A Divided Legislature

By Jeff Johnson, President, Washington State Labor Council

When Senators Rodney Tom (LD 48) and Tim Sheldon (LD 35), with much fan-fare, broke with the Senate Democratic Caucus and formed the Senate Republican Majority Coalition Caucus (RMCC), their message was that the Senate would run in a truly bi-partisan fashion - the state Senate would break new ground and govern from the middle.

That didn’t last long. Policy bills attacking the injured worker safety net, family leave insurance, paid safe and sick leave, public employee pensions, part-time public employee health benefits, collective bargaining for teachers, etc., etc., stacked up in the Rules

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Social Security, Medicare & Labor Day

By Robby Stern

Labor Day will be a special time to send a message to our elected officials and the broader community that working people and retirees insist our earned benefit programs be preserved, strengthened and passed on to the generations to come.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. County Labor Council has invited PSARA and the broader Social Security Works WA coalition to participate in their annual Labor Day Celebration at Woodland Park and also to communicate our message as part of the activities of the day. The picnic draws a large crowd, including elected officials and the press. It is an opportunity to emphasize the critical nature of our earned benefits and the absolute necessity to strengthen these programs so they can become even more effective in the 21st century.

Our activity will begin at 10 a.m. We gather at Lower Woodland Park — Shelters 1, 2 & 3, (N. 50th Street & Woodland Park Avenue N, Seattle). We will walk with our signs to the busy intersection at Greenlake AV N. and N. 50th St, stretch out along the intersection(along the side, not blocking traffic) and wave our signs to passing motorists. If some of us feel inspired and want a little exercise, we can walk to Greenlake with our signs. At 11:30 we march from Greenlake AV N. & N 50th as one large contingent back to the site of the Labor Day Celebration. We will carry our

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A Special Thanks

A special thank you to the officers and staff of the Martin Luther King Jr. County Labor Council and the staff of the Seattle Labor Temple for the assistance they provided in planning and carrying out the celebration of Will Parry.

These two organizations went out of their way to make this celebration the special sendoff Will deserved. Thank you from all of us in PSARA!

A huge crowd filled the Seattle Labor Temple’s Hall 1 to honor Will Parry on June 29. More photos Page 6. (Photo: Garet Munger)
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
Treasurer, Edyth Koch: treasurer@psara.org
Environmental Committee Co_chairs:
Kristen Beifus & Tom Lux: envirocommittee@psara.org
Government Relations Committee Co-chairs,
Chuck Richards & Tom Lux: govrelations@psara.org
Retiree Advocate 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.

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President: Robby Stern
Administrative Vice-President: Maureen Bo
Treasurer: Edie Koch
Secretary: Frieda Takamura
Editor, Retiree Advocate: Mike Andrew
Associate Editor: Bob Shimabukuro
Editor Emeritus: Will Parry
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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, or visit PSARA on Facebook.

Donations in honor of Will Parry

AFT Seattle Community College Local 1789
AFT Washington Association of Western Pulp & Paper Workers
Karen Batroukhu
Jessica Bonebright
Visi Carlaso
Minnie Caruso
Benjamin Chotzen & Carolyn Pinkett
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Karen Pipkin
Frank Prochaska
Kathleen Robel
Stanley Rosenberg
SEIU Local 925
Irene Stewart
Thalia Syracopoulos
UFCW Local 21
Ruth Williams

Ronnie Shure elected to PSARA Executive Board

Ronnie Shure was elected to the PSARA Executive Board at the general membership meeting. He has been committed to providing health care to the underserved as a pharmacist working in public health, mental health, and substance abuse programs since 1970. Ronnie recently retired from Harborview Medical Center.
He will help represent PSARA in our advocacy for universal health care coverage and single payer health care.

Now More than Ever!

As this issue of the Retiree Advocate goes to press, we’ve received word that PSARA has been honored with the President’s Award at the Washington State Labor Council convention, in recognition of the outstanding work PSARA has done on behalf of organized labor, working people, and retired people in the Puget Sound region.
Now more than ever, it’s time to step up the work! The coupon on Page 11 is your tool. Use it to subscribe to the Retiree Advocate, or better yet, give a subscription to your family, friends, neighbors, anyone who - like you - cares about the future of our planet and the working people who inhabit it.
A Divided Legislature

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Committee and the Senate floor were waiting action. Rather than governing from the middle, the RMCC was clearly waging an attack on the middle class.

When the RMCC unveiled their "no new revenue" operating budget, the charade was complete. "Bi-partisanship" became a mask for a seriously divided legislature and "reform" became code for long sought partisan policy changes.

Taking a page out of the Republican playbook in Congress, the RMCC held the operating and capital budget hostage to a list of 33 policy bills that had no real connection to the budget.

A particular favorite was SB 5127. This bill would have expanded the age at which seriously disabled injured workers could enter into "compromise and release agreements", a step towards privatizing our workers' compensation system. SB 5127 was offered up in exchange for various revenue bills, including Brakken and Telecon, and some say for the transportation revenue package. A serious game of whack a mole played out during the two "Special Sessions" as SB 5127 kept popping up as trading bait.

The Department of Labor and Industries announced in June that the original 2011 fiscal note booking savings from "compromise and release" agreements had been grossly exaggerated to the tune of $250 million. Despite that, he RMCC blindly went forward arguing that SB 5127 would save the workers' compensation system and the business community great sums of money. Apparently the RMCC favors the adage of never allowing facts to get in the way of a good political argument.

The great irony of the session is that many of the working family policies that came under attack, like family leave insurance and paid safe and sick leave, are common sense middle ground policies that historically enjoy huge public support and are part of the "common good" in most of our major international trade agreements. In 2013 it shouldn't be this difficult to enact family friendly employment policies.

The great tragedy of the session was the refusal of the RMCC to take up the voting rights act and access to state higher education financial aid for "dreamers". A measure of the character of our state is in the way we address fundamental civil rights. In both cases the RMCC failed our state. Communities of color ought to have a mechanism in place that allows them to challenge a voting system that, for all intents and purposes, excludes their representation of choice. "Dreamers," the children of immigrant workers, who contribute to the richness of our communities and the hopes for our future, should have the financial opportunity to attend institutions of higher education in our state.

Another great tragedy of the session was not passing the transportation revenue package. The package was open to adjustments all throughout the legislative sessions but there was no desire on the part of the RMCC to pass any package. Given there was no vote in the Senate and only one Republican vote in the House, it is clear that the business community had no impact for their efforts.

If we lose $850 million of federal money for the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) bridge, and have to pay back to the federal government another $170 million, we will have made a bad decision of colossal proportions. The CRC is critical to the economic vitality of the Pacific Northwest and Washington State.

Finally, passing a transportation package would have been the best thing we could have done to put people back to work and to generate future revenue for our State's operating budget and needs.

In the final analysis the legislature increased funding to K-12 education by about $1 billion but did so not by eliminating tax exemptions for the wealthy, championed by the Governor and the House Democrats, but rather by sweeping the public works trust and other accounts, not paying the I-732 COLAs, and relying on increased revenue projections and falling case load projections. We had an opportunity to do so much more if the RMCC had been open to closing the income disparity gap some. They were not, and are not likely to be in the future.

The battle now shifts to educating the public in various legislative districts. This is where we can make a difference.

Jeff Johnson is also a PSARA member

Social Security, Medicare & Labor Day

Continued from Page 1

signs to participate in the celebration of Labor Day. (The PSARA table is known for providing a delicious assortment of treats! All PSARA members are welcome to bring their favorite cookies!)

We will offer everyone at the celebration the opportunity to wear a newly designed sticker that says "Social Security & Medicare, Preserve Them, Strengthen Them and Pass Them On". People meet at the picnic, on the street and at Greenlake will be asked to call our U.S. Senators and ask them to oppose any cuts to the earned benefits programs (like the chained CPI cut proposed by the President). Our Senators will be urged to fight to make these programs stronger by Scrapping the Cap on Social Security and allowing Medicare to be available to all people in the U.S.

Please join us at 10 a.m. on Labor Day. Meet us at the location where the Labor Day Celebration will be happening and where there is plenty of parking. Late arrivals or those who have a hard time walking can meet us at N 50th & Greenlake AV N where there is also abundant parking.

Help make Labor Day an advocacy day for Social Security and Medicare and also have some fun!!
Thoughts on Mayor McGinn, Trayvon Martin

By Robby Stern

On July 15, Mayor McGinn issued a new policy statement that is progressive, unique and bold. For purposes of disclosure, I am serving as a co-chair of Mayor McGinn’s re-election committee. This is a personal endorsement. I am not representing PSARA in this effort. PSARA does not endorse candidates.

Whole Foods wants to build a new facility in West Seattle. They have requested that the city “vacate” a city owned alley so that Whole Foods can use the alley as part of their development. The Director of the Seattle Department of Transportation is to transmit a recommendation to the City Council regarding the request for the city to “vacate” the alley.

For the city to transfer a publicly owned asset to a private owner, the private owner must demonstrate that there will be public benefit from the city turning over the public property to private ownership.

Mayor McGinn states in his letter to the Director of the Seattle Department of Transportation that a request to turn over public property should require consideration of the City’s vision for “sustainable economic development with shared prosperity”. The Mayor points out that the four core values of the Seattle Comprehensive Plan are “community, environmental stewardship, economic opportunity and security, and social equity”.

In reviewing Whole Foods’ development plan, the Mayor determined that disapproval of the transfer of public property is in the public interest because the project does not provide adequate public benefit.

The Mayor states that the City has a strong commitment to social and economic justice. That commitment requires the provision of fair and livable wages and benefits for Seattle’s residents. He points to language in Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan which states that the City is “seeking a greater proportion of living wage jobs that will have greater benefits” and “support key sectors of Seattle’s economy to create jobs that pay wages that can support a family, provide necessary benefits, and contribute to the vitality of the City.”

The Mayor notes there are already seven large supermarkets within a mile and a half of the proposed site of the Whole Foods store. At least six of those stores provide employer paid, comprehensive affordable health benefits for full time and part time employees and their families, as well as family-supporting wage scales. Whole Foods provides significantly less than other similar businesses, particularly to part time employees.

Additionally, the Mayor states that the proposed development will have a negative impact on the pedestrian environment. His administration is committed to enhancing pedestrian access.

This unprecedented action by the Mayor (the City Council is the ultimate decider, so get ready for a fight!) is a shock to the development community. This action has the potential to also impact future developments including a huge hotel development planned for the site of the old Greyhound bus station in downtown Seattle. Developers and big business are angry. This will add fodder to their determination to defeat this Mayor.

While the construction jobs for these two facilities would be welcome, it is critical that the nature of long term jobs created by these projects be considered. If we want to reduce the disparity in wealth and income in our community, we need government to use its power to assist in this daunting effort.

Kudos to Mayor McGinn!

Trayvon Martin

The tragic jury decision in the Trayvon Martin killing reinforces vigilantism, racial profiling, and “stand your ground” mentality. It deepens the realistic fear and insecurity within our communities of color and deepens the divide within our nation.

The jury decision is disturbing and the operation of the justice system is appalling. George Zimmerman was allowed to walk away from the crime he committed and was only arrested weeks later. While the dead body of Trayvon Martin was drug tested, no drug test was ever performed on George Zimmerman. The Judge in the case ruled that the issue of race could not be brought into the trial, despite the racist language Zimmerman used when he called the police dispatcher and despite the fact that Zimmerman left his vehicle and stalked Trayvon Martin after being told by the police dispatcher to remain in his vehicle.

Meanwhile, the same “Special” Prosecutor who prosecuted the Zimmerman case also prosecuted Marissa Alexander, an African American woman, who was sentenced to 20 years for firing a warning shot to stop an attack by her known physically abusive husband. No one was injured by her action.

Sadly, Jim Crowism is rife in our justice system.
We need to find jobs, we need to find ways in which low-income families and communities of color can participate in the soon to be “smart (meaning computer controlled and dependent) economy,” and we need to do it soon. This appears to be the immediate response to PSARA’s “Jobs & the Environment, NOT Jobs vs. the Environment” Forum held July 16 at the Central Area Senior Center.

Panelists at the forum included Jeff Johnson, President, Washington State Labor Council; Kathleen Ridihalgh, Northwest Regional Director of Sierra Club; Michael Woo, Executive Director of Got Green; and Barbara Hins-Turner, Executive Director, Pacific Northwest Center of Excellence for Clean Energy.

The forum provided a venue for PSARA members and their respective communities to discuss the issues which will guide our international economies during the next century: jobs and the environment, especially global warming/climate change.

The City of Seattle’s contracts currently have no provisions to employ or train local residents on public works jobs. Got Green is working to change that. Hiring out-of-work community members makes sense. People don’t have to travel very far, hence a smaller carbon footprint. It also means that some of the City’s funds go directly back into the community.

In April, Mayor McGinn agreed to support local hiring. Shortly after that he agreed to have community negotiators at the table, with building trades union leaders and minority contractors, to negotiate over jobs on the Elliott Bay Seawall.

These short-lived victories turned sour when the city dictated the size and composition of the community seats, and a gag order on discussing content of the negotiations.

Said Woo, “Our take-away from the Seawall negotiations was that our community is strongest when we can have the debate about jobs out in the open, in a public arena, not behind closed doors. From that point forward Got Green held fast to the notion that a city-wide ordinance for Targeted Local Hire was the way to go.”

(For more information, see story of Targeted Local Hire from the “Got Green’s Annual Organizing Report 2012: the Year of Emerging Leaders” handed out at the forum.)

PSARA members apparently felt the same way. In the small group discussions that followed the panel presentation, PSARA members expressed that supporting Got Green was important. They also welcomed the coalition building of labor and environmental groups by Ridihalgh and Johnson. Questions posed to Hins-Turner indicated that many members were not aware of the job training program partnering corporations, utility companies, universities, community colleges, organized labor, government.

Members also expressed a sense of urgency about these issues, given the recent global warming/climate change news.

(A report from the Environmental Committee will be in the September issue of the Retiree Advocate)
Remembering Will Parry
Seattle Labor Temple, June 29

(Photos by Garet Munger)
Demonstrate & March on Labor Day for:

Social Security & Medicare


Labor Day, September 2, 2013

The annual Labor Day Celebration sponsored by the Martin Luther King Jr. County Labor Council is the venue for this demonstration.

Gather at 10 a.m. at Lower Woodland Park — at the south east corner of the picnic area, (N. 50th Street & Woodland Park Avenue N, Seattle). We will walk with our signs to the busy intersection at Greenlake AV N. and N. 50th St, stretch out along the intersection (along the side, not blocking traffic) and wave our signs to passing motorists.

People arriving later than 10 a.m. can meet us at N 50th & Greenlake AV N

The picnic begins at 11 a.m.

11:30 a.m. demonstrators march from Greenlake AV N. & N 50th as one large contingent, with signs and stickers to join the Labor Day Celebration.

Sponsored by Social Security Works WA, M.L. King County Labor Council & Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA)
In Detroit’s Bankruptcy: Why Are Contracts with Workers a Joke?

By Dean Baker, economist and co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research

The decision by the City of Detroit to declare bankruptcy came as a shock to many. Detroit, which was once the nation’s fifth biggest city, is by far the largest government in the United States ever to declare bankruptcy. While Detroit has been seeing a falling population and worsening finances for five decades, bankruptcy is still a dramatic step.

One part of this story that is striking is the discussion in the media of how workers’ pensions will fare in bankruptcy. Most articles seem to take it for granted that pensions will face large cuts, with some implying that retired workers may be in the same situation as unsecured creditors, getting just a few cents for each dollar owed.

This is striking because Michigan’s state constitution seems to say as clearly as possible that pension payments are a contractual obligation of the state. Article IX, Section 24 states:

“The accrued financial benefits of each pension plan and retirement system of the state and its political subdivisions shall be a contractual obligation thereof which shall not be diminished or impaired thereby.”

That language would seem to put pensions ahead of bondholders in claims on the city’s income and assets. That would mean that bondholders would only get any money if pension claims have been honored in full.

If that seems unfair to bondholders, remember that this provision in the constitution dates back to 1963. Anyone who lent Detroit money in the subsequent five decades presumably could have read the constitution and recognized that they would be behind retired workers in claims on the city’s assets in the event of a bankruptcy.

If they lent the city money knowing that pensions would have priority, then they have nothing to complain about. If bondholders didn’t know that pensions would have priority then they should do more homework before investing their money in the future.

A contract is still a contract.

It is striking that so many people in the media are acting as though this clause does not exist. Part of the story is undoubtedly a belief by many reporters that Detroit workers got overly generous pensions. The pensions of Detroit’s workers are almost certainly better than private sector pensions, which have been rapidly disappearing. However research shows that most public sector workers incur a wage penalty relative to private sector workers with the same education and experience. Better pensions and other benefits essentially even the score.

But even if Detroit’s workers got a good deal with their pay and benefit package, so what? A contract is still a contract. Workers put in their time in exchange for a specific package of pay and benefits. How can the government arbitrarily change the terms of the deal after the fact?

Not alone.

There are businesses that end up getting very good deals from the government all the time. How often does a state or local government end up selling a parcel of land for a price that turns out to be hugely below its true value. Or they may give tax concessions to lure businesses that prove to be overly generous. It looks like the City of Chicago made a really bad deal in leasing its parking meters to Morgan Stanley (MS) for three quarters of a century. Does Chicago get to just rewrite the terms of the contract?

In these cases involving businesses, somehow a contract is a contract, end of story. The relationship is sacred and no one suggests changing the terms after the fact. However in the case of the pensions for city workers, these are just office workers, custodians, or garbage collectors. The media would have us believe that contracts with these sorts of people aren’t real contracts. If they prove inconvenient, then they can be changed.

While that may be the view that the media is trying to push, the rest of us should insist that the law and the constitution be respected. Detroit’s city workers have as much right to have their contracts respected as the Wall Street bankers making millions and billions off contracts that are often far more questionable.

This is class war at its ugliest. The elites have to learn that they don’t get to change the rules as they go along. If they want their contracts to be respected they will have to respect contracts that protect working people as well.

Dean Baker is an economist and co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research (www.cepr.net), and serves on the board of the Economic Opportunity Institute (www.eoionline.org). He has written extensively on a wide range of topics, including the housing bubble. His most recent book is The End of Loser Liberalism: Making Markets Progressive.
One step forward, two steps back:
SCOTUS OKs marriage equality, rolls back racial equality

By Mike Andrew

When the nine justices of the US Supreme Court left DC for their summer vacations on June 27, they left behind them a dismal record on civil rights.

Although LGBT rights activists rightly celebrated the court’s decision in USA v. Windsor, striking down the infamous Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the justices also gutted the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965 and suggested new restrictions on affirmative action.

In the DOMA case, the Supreme Court decided by a narrow 5-4 majority that denying Gay and Lesbian couples equal access to federal recognition, rights, and benefits violated their equal protection and due process rights.

In a related case, Hollingsworth v. Perry, they also said that same-sex couples in California could resume marrying, which they were entitled to before voters abolished that right in 2008.

Taken together, these decisions mean that thousands of married gay and lesbian couples have the same rights as opposite-sex spouses in the 13 states, five Native American nations, and the District of Columbia where their marriages are now legal.

The Obama administration immediately issued directives to all federal departments, ordering them to implement across-the-board equality for same-sex spouses.

Within hours of the decision, the Department of Homeland Security halted deportation proceedings against foreign-born same-sex spouses of US citizens. Within days, they were approving Green Card applications.

In contrast to the Supreme Court’s recognition of the marriage rights of gay and lesbian couples, the justices turned their backs on the voting rights of people of color.

In Shelby County v. Holder, the day before it ruled on DOMA, the court struck down Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act – the part that required jurisdictions with a significant prior history of racial discrimination to clear any proposed changes in voting regulations with the federal Justice Department.

By getting rid of the so-called “pre-clearance” formula, the court made it much harder for the federal government to protect the voting rights of people of color. The Justice Department can now pursue only individual complaints of discrimination. It can no longer intervene to prevent discriminatory voting regulations from being enacted in the first place.

Just as federal departments moved to get rid of discriminatory provisions once the DOMA decision was announced, state governments covered by Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act moved immediately to put new discriminatory laws in place. Texas led the way, moving within 24 hours to reintroduce laws that had been blocked by the Justice Department last year, including a restrictive voter ID law and a redistricting map that would disenfranchise African American and Latino voters. North Carolina followed suit with what would be the most restrictive voting laws in the country.

The voting rights ruling sparked outrage and opposition, even among those who celebrated the DOMA ruling. Twenty national LGBT organizations issued a joint statement condemning the Supreme Court’s decision in the voting rights case.

On July 25, Attorney General Eric Holder said he would ask a federal court to reinstate pre-clearance requirements in Texas.

In Fisher v. University of Texas, a case dealing with affirmative action programs at UT, the Supreme Court left the university’s affirmative action program in place, but directed a lower court to review it with “strict scrutiny.”

“Strict scrutiny” is the most stringent standard courts use to examine laws for discriminatory effect, and it is the same standard used to review racial exclusion laws. In other words, a majority of the justices tacitly accepted Justice Scalia’s bizarre argument that affirmative action is legally equivalent to racial discrimination.

The final word on this issue will certainly be written in the court of public opinion, and not in the august chambers of the Supreme Court.

Stopping Foreclosure Crisis: A Path to Economic Recovery
By Gabi Sanchez-Stern, a PSARA member

As Seattleites struggle to recover from the recession, the foreclosure crisis is continuing. It has disproportionately impacted communities of color, exacerbated income inequality and is delaying our chances at full economic recovery. The median wealth of white households is now 20 times that of African-American households and 18 times that of Latino households.

Dixie Mitchell, a longtime resident of Seattle’s Central District, has lived with her husband in their home for over 46 years. Dixie and her husband raised a family and dozens of foster children in their home.

Though they paid off their mortgage years ago, the Mitchell’s took out a second mortgage to help one of their foster children. Like homeowners across the country, the Mitchell’s got offers from multiple banks who assured them that a new mortgage was a safe deal.

Instead, they fell victim to predatory lending practices, and became part of a grim statistic: people of color across the country were much more likely than white borrowers to be targeted by banks with high-cost, subprime loans.

When the economy tanked, the Mitchell’s mortgage payments shot up by $400 a month. They did everything from multiple banks who assured them that a new mortgage was a safe deal.

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Foreclosure
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could to get a loan modification - talked to housing counselors, went to classes, and filled out all of the paperwork. After a long fight their modified loan application was approved.

However, what the bank offered was not fair or sustainable. Dixie and her husband are like many retiring seniors: they depend on a fixed income. Because the modification did not include principal reduction (reducing their mortgage to the fair market value of their home) their monthly payments eat up over two thirds of their fixed incomes. Moreover, the mortgage includes a balloon payment. In a few years when this payment is due, the Mitchell’s are all but certain to lose their home.

Unfortunately, Dixie’s story isn’t unique. More than one in three Seattle home- owners (42,000 total) are underwater on their mortgages, meaning they owe more than their homes are worth. The average underwater homeowner in Seattle owes $92,000 in excess of their home’s actual value.

Not only does the overhang of underwater debt prolong the foreclosure crisis, but it also prevents an economic recovery. As the equity in their homes disappears, people feel less financially secure and cut back on consumer spending. Instead, they spend a larger share of their modest recession-era paychecks on their inflated boom-era mortgages just so they can stay in their homes.

Economists and experts agree that principal reduction is the key to immediate economic recovery. A study published last month by the Alliance for a Just Society shows that a widespread principal reduction program could save homeowners in Seattle an average of $9,300 annually. If these savings are spent on goods and services, it will translate into an economic stimulus of more than $510 million, which will create over 7,500 jobs. Ending the foreclosure crisis isn’t just about righting the wrongs of the banking industry or preventing families from becoming homeless; it has tangible economic benefits that could set entire neighborhoods, cities, and ultimately the whole country on the path to recovery.

Legislative Update: Highlights and Lowlights

By Pam Crone, PSARA lobbyist

The 2013 Legislature at long last ended its business on Saturday, June 28 on the 153rd day, after a regular session of 105 days and two overtime “special” sessions. In odd years, the Legislature’s primary job is to pass an operating budget for the next biennium. Although it took an inordinate amount of time for the legislators to accomplish that job, they finally did. The results are a mixed bag, with definite highlights and lowlights.

For PSARA the 2013 session introduced an era of deeper involvement in Washington State legislative work. PSARA hired me as a “contract lobbyist” to advocate for PSARA’s legislative priorities. Together we brought PSARA members’ voices to Olympia advocating to make Washington State a safer, healthier place for our seniors, their children and their families.

Highlights:

Our new biennial budget fully expands Medicaid, restores adult Medicaid dental coverage while protecting health programs and the larger social safety net. This final budget books $351 million in savings from Medicaid expansion. This reflects the full commitment of the Governor, Senate, and House that Medicaid expansion is the right thing to do for Washingtonians. The budget raises revenue by restoring the estate tax ($159 million) and by changing the way the telecommunication industry is taxed ($99 million).

Lowlights:

Legislators steered way off course by creating $15 million dollars in additional tax breaks. In sum, 17 loopholes were newly enacted or extended. These “loopholes” are a prime example of the yawning gap between the House and Senate in their approach to building a revenue solution that addresses the long term economic well-being of our state and its citizens.

At one point during the session the House had proposed eliminating tax loopholes and extending current taxes that would have led Washington State toward a more sustainable budget. Had this proposal been adopted it would have provided resources we need for a first rate educational system and other services that assist Washington families. It was a non-starter in the Senate.

To wit: our Legislature yet again failed to support working families by failing to move forward with funding our family leave insurance program. Nor did they see fit to ensure workers are able to take paid time off work when they are ill, need to care for a sick family member, or need to cope with the effects of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking.

In fact, the Senate went so far as to try to preempt local governments from enacting ordinances similar to Seattle’s providing Paid Sick and Safe Days to workers. And the Senate attempted to place geographic limitations on Seattle’s ordinance as well. PSARA was part of the coalition that successfully fought off these attempts to curb worker leave protections. Successful lobbying involves both offense (pressing for social reform legislation) and defense (preventing bad legislation from passing).

The biggest disappointment of this extra-long session may have been the failure to pass a transportation revenue package despite strong leadership by Governor Inslee and the House. The Senate Majority Coalition Caucus blocked this action. Because of this failure, King County cannot send a car tab tax to the local ballot. The immediate consequence will be cuts by Metro to routes and services. As you know, this will disproportionately impact seniors and working families dependent on bus service to access services and jobs.

In summary, we can claim a huge victory on the healthcare front by our state’s decision to provide healthcare to 300,000 people who do not currently have it by expanding Medicaid. We also made a “down payment” on our paramount duty to fund basic education. We’ll return in 2014 to continue to advocate for all of our families to ensure they have the opportunities they need to be healthy and prosper.
What do the 1% Really Think?

By Mark McDermott, Chair of PSARA’s Education Committee

We live in an age of the super-wealthy, the wealthy and the 99%. Public opinion polls constantly tell us what the 99% think and do. But what do the 1% think and do politically?

We know what the 1% do. They give big money to influence elections and government. In the 2012 election, Sheldon Adelson and his wife gave over $90 million. Another 31 super-rich people gave $223 million. This $313 million equaled the $312 million given by 3.7 million contributors who gave less than $200. Under Supreme Court decisions like Citizens United, we are all equal under the law and can contribute $90 million to make sure our voice is heard.

But what are the 1% thinking? A recent first-of-its-kind, cutting-edge academic study entitled “Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans” reveals the political thinking of 83 wealthy Chicagoans who participated in in-depth interviews.

Who are these people? Their average yearly income amounted to $1.04 million. Their average wealth was $14 million, and their median income was $7.5 million.

How do these wealthy folks participate in politics? Ninety-nine percent voted. Eighty-four percent “attend” to politics. Twenty-one percent collect donations from others and send them to the parties and candidates of their choice. Fifty-three percent contacted the White House, Congress and/or senior administration officials in the previous six months.

They are serious about influencing the government. So what ideas guide their efforts?

Here is what the “one-percenters” think: 67% want to cut Social Security; 64% want to cut food stamps. Only 19% of “one-percenters” think the federal government should see to it that everyone who wants to work can find a job. Sixty-eight percent of the general public think so.

Should the minimum wage be high enough so that no family with a full-time worker falls below the federal poverty line? Only 40% of the “one-percenters” say Yes, compared with 78% of the general public.

What about education? Only 28% of the “one-percenters” think the federal government should make sure that everyone who wants to go to college can do so. Only 35% of the super-rich think the federal government should spend whatever is necessary to ensure that all children have really good public schools, but a whopping 87% of the general public thinks so.

What about racial justice in education and opportunity? Only a bare majority, 53% of the super-rich think the federal government should make sure that minorities have schools equal in quality to whites, even if it means higher taxes; 71% of the general public think that.

The children of the overwhelmingly white 1% go to excellent public or private schools. They don’t need financial aid to go to college. It is refreshing to know that the wealthy are not interested in ensuring that kids of working class, poor and people of color backgrounds have an equal chance at a bright future.

What about skyrocketing income and wealth inequality? Only 13% of the “one-percenters” think the government should try to reduce income disparities between people with high incomes and those with low incomes. Eighty-seven percent of the general public thinks that’s a good idea.

A quick summary of the thinking of the 1%: Cut Social Security. Sub-poverty minimum wage. No commitment to full employment. Strong opposition to quality affordable education for all. Weak support for racial equality in education. Strong opposition to government efforts to address issues of skyrocketing income and wealth inequality. Is it any wonder the 1% needs to buy elections and lobby hard when their clearly stated interests are so deeply opposed to ours? The 1% is opposed to our American Dream.

We need to take the fight to them and their political allies!

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Meetings and Events

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 12:30 p.m. – 2 p.m. Wednesday, August 7, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Avenue, Rm. 226. The committee will be working on the candidate questionnaires for the Nov. election and on preparations for the Social Security/Medicare action on Labor Day. All PSARA members welcome.

PSARA Environment Committee: 2 p.m. – 3:30 p.m., Thursday, August 8th, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Avenue, Rm. 226. Follow-up on Jobs & the Environment NOT Jobs vs. the Environment Forum. All PSARA members welcome.

PSARA Executive Board Meeting: 1 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, Aug, 15, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Avenue S., Seattle. All PSARA members are welcome.

Labor Day Action to Protect and Strengthen Social Security & Medicare and M.L. King County Labor Council Labor Day Picnic: See article on page 1 and flyer in centerfold to find out how to participate.

“Throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet.”

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in her dissent defending the Voting Rights Act.