Arkansas Oil Spill: Warning for the Future?
By Mike Andrew

On March 29, a river of oil washed through the little town of Mayflower, Arkansas.

The oil belonged to Exxon Mobile, and it spilled into the streets of Mayflower when a pipeline ruptured. Although Exxon Mobile initially admitted to spilling only 4,500 barrels of oil, later reports put the figure at 12,000 barrels – more than 500,000 gallons.

While this is a minor disaster compared to the nearly 5 million barrels, or 210 million gallons, BP spilled in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, it’s an important event because of the kind of oil the pipeline was carrying.

The pipeline running through Mayflower was carrying tar sands oil from Wabasca, Alberta, Canada to Nederland, Texas, along a route roughly parallel to the proposed Keystone pipeline. Same route, same oil, same safety issues.

Continued on Page 5

U.S. Capitalism: Bad For Your Health
By Bob Shimabukuro, PSARA Executive Board Member and Associate Editor

"You sick all the time," my dad would say. "Body weak. Cannot do physical labor. Got to use your brain. That's the only way you going to live." That was about 60 years ago.

It seems like just yesterday I was listening to aging Nisei in Seattle in conversation, which almost always, ended up talking about their health. Or more to the point, about their various challenges to their health, like comparing the merits of various kinds of kidney dialysis treatments. "Okay," I thought then. "When I get old I am not going to be talking about my maladies."

Fast forward 20 years later at a monthly lunch get together of older friends, I realized that we were doing just that, talking about arthritis, gout, plantar fasciitis, various forms of cancer, radiation, brain tumors, and who knows what.

"Stop," I said. "Let's stop talking about our ailments."

Everyone agreed. But then, a latecomer walked into the meeting, "Hey, haven't seen you for a while. How're you're doing, what are you doing these days?"

I answered without thinking, "Okay, just dealing with some joint (body, not marijuana) problems. Trying to get my health back."

Continued on Page 5

The Phony Crisis
By Rep. Jim McDermott

The last few months, in the other Washington, have been all about the budget: the “fiscal cliff” debates, the unbelievably senseless package of cuts called “sequestration,” and various budget proposals. With hearing after hearing, and bill after bill, it often seems like the budget is all we talk about anymore, or more specifically, the debt.

Ever since President Obama took office, the Representatives who voted for billions in Bush tax cuts and two unfunded wars can't stop harping on our national debt.

Of course this is nothing new. Budget hawks and neocons have been preaching economic doom and gloom for decades. It’s the best, and maybe only, argument for their true agenda: tax breaks for big corporations and the wealthy and an end to the social safety net. Every program that helps vulnerable people has to be cut and every investment is too expensive because nothing is sacred when we're worshiping at the altar of the “Deficit Crisis.”

Continued on Page 5
Bob Shimabukuro Appointed to Executive Board

The Executive Board voted to appoint Bob Shimabukuro to the PSARA Executive Board subject to a vote by the general membership. Bob retired from numerous occupations including freelance writer/editor, community organizer, woodworker, artist-craftsman and restaurateur/chef. He has been a volunteer in progressive change work for more than 50 years including farm worker rights, anti-Vietnam War, anti-apartheid, and most recently in Asian/Pacific Islander(API) community-building work in Seattle.

Bob is the founding member/director of the Asian Pacific AIDS Council, an education and prevention group in the API community. He has written extensively on his brother’s bout with AIDS.

He authored the book Born in Seattle: The Campaign for Japanese American Redress, published by the University of Washington Press. He constructed the award winning Wing Luke Museum exhibit “EO 9066: 50 years before and 50 years after” which covered the century of Japanese Americans in the U.S. Executive Order 9066 was the presidential order which allowed the military to “exclude” anyone they deemed a security threat from the west coast which led to the incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans.

We are privileged to have Bob join the PSARA Board.

PSARA Summer Membership Meeting and Potluck

It is time for one of PSARA’s fun and informative annual traditions. On Thursday, June 20, beginning at 12:30 p.m., we will gather for our summer meeting and potluck. We will be at a new location, the South Side Commons, located at 3518 South Edmunds St., in Columbia City, Seattle. (There is a flyer on Page 7 of this newsletter with more details about the event and parking, etc.)

At our business meeting, you will be asked to approve the appointment of two new Executive Board members. You will hear a short presentation from our lobbyist, Pam Crone, about the 2013 legislative session. You will also preview and evaluate a new Power Point 10 minute presentation about PSARA.

Don’t worry, there will be lots of time for conversation and socializing. Mark your calendars, prepare a yummy dish, and get prepared to welcome summer with PSARA!

Change the world and have fun doing it!

Working to make the world a more just and humane place doesn’t have to be a grim and thankless task. In fact, it can be downright fun!

That’s one of the great things about being a PSARA member. You can work side by side with like-minded people to change the world, and still share a meal, a drink, and a laugh. And you can share PSARA membership with all your friends and neighbors. They will appreciate PSARA as much as you do! Won’t you help us meet our goal of signing up 250 new members for the year?

Renew your membership when its time, and give a membership to a friend today.
I decide to focus on economics. As my friend Hava repeatedly tells me, in regard to discussions of policy, politics and public will, "It's all about money." I tend to agree with her. We have a morally bankrupt economic system, which rewards people who have money, and punishes families who are trying to move up economically. Families who have very little resources are ignored, except as a lowly paid workforce for jobs most Americans don't want or cannot exist on.


In the first, Brill's "Bitter Pill," chronicles the rise of "non profit" mega hospitals cropping up across the country, the obscene gouging of the patients with unnecessary procedures, inflated prices for lab work and other services, and some insurance companies who go along with it as long as they get a cut. These mega hospitals don't take Medicare patients, because Medicare regulates their payments for various procedures, and I assume, infringes upon their freedom to make a/an "(dis)honest" buck.

Moss' "Extraordinary Science" documents that the junk food industry has known since 1999 (if not before) the bad health effects of their food. And they didn't care. They had, and still have, no intention (or moral sense) to stop selling their cash cows. We're giving people what they want, we aren't holding a gun to people's head, they said. I guess they don't see anything wrong with crack or smack dealers then. Remind you of the tobacco companies? Should. One of the big junk food companies is Kraft's, a division of Philip Morris Tobacco.

Choice? Try to buy worthwhile food on a limited budget? The cheap food is cheap because it's stuffed with "fillers" and "flavors" that help you feel full without having any food value. You feel hungry even when you're full. Gigantic scams. They even get subsidies so that they can sell the stuff dirt cheap.

Like corn syrup. Those big 1-liter Coke specials? Real cheap at your favorite burger house? Heard of Archer Daniels Midland? Large subsidies for corn production. Really. Our government (with money from you & me) paid ADM to produce and sell the stuff. It's the same with a lot of other products. Makes you wonder how First Lady in Charge of Nutrition Michelle can even make a dent. Big Food (think Nestle, Pepsi Cola, Unilever, DuPont, Monsanto, and ADM) pays a lot of money on both sides of the aisle for campaigns.

I could go on and on. But this piece was supposed to be short and to the point. So I'll leave you with two very important slogans important to remember.

SOCIALISM FOR THE RICH, CAPITALISM FOR THE POOR
Popularized by political scientist Michael Harrington's use in his 1962 book, "The Other America: Poverty in the United States." Still relevant today, the phrase and its many variations were heard a lot during the 2008-2009 crash after payouts to "save capitalism." But payouts are going on all the while, and many of them apply to health. The phrase means: If we (corporations) make money from the government investment, we keep all the profits. If we lose money, the public shares the debt.

Strengthen Social Security, SCRAP THE CAP!
There is no crisis in Social Security. It needs to be tweaked, not weakened. All employees pay Social Security taxes, up until a ceiling, known as the "cap," which is currently set at $113,700. What this means is that a person making $113,700 a year pays 6.2% taxes for SS. A person making 1,000,000/year pays only 0.68%, significantly less than one per cent. If everyone paid the same 6.2%, the SS system would be in good shape for future retirees.

As I said earlier, we have a morally bankrupt economic system.

(This article, modified for the PSARA Newsletter, was originally published in the April 3, 2013 International Examiner)
Two Letters and More Struggles

By Robby Stern

The letters in this column reflect some of our on-going work. We anticipate carrying on the fight for lives of dignity and respect for all people in our community.

PSARA members participated in the Caring Across Generations (CAG) first annual lobby day. One of our smart and committed members, Kate Hunter, suggested PSARA hold a bake sale to encourage and perhaps shame the legislature to raise revenue to restore cuts to critically needed home care services and to pay home care workers the level of wages they genuinely deserve.

Following excellent baking, we set up our table in the Capitol (a no-no but we ignored the nosayers for the entire morning). We then moved the bake sale outdoors between the House & Senate office buildings. Kate, Maureen, and other PSARA members actively talked to people who came by. They spoke to a LOT of legislators.

Here is the letter we sent to Governor Inslee, Speaker Chopp, and Senate Majority Leader Rodney Tom:

Dear Leaders:

“On Thursday, March 28, 2013, activist members of Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) held a bake sale in the Legislative Building and on the Capitol grounds to raise money to restore home care hours and improve the pay of home care workers. We raised $268.55. Please find enclosed the form we sent to the State Treasurers’ Office along with the check representing the proceeds raised.

We are not naïve, nor do we have any illusions that our small contribution will make a difference. We were making a statement. We were urging you to do the right thing for the people of Washington by raising the necessary revenue to meet the fundamental needs of the young, old, disabled and poor in our beloved state. We baked the dough and raised the dough to communicate to you that it can be done if you have the will and compassion to do it.

At the time of this writing, the Governor has thankfully called for raising revenue by closing unneeded tax loopholes and extending temporary taxes. Shamefully, the Senate has failed to address the need and is proposing to cut services to some of the neediest in our state as well as cutting programs upon which our residents depend. The House is expected to issue their budget soon.

PSARA is a multigenerational organization committed to raising our voices for a decent, compassionate, and respectful state of Washington. We urge you to follow the Governor’s lead and the lead of our senior citizens who carried out this bake sale. Please place compassion and caring for Washington residents over the political obstacles that you have placed in your way.

Respectfully, Robby Stern, President

The Governor’s budget and the proposed budget of the House identified sources for raising revenue. The Senate budget proposal failed to raise revenue. We await the final outcome of the budget process but we WILL stay engaged.

At the same time, President Obama made a tragic and historic mistake proposing a budget that cuts Social Security and Medicare. He has damaged these programs for decades by providing political cover for the enemies of our earned benefit programs.

The following is the letter that was sent to our entire Washington Congressional delegation:

Dear Representative/Senator __________.

With the release of President Obama’s budget, the threat of unfair and unnecessary cuts to Social Security and Medicare have become palpable. We are asking you to take a stand!

The change to the Chained CPI simply makes the COLA for Social Security even more unfair. We know that the CPI for Urban Wage Earners, the present index, fails to take into account the disproportionate amount seniors and disabled people pay towards health care costs. The Chained CPI is even worse because it will reduce already insufficient annual cost of living adjustments. It was immoral for President Obama to offer this benefit cut as a way to entice the GOP to the table to discuss revenue. The damage he has done will be with us for decades into the future. What is most appalling is there exists a simple tweak that could eliminate any discussion of Social Security solvency for the next fifty years: eliminating the cap of $113,700.

Will you stand with the vast majority of your constituents and commit in writing to oppose any effort to adopt the Chained CPI? Will you take the further step of committing to support Scrapping the Cap, a simple fix that will put Social Security on sound financial footing for many decades to come? The time for making such a commitment has never been more appropriate.

President Obama also proposed to raise the cost of Medicare for people earning more than $47,000 a year. Such a proposal demonstrates blinders to the struggle of middle class people to make ends meet. Frankly, it is an outrageous proposal! There are so many constructive solutions to lowering the costs of Medicare.

1. Allow CMS to negotiate the cost of prescription drugs.

2. Change the reimbursement formula to pay for best practices and outcomes rather than paying per procedure.

3. Lower the age of eligibility for Medicare to 50 or 55 and allow this healthier cohort to pay premiums to Medicare, if they choose.

We recognize these suggestions (like Scrapping the Cap) are heavy political lifts, but they are also the correct approach and put you, as opposed to President Obama and the Republicans, on the side of the American people.

Are you prepared to commit to oppose the proposal to increase the cost of Medicare to the middle class of our country? We look forward to your response.

Robby Stern, Chair, Social Security Works Washington; President, Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action

We will push for a response to this letter and take further action to demonstrate how seriously we take this threat to our earned benefit programs.

By Robby Stern
Arkansas Oil Spill

Continued from Page 1

Unlike so-called “light sweet crude” oil, tar sands oil is not liquid in its natural state. To become liquid enough to flow through pipelines, it has to be mixed with some solvent, in this case benzene.

Consequently, when the pipeline ruptured, toxic solvents spilled into the streets of Mayflower along with the oil. Many residents said they became sick from the fumes. Twenty-two families had to be evacuated.

Although Exxon Mobile said the spill would not harm local waterways, the oil flowed into storm drains leading to nearby Lake Conway, a fishing lake. The manmade disaster was made even worse on April 10, when a rainstorm hit the region and spread the oil even further along the shores of Lake Conway.

Again, unlike light sweet crude, tar sands oil is denser than water, even when it’s mixed with benzene. That means that it sinks rather than floating on the surface where it can be contained by the floating booms we’re familiar with from the Gulf disaster.

At the present time, there is no technology available to retrieve tar sands oil once it’s sunk in a lake or waterway. It’s there for good.

Mayflower residents were astonished to see the oil bubbling up out of their backyards and running like a toxic river down their streets.

The pipeline was installed 40 years ago, and most Mayflower residents didn’t even know it was there till it burst. That’s one of the problems with oil pipelines - no one pays much attention to them till they burst.

The oil company promised residents they would have the spill cleaned up within a week, but Mayflower residents say the problems are still unresolved. They continue to demand action and have formed a group called Arkansans Concerned about Oil Pipelines to force the company to take action.

How many local citizens’ groups will have to be formed if the Keystone Pipeline is approved?

The Phony Crisis

Continued from Page 1

Since 2010, we have achieved $2.5 trillion in deficit reduction, and lots of common-sense deficit-reduction proposals are under public debate. For example, I recently introduced legislation to end a Medicare windfall to the pharmaceutical industry that would save taxpayers over $140 billion. Despite this, we’re also seeing, sadly, bipartisan support for damaging cost-saving measures this year, like a Chained Consumer Price Index, or “CPI,” cuts to Medicare and Social Security benefits, cuts to food-assistance programs for kids and seniors, defunding of scientific research and development and more attacks on the Affordable Care Act.

Never mind that most of these programs save us money in the long run. In-home care assistance for seniors is cheaper than nursing homes and Head Start is much cheaper than unemployment and prison costs for students who get left behind.

Never mind that the best way to get rid of debt is to increase revenue. While Republicans attack school lunches they continue to protect tax loopholes for yachts and corporate jets and subsidies for big oil and pharmaceuticals.

Never mind, because now the basis of this hysteria, the one study that debt hawks have been peddling as proof of our impending economic doom, has been entirely discredited—by a doctoral student. Reinhart and Rogoff published findings that a debt-to-GDP ratio of over 90% could slow economic growth, and, despite being impossible to replicate the numbers, it was taken as gospel by the austerity crowd. Unfortunately for their admirers, the world recently found out that in addition to some strange methods and selective data, their findings were missing something very important: rows 45 to 49 on their Excel spreadsheet. In other words, the entire austerity debate has been built on one big coding error.

So how do we craft a sensible budget?

In addition to closing the tax loopholes mentioned before, there are some reforms that would strengthen our economy and safety net programs. One such “fix” would be raising or eliminating the cap on the payroll tax that funds Social Security. Individuals are only required to pay into Social Security up to around $113,700. If all workers paid the same payroll tax rate on all of their income, Social Security would be solvent for at least the next 75 years.

Ultimately, however, investing in our people and our workforce must be the number one priority. We don’t have a debt crisis, but we do have a jobs crisis. President Obama’s stimulus plan helped slow the devastation of the recession, but our sluggish recovery proves that we need much more. Government ought to invest when the private sector won’t. Investing in infrastructure now, in new and growing industries like green energy, new technologies, and education, will bolster our current economy and build a foundation for globally competitive industries in the future.

It’s simple math. With low unemployment, more people are paying taxes and fewer people need public assistance.

Budgets are moral documents. They may not be easy to craft, but there ought to be certain principles that we hold as sacred. American families would never pay down their credit card debt with their children’s lunch money or their grandparent’s prescription funds, and neither should our government. Shifting the burden to seniors, half of whom earn under $22,500 a year, or those on a minimum wage, whose salaries can’t buy a fair-market apartment in any state, is impractical and unethical. It’s time to stop the debt-crisis mania and start rebuilding our economy.

I believe in the greatness of America. I believe we are a country that can afford to take risks and demand the best of ourselves. We just have to get past phony catastrophes and partisan bickering, but I believe we can. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be here.
We Need Support for Families

By Aaron Keating, Communications and Operations Director of the Economic Opportunity Institute, and a PSARA member

Hard-line conservatives in the state Senate are trying to repeal Washington’s family leave insurance plan in upcoming budget negotiations — you can help stop them in their tracks.

Since taking over the state Senate under Sen. Rodney Tom this year, hard-line conservatives have launched attack after attack on Washington’s family leave insurance plan. Their latest effort: A taskforce — stacked with family leave opponents — to decide the fate of family leave.

Here’s the catch: if the task force doesn’t come up with a funding source, family leave insurance is automatically repealed. In other words, it’s a smoke screen so legislators can repeal family leave without looking like they’re taking an anti-family vote.

The Senate’s task-force plan now heads to the House, where it will become part of budget negotiations during the upcoming special session. But with your help, we can make sure the Senate’s plan is DOA in the House.

Contact your legislators in the Washington State House (1-800-562-6000) and tell them: Don’t accept the Senate plan to repeal family leave insurance.

We don’t need a taskforce — we need concrete action to protect Washington’s workers and their families. That means expanding paid leave protections, not rolling them back.

Here’s the backstory: In 2007, Washington legislators created family leave insurance to ensure that parents of a newborn or newly adopted child could take up to 5 weeks of partially paid leave. That plan has since been twice delayed, as legislators haven’t identified a funding source.

To hear some legislators talk about it — and this is on both sides of the aisle, mind you — you’d think there’s nothing to be done, the funding just isn’t there, etc. But that’s simply not true. In fact, this year the Washington Work and Family Coalition put a very specific and straightforward proposal in front of legislators: let Washington’s workers insure themselves to replace those lost wages when it really counts.

It’s modeled on what works in several other states, and it’s called Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FMLI). FMLI provides workers up to 12 weeks to care for a new child or a sick family member, and up to 12 weeks for the worker’s own serious health condition. Workers receive 2/3 of usual weekly pay, up to $1,000 per week, and the cost is shared equally between workers and employers — about 2/10th of 1% of total pay.

To put that in concrete terms, someone earning $50,000 per year would pay about $50 per year in premiums, matched by their employer, and be eligible for $641.35 each week they are on leave. We’re bringing that proposal back to legislators again next year — but in the meantime, we have to stop conservative senators from repealing family leave insurance during upcoming budget negotiations.

So please, contact your legislators in the Washington State House (1-800-562-6000) and tell them: Vote NO on SB 5903. The task force is a waste of time and money. Protect Washington’s workers and families by expanding paid leave protections, not rolling them back.

Whether caring for a child, an elderly parent, a partner or yourself, all people occasionally need access to paid time off for their own health and that of a loved one. Please take 5 minutes today to urge your Representatives to do the right thing for Washington’s workers and families. Thank you for taking action today!

21 Progress: Leadership Development for Low-Wage Workers

By Bob Shimabukuro

Progress, created by UFCW Local 21 to provide leadership development among mostly low wage workers, their families and communities, held a launch party April 3 to introduce the organization and report on its early achievements to a multigenerational gathering.

In distinguishing the new 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization among other social justice groups, executive director Sharon Maeda said “we will not reinvent the wheel; we’re committed to being strategic and providing programs that complement, not compete with what other organizations are doing.”

Emphasizing those core values, Maeda discussed three programs: free tax return filing help (in 11 different languages) for low-income youth and immigrant workers, an immigrant leadership training in Yakima (both recently completed), and a continuing program which offers no-interest loans to pay the $465 fee for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program applicants and develops youth leadership skills.

The organization was endowed with funds large enough to sustain a small staff from the sale of Sunset House, an 82-unit apartment building constructed in 1981 by the Retail Store Employees Union Local 1001 (which is now a part of UFCW Local 21) for low income residents. It originally housed many union retirees but the number decreased over time until the last one died in 2009.

The union decided to sell the property to Housing Resources Group, a nonprofit developer which agreed to preserve the 82 units of low income elderly and disabled housing, and ensure a seamless transition for current residents during the construction and renovation work.

In doing so, Local 21 continued the important legacy of Sunset House as housing for low income elderly, while beginning another important strategy of building a new generation of leaders.
June 20, 2013 – SAVE the Date

PSARA ANNUAL SUMMER MEMBERSHIP PARTY,

Yummy Potluck & Reasonably Brief Membership Meeting

12:30 to 3:00 p.m. THURSDAY, JUNE 20

Location: South Side Commons, 3518 South Edmunds St, Seattle, WA 98118 (Columbia City just west of Rainier on S. Edmunds)

12:30 Potluck lunch and socializing: Please bring a main dish, salad, fruit, dessert or soft drink to share at the party. RSVP to office and let us know the food item you can bring: 206-448-9646 or e-mail to adminvp@psara.org.

1 p.m. General membership meeting and then back to socializing!

Parking on street & inexpensive parking lot just east of facility on S. Edmunds. Bus lines will be published in our June newsletter flyer. If you cannot drive or take public transit and need a ride, or if you can offer a ride to a member who cannot drive, please e-mail Maureen Bo at adminvp@psara.org or leave a message on the office phone 206-448-9646.

Please consider bringing items of non perishable food for the Labor Agency Food Bank.

Senate Unanimously Votes Against Cuts to Social Security, Media Don’t Notice
By Dean Baker

There are few areas where the corruption of the national media is more apparent than in its treatment of Social Security. Most of the elite media have made it clear in both their opinion and news pages that they want to see benefits cut. In keeping with this position they highlight the views of political figures who push cuts to the program, treating them as responsible, while those who oppose cuts are ignored or mocked.

This pattern of coverage was clearly on display last weekend. Both the New York Times and Washington Post decided to ignore the Senate’s passage by voice vote of the Sanders Amendment. This was an amendment to the budget put forward by Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders that puts the Senate on record as opposing the switch to the chained CPI as the basis for the annual Social Security cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).

Switching the basis for the COLA to the chained CPI is one of the most beloved policies of the Washington elite. The idea is that it would reduce scheduled benefits for retirees by 0.3 percentage points annually. This amounts to a cut of 3 percent after 10 years, 6 percent after 20 years, and 9 percent after 30 years.

If a typical retiree lives to collect benefits for 20 years the average cut in benefits over their retirement ends up being around 6 percent. This is a much bigger hit to the typical retiree, who relies on Social Security for more than two-thirds of their income, than the tax increases put into law this year were to the typical rich person.

But the magic of the chained CPI is that everyone gets to run around saying that they are not really cutting benefits, they are just "adjusting" the cost of living formula. And the media do their best to assist the politicians pushing these cuts. They almost always uses euphemisms like "changing" or "restructuring" Social Security, trying to

Continued on Page 10
Raising the Dough

By Maureen Bo, PSARA Administrative Vice President

With many legislators saying: “Oh, No! We can’t raise revenues,” PSARA and our partners in Car ing Across Generations Coalition stepped up to raise the dough—with our dough. Boxes and trays of baked goods, donated by PSARA members and friends, were sold in the State Legislative Building at the Caring Across Generations Lobby Day. We made our point as visibly as possible, with visits to the leaders of the House and Senate, and notification to the press. When building security made us move out of the building, we set up our table outside between two legislative office buildings and did good sales and education there.

Our point was that we must restore home care workers’ hours that were cut in 2008 and provide the workers with a living wage. Home Care workers who care for elderly and disabled individuals in their homes provide an important service to the individuals, allowing them to live safely, in dignity and privacy of their own home, rather than be sent to a nursing home. Home care is much less expensive than nursing home care, for the individual or for the state in the case of Medicaid eligible people. It is one of many human services that have been cut during the economic downturn. We say stop! It’s time to tax the Lear Jet sales and corporate tax loopholes that don’t benefit residents of our state.

The idea and energy for the action came from Kate Hunter, PSARA member and long-time political activist. Kate and other PSARA members provided baked goods. A flyer and press notices were created with the help of Washington CAN. We set up a table with goods and flyers, and Kate led the sales by approaching visitors, staff and legislators to buy pastries to help us raise state revenue for Home Care workers. Kate was polite, gentle and relentless in explaining the problem and the need. In all $288 were raised, including a donation from House Speaker Frank Chopp, a long time supporter of home care workers.

Our delegation planned to visit the offices of Senate and House Leaders, give them each half of the money and tell them what it must be used for. Legislators were in intense committee meetings and budget negotiations. We arranged to meet with a staff member for Speaker Chopp and were told to ask Majority Leader Rodney Tom to join us for a brief meeting outside the committee hearing he was attending.

We had a good meeting with House Speaker Frank Chopp’s aide who was very supportive of our requests. We could not get a response from Senator Rodney Tom (the Democrat who joined the Republican coalition in the Senate) even though we sent a message into his committee and waited in the hall nearby for quite a while. A letter has been sent to House and Senate leaders (see Robby’s column), informing them of the dollars raised and our donation of the funds to DSHS for Home Care funding.

Many thanks to Kate Hunter who inspired and engineered much of the action.
We Gather in Olympia to Support Caring Across Generations

By Mike Shilley and Tom Buchanan

The national Caring Across Generations campaign brings together care workers, people with disabilities, older adults and their families with the goal of improving the quality and accessibility of care for everyone. The Washington Care Council is the state umbrella organization for the campaign.

We all have a stake in transforming our care infrastructure.

PSARA was one of a number of organizations from across the State attending the first annual lobby day of the Caring Across Generations campaign.

We heard from Hillary Stern, Executive Director of Casa Latina about the need for a movement to expand and improve home care. Our goal is to gather the resources necessary to make it possible to "create a caring relationship between care givers and those who need care".

Susie Levy, an organizer with Washington Community Action Network, said this lobby day "starts a new path of advocacy in Washington. An important goal is for care workers to gain the resources they need to provide quality care and to support their families. We will work to assure respectful and compassionate treatment of our immigrant community. This is a key piece of the effort to develop a work force capable of addressing future long term care demand."

By 2050 more than 27 million additional Americans will need long term care. It will be delivered either in institutions or through home care. A national crisis is looming and we need a long term plan.

After the morning program, legislative district groups visited their respective legislators. A great range of experienced political activists and first-time attendees came together from several ethnicities and speaking different languages.

With the help of experienced translators we heard the stories of exploitation of workers in the elder care industry. We heard stories of home care workers giving compassionate care for very little pay. The need for training and a living wage was heard loud and clear.

The fact that many workers in this industry are new immigrants, some undocumented, made the need for immigration reform a high priority. Most of our Legislators with whom we spoke expressed sympathy for our goals.

We will continue to pursue the five goals of the campaign:
1. Respond to the future need for two million new home care workers.
2. Provide a living wage for current and future home care workers.
3. Provide quality training programs for long term care workers.
4. Provide a pathway to citizenship for these workers.
5. Create social insurance programs that provide financial support to individuals and families that need long term care services.

Mike Shilley and Tom Buchanan are PSARA members.
Control the price of prescription drugs!

By Elmer Brunk, a PSARA member

The United States is missing from the list of developed nations in the world in two major areas: 1) Universal Healthcare, and 2) price controls on pharmaceutical drugs.

H.R. 1102, introduced in the U.S. House in March 2013, provides enforcement to limit the cost of drugs under the Medicare Part D insurance. This is a step in the right direction. In the U.S. Senate, Senator Jay Rockefeller will introduce the Medicare Drug Savings Act of 2013, a Senate version of the House bill. Unfortunately, neither bill addresses the present high cost of drugs to the American people.

Until Congress acts to control the prices of prescription medication, we can be pro-active in securing medications that are affordable. Frequently people on fixed and/or limited incomes have to choose monthly whether they can afford food to eat or drugs to survive. This reality is unacceptable.

Imported drugs from reputable foreign pharmaceutical suppliers are often maligned as unsafe or ineffective. There are ways to ensure the quality of foreign imports through government requirements in the country where the drugs are manufactured, or by the government through which the drugs are sold and distributed. Most of these certifications are available through online searches.

My wife was prescribed Fareston, a relatively new cancer treating medication. A one month supply (30 capsules) cost $815 at a local pharmacy. Purchasing the same drug, manufactured by the very same Pharmaceutical Company but in different packaging, the cost was 90 capsules (3 months supply) for $150.00 from a Canadian source.

We can act to curb the outlandish profits being made by the pharmaceutical companies! Taking actions as individuals and working together with advocacy organizations like PSARA can give us a head start.

Elmer Brunk has offered to assist PSARA members in managing their prescription drug costs. He can be contacted at gn.mtngoat@hotmail.com

Senate Votes Against Social Security Cuts

Continued from Page 6

conceal the simple reality that politicians are pushing cuts to the program.

It is also worth noting, in contrast to the claims of the pretentious elites, there is no -- as in zero, nada, none -- basis for the claim that the chained CPI would give a more accurate measure of the rate of inflation experienced by seniors. Research by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows that the rate of inflation seen by seniors is actually higher than the CPI that provides the basis for the current COLA.

While this research is far from conclusive, the answer for those interested in accuracy would be to have the BLS construct a full CPI for seniors. But the Washington elites don't give a damn about accuracy, which is why not one of them has called for a full elderly CPI. The elite want cuts to Social Security; accuracy is just something they talk about to children and reporters for major media outlets.

This is why the vote on the Sanders Amendment should have been newsworthy. Here was an opportunity for all the senators who have explicitly or implicitly supported the adoption of the chained CPI to step up and say why the switch to the chained CPI was a good and necessary measure. However, not one senator was prepared to stand up and argue the case. Not one member of the Senate wanted to go on record in support of this cut to Social Security.

With all the Republicans who pronounce endlessly on the need to cut entitlement spending, there was not a single Republican senator who was prepared to say that switching the Social Security COLA to a chained CPI was a good idea. And even though President Obama has repeatedly stated as clearly as he could that he supported the switch to a chained CPI, there was not one Democratic senator who was prepared to stand up and speak in solidarity with the president.

This is a clear case of the elite lining up together against the bases of both political parties. If the chained CPI were put to a vote of the people it would lose in a landslide. But the elites are prepared to use their control of the political process and the media to do everything they can to push this cut forward.

The battle over the chained CPI provides a great case study on the state of American democracy. We will get to see whether the rich and powerful are able to attack a program that is vital to the security of almost all working people, even when the vast majority in both parties stand against them.

Dean Baker is Co-chair of the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Page 10 The Retiree Advocate May 2013
Telling Our Story Brings Hope: Fighting to Create and Keep a Secure Retirement

By Mark McDermott

If I had $10 for every time I hear a young person say that Social Security won’t be around for them, I could pay for a round-the-world trip. These feelings are anchored in fear, hopelessness, powerlessness and ignorance of history. We are constantly bombarded with pessimistic messages that our country can’t afford to ensure that everyone has a secure retirement. This is nonsense.

Winning a secure retirement for all has been one of the key struggles of working people since the 1800s. We need to tell our story of hope, courage and victories against entrenched corporate power. In doing so we will inspire people, young, middle-aged and old, for the fights ahead.

To paraphrase Fred Kaltenstein, a labor educator: “If the young don’t understand and appreciate the struggles of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, they may be doomed to fight the same battles over again.” Let me share a family story that brings hope.

My Irish-American grandfather worked from the age of 10 to 75. A frugal hard-working laborer, he was too old to get Social Security. When he “retired” in 1945, my grandparents received a monthly old-age pension check from the state of Illinois. This program preceded Social Security and was intended to help old people with no income. Each month, the state placed a lien against their house. When they died within a month of each other in 1954, the state foreclosed on the house as the liens were worth more than the house. Sixty-five years of work left nothing for their heirs.

My German-American grandfather was an unemployed autoworker who was seriously injured after being hit by a street car. With no money and no health insurance, he received inadequate health care. In 1932, he died in physical agony and his family in crisis. No Social Security, no pension and the family suffered greatly.

These stories are typical of what “retirement” meant for millions of Americans prior to the rising of we the people in the 1930s. There was little justice in these stories. In general, people of color and elderly single women faced much worse plights that those of my family.

The people’s uprisings of the 1930s began to create a new more secure future for millions. A powerful labor movement and many allies built mass movements which successfully won many reforms including Social Security. For the first time, millions of Americans would eventually earn a monthly retirement check. Racist and sexist lawmakers excluded many people of color and women from the program.

Over the next four decades, continued mass pressure won other major legislative victories: Medicare, Medicaid, cost of living adjustments for Social Security, and an end to many exclusions from Social Security. In addition, a strong labor movement won defined benefit pensions for millions, and many non-union employers followed suit to help keep the unions out. Last but not least, the vast majority of Americans were benefiting from a rising standard of living. Again, people of color and women lagged behind whites and men. Nonetheless retirement was the brightest in our national history. That bright future was built on relentless economic and political organizing. Nothing was given to us.

What did these victories mean for my poor working class parents? Social Security with a COLA and Medicare. They lived into their 90s and used their red-white-and-blue Medicare card at University Hospital many times for in- and out-patient care. They did not suffer the fate of my injured grandfather. This is but one of millions of examples of what our great people’s victories meant in the lives of working people.

Everyone has their own family stories of how these struggles made their retirements more secure. We need to share them with our families and friends. In doing so, we create the needed hope that we can once again rise up and create a brighter more secure future for everyone.

Today we are told that our nation, which is much wealthier than in the days of my grand-parents and parents, cannot afford to ensure that everyone can have a secure and dignified retirement. This is a lie of Corporate America and their allies. They don’t want us to have a secure retirement. They certainly don’t want to pay for it. They want us to bear all of the financial risks of retirement.

We the people have a choice. We can accept the corporate-dominated future of growing retirement insecurity or we can rise up once again as our ancestors did. A key part of this new rising must be reclaiming our own history that inspires us, and gives us courage and hope.

Mark McDermott is chair of PSARA’s Education Committee.

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Meetings and Events

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

Green Lake Discussion Group: 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Thursday, May 23, Green Lake Library, 7354 East Green Lake Drive N., Seattle. PSARA Outreach Committee led discussion group discussing the state of the news media.

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 12:30 – 2 p.m., Wednesday, June 5, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First Ave, 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 Environmental Committee: 2 p.m.- 4 p.m., Thursday, June 6, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Ave, Room 226, Seattle. All members welcome as PSARA Environmental Committee continues developing an environmental program for PSARA.

PSARA Summer General Membership Meeting & Potluck: 12:30 – 3:00 p.m., Thursday, June 20, South Side Commons, 3518 South Edmunds St, Seattle, WA 98118 (Columbia City just west of Rainier on S. Edmunds) More info. in centerfold of newsletter.

Words to live by...

“There is a weapon we can fight with. That is the weapon of political action.”

Harry Bridges (1901-1990), President of the ILWU.