23, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, or ObamaCare, was passed. It was the most significant reform to our health care system since the passage of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965 and has faced as much controversy. Only a year ago, the law was threatened by both a looming election and a potentially negative Supreme Court ruling, but both supported this landmark legislation.

There was no debating that reform was needed. For years medical bills have been the number one source of personal bankruptcy in America and rising health care costs were the biggest driver of our national debt. Health insurance companies dropped enrollees when they became ill and many couldn’t get insurance to begin with. Financially and morally, we were on an unsustainable path.

Since its passage, the health law has helped slow the growth in premium increases by requiring insurers to justify large rate hikes and spend at least 80% of individual’s premiums on health care benefits and quality improvement. Soon, lifetime caps on care will be a thing of the past and preexisting conditions will no longer be used to deny coverage. And that’s not to mention the quality health care system if the people who need reforms don’t know about them.

That’s why we’re getting started early. Washington State is ahead of the curve when it comes to Affordable Care Act implementation and we need to stay that way. Reforms can’t improve our health care system if the people who need reforms don’t know about them.

Though many PSARA members might already get their insurance from Medicare, your businesses and networks may benefit from certain insurance changes. Trusted friends and family will always be better educators than a Congressional newsletter or event, so I am asking you to help us spread the word.

To find out about Washington State’s marketplace, visit Washington HealthPlanFinder’s website: wahbexchange.org.

More information is available at healthcare.gov, where you can find out if you, your family, or your business is eligible for tax credits and sign up to get email and text updates.

As ranking member on the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, I will continue to fight to build on Obamacare so that we are able to bring everyone into the “house of health” and to make quality health care truly affordable for all. It’s important, however, that we embrace the positive changes that have already been made.

Legislators can’t change this system alone. It will take a community effort to make health insecurity a thing of the past, but it is essential to the health of our citizens, infrastructure, and economy.

Jim McDermott, D-Wash., is the ranking member on the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee.
401Ks are a disaster!

By Duncan Black

Recent and near-retirees, the first major cohort of the 401(k) era, do not have nearly enough in retirement savings to even come close to maintaining their current lifestyles.

We need an across the board increase in Social Security retirement benefits of 20% or more. We need it to happen right now, even if that means raising taxes on high incomes or removing the salary cap in Social Security taxes.

Over the past few decades, employees fortunate enough to have employer-based retirement benefits have been shifted from defined benefit plans to defined contribution plans. We are now seeing the results of that grand experiment, and they are frightening.

Frankly, that’s an optimistic way of putting it. Let me be alarmist for a moment, because the fact is the numbers are truly alarming. We should be worried that large numbers of people nearing retirement will be unable to keep their homes or continue to pay their rent.

According to the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, the median household retirement account balance in 2010 for workers between the ages of 55-64 was just $120,000. For people expecting to retire at around age 65, and to live for another 15 years or more, this will provide for only a trivial supplement to Social Security benefits.

And that’s for people who actually have a retirement account of some kind. A third of households do not. For these people, their sole retirement income, aside from potential aid from friends and family, comes from Social Security, for which the current average monthly benefit is $1,230.

There are good proposals out there for improving the private aspect of our retirement system. Having employer-based 401(k) contributions be opt-out rather than opt-in is one such proposal. There are other commendable suggestions for ways to simplify personal financial management.

But none of these ideas will help people who are nearing retirement. Only the possibility of several decades of compound returns makes the personal financing of retirement a realistic idea for most people; those with only a few working years left cannot benefit from this. Absent an unexpected windfall, such as lottery winnings or inheritances, most 60-year-olds lack any capacity to significantly increase their savings.

Even if we do find ways to improve the framework for self-funding retirement, how, exactly, do we expect younger workers, who might benefit from these improvements, to start saving significantly for their retirement? Soaring tuition and fees at universities, combined with the associated soaring student loan borrowing, have led many people to start their working lives already deeply in debt. According to the Project on Student Debt, the members of the class of 2011 with student loans had an average of $26,000 outstanding.

These are mostly 22-year-olds who have never worked full time and who are finding it difficult to find good jobs in the age of the Great Recession. They’re beginning their working lives in the hole. Understandably, and necessarily, retiring that debt is going to be a priority over retirement savings. One might imagine that saving for a mortgage down payment and even spending a few bucks to enjoy life might be priorities too. At the very minimum, beginning their personal retirement savings will be delayed by years.

People who go beyond undergraduate education and go on to graduate or professional schools can find themselves even more deeply in debt. The cost of law school is prohibitive for most. Many graduates effectively find themselves with a mortgage-sized debt but without the house.

Those who, for whatever reason, did not choose to further their studies might lack the large levels of debt, but they also generally lack the opportunities to obtain jobs with decent wages and benefits, or any benefits at all.

If the consensus is that we need policies in place to ensure that the vast majority of people have at least a comfortable retirement, then we need to adjust our current failing policies. Expecting people to save sufficiently for their retirement, even if those savings are subsidized by our tax code, is unrealistic.

The 401(k) experiment has been a disaster, a disaster which threatens to doom millions to economic misery during the later years of their lives. Proposals to improve our system of private retirement savings -- even good ones -- will offer little to no help for the baby boomers who are currently nearing retirement, and are also unlikely to be of sufficient help for current younger workers. We need to increase Social Security benefits, now and in the future. It’s the only realistic way to provide people with guaranteed economic security and comfort post-retirement.

Duncan Black writes the blog Eschaton under the pseudonym of Atrios and is a fellow at Media Matters for America. He holds a doctorate in economics.

Senate says No to Chained CPI

Sen. Bernie Sanders authored an amendment to the Senate budget which passed on Saturday, March 23. Sen. Sanders amendment, which passed unanimously, opposed switching to the chained CPI in calculating Social Security benefits. The amendment is included in the final budget which passed the Senate. In a statement released after the vote, Sanders stressed that the Senate is clearly opposed to chained CPI and will oppose any bill that includes it. If implemented, chained CPI would cut Social Security benefits for 55 million Americans, including retirees, disabled veterans, and the surviving spouses and children of veterans.
Cyprus was so successful in expanding its banking sector that by 2013 it accounted for 30% of the country’s total economic activity. In doing so, Cyprus became the Cayman Islands of the Mediterranean – a tax-haven for European investment fund managers and Russian oligarchs.

Prior to the global financial crisis beginning in 2007-2008, Cyprus’s debt was lower than the European average, and declining. But the crash of US sub-prime mortgage markets had serious consequences. By 2009, the Cypriot economy was in decline, mainly due to contraction of tourism and the shipping industry.

Because 80% of Cypriots are ethnically Greek, and Greece sponsored Cyprus’s entry into the EU, Cypriot banks invested heavily in Greek government bonds. With a total GDP of less than 20 million Euros, Cypriot banks held Greek debt amounting to 22 billion Euros. Cyprus was therefore extremely exposed when the EU imposed austerity measures on the Greek government, causing its economy to collapse. When the EU allowed Greece to mark down its bonds in 2011, Cypriot banks took a hit from which they never recovered.

In June 2011, explosives stored at a Cypriot naval base accidently blew up, killing dozens of people and destroying the country’s largest power plant, which was located next to the base. More than half the country was left without electricity, including the capital city, Nicosia.

Cyprus was then forced to borrow heavily from European banks to rebuild its power system, and secure an emergency loan from Russia to refinance its existing debt.

Finally, in November 2012, the Cypriot government secured an EU bailout. The bailout did not come without a price, however. As they did in Greece, the EU insisted on severe austerity measures – layoffs of public employees, deep cuts in pensions and social benefits, increases in medical deductibles, reductions in salaries, and increases in regressive sales and fuel taxes.

The formula was the same as in Greece, and the result was the same. Rather than improving Cyprus’s financial situation, the austerity program led to further economic contraction. Unemployed workers began liquidating their bank accounts to pay their bills. At last, Cypriot banks could no longer cope with the situation, and they shut their doors on March 15.

The EU agreed to an additional payment to Cyprus of 10 billion Euros, but only on condition that the Cypriot government kicked in 5.8 billion Euros by confiscating savings accounts held in the country’s banks.

According to the BBC, European fund managers knew this was coming, and had already taken the precaution of moving their holdings elsewhere, leaving the Russians – and the Cypriots themselves – to take the hit.

The Cypriot parliament unanimously rejected the EU plan on March 19, and tens of thousands of workers poured into the streets to protest their government’s willingness to make them the victims of EU demands. Alternate plans, which may hit only the largest accounts, are now being negotiated.

Banks reopened March 28, but Cyprus’s second-largest bank is now out of business, and its largest bank is being acquired by foreign investors. It remains unclear whether Cyprus will be able to remain in the Eurozone.

Jeroen Dijsselbloem, head of the Eurozone’s finance ministers, has suggested the Cyprus model – forcing local savings account holders to pay for EU loans – might be applied in future EU bailouts.
Government Relations Committee to Query Candidates  

By Tom Lux and Chuck Richards, PSARA Governmental Committee Co-chairs

Our members deserve to know how candidates for local office feel about issues that are of great concern to PSARA members. To help keep our members informed the Government Relations Committee (GRC) will be developing a short questionnaire for local political candidates.

This year we will be concentrating on only a few races: the Seattle Mayor, Seattle City Council, King County Executive, and King County Council. If this educational process proves worthwhile, as we think it will, we may expand the scope in the future.

We would like you to be involved in developing our process. If you have any questions related to PSARA issues that you would like us to ask the candidates let us know. The GRC will review all the questions submitted and select a few of the best to query the candidates.

We also welcome your input on how you would like to learn the results of these candidate questionnaires.

A note from Will Parry:

We received the following note from our beloved 92 year old Editor and President Emeritus. He is an inspiration to all of us who have been fortunate enough to know him and work with him.

Robby,

Please convey to the membership my appreciation for the many kind and thoughtful expressions afforded me. I wish nothing more than to rejoin them. Toward that end I am working to rebuild my health and strength. I hope that day will come soon.

In solidarity,

Will Parry

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

PSARA Environmental Committee: 10a.m. – 11:30 a.m., Thursday, April 11, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First AV, Room 226, Seattle. All members welcome as PSARA Environmental Committee continues developing an environmental program for PSARA.

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 12:30 – 2 p.m., Friday, April 12, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First AV, Seattle. All members welcome as we develop a questionnaire for local government candidates and a procedure for informing our members of the responses to our questionnaire.

PSARA Executive Board Meeting: 1 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, April 18, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Avenue S., Seattle. All PSARA members are welcome.

Green Lake Discussion Group: 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 24, Green Lake Library, 7354 East Green Lake Drive N., Seattle. Robby Stern will lead a discussion of the Caring Across Generations campaign.

Overheard:

"If the environment was a bank the United States would have saved it already!"

- Hugo Chavez, President of Venezuela