Hospital Mergers: A Brewing Storm
By Thalia Syracopoulos, Co-President of Seattle NOW and a PSARA member

In February 2012, Swedish Medical Center and Providence Health Systems of WA formed an “affiliation,” which potentially changed the availability of reproductive and end-of-life health care access. The only publicly announced change was that elective terminations of pregnancy would no longer be done at Swedish Hospital, or its affiliated campuses.

In response to an outcry from people concerned about the negative impact of this affiliation, Governor Inslee directed the state’s Department of Health to adopt new rules requiring that any hospital changing control through sale, affiliation or merger must seek a Certificate of Need [CON] review. The new CON was made public in December 2013 and will go into effect on January 23, 2014.

Surprisingly, the rules have nothing to do with whether or not the hospitals will provide or deny care. The new CON only requires that hospitals make information about what health care they do/do not deliver widely available to the public.

Governor Inslee also directed the WA Department of Health to provide a report on “Access to Care” in WA State in order to address the concerns of supporters of end-of-life services, reproductive rights, and the impact on our LGBT community. The preliminary report, documenting care through 2011, was issued in December 2013, and it is more reassuring than one might have anticipated.

While acknowledging that there were some data limitations, “our prelimi-

Senior Lobby Day is Feb. 20th
By Chuck Richards, Co-Chair, PSARA Government Relations Committee

It’s that time of year. PSARA members are invited to attend Senior Lobby Day by carpooling to Olympia on Thursday, February 20th.

PSARA has a team of eight legislative district coordinators organizing carpools for Olympia. Below is a list of coordinators and their contact information. If you do not see your LD listed here call the PSARA office at (206) 448-9646 or contact govrelations@psara.org. We will work with you to make legislative appointments and try to organize a carpool from your area.

30th LD – Tim Burns, tburns023@gmail.com, (253) 874-6292
33rd LD – Mary Anderson, maryanderso@hotmail.com, (206) 276-3069
34th LD - Mac McIntosh, co-chair, (206) 938-1634
Rachael Levine, co-chair, levinepr@comcast.net
36th LD - Mike Warren, mikew@drizzle.com, (206) 282-3363
41st LD - Harvey Kriloff, hzkriloff@gmail.com, (425) 453-1941
43rd LD - Jerry Alexander, gerald.alexander.32@gmail.com, (206) 527-5117
46th LD – Rick Erickson, Rickstere44@msn.com, (206) 634-1530
Other LDs – PSARA office, (206) 448-9646 or govrelations@psara.org.

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Social Security under attack!
Sen. Elizabeth Warren Page 9

Many PSARA members were in attendance at the Seattle Labor Temple for the kickoff of the $15 minimum livable wage campaign in Seattle. Among the speakers at the event was PSARA President, Robby Stern.
For the text of Robby’s speech, see his column on Page 3.
(Photo: Garet Munger)
New Executive Board Members

Mildred Ollee retired as the President of Seattle Central Community College after having spent over 35 years in community college education. Through her family, her profession, and working with individuals and organizations like PSARA, she will further her goal of making our community and the world a better place. Through joining with those who share a common purpose, she believes significant change can be made and the goal of social and economic justice can be achieved.

Sarajane Siegfriedt recently retired from a career that evolved from business to human services to government service. An activist and former lobbyist for public campaign financing, she ran for 46th District State Rep in 2012. She is active in the fight for low income and affordable housing and will represent PSARA in coalitions working to expand low-income housing.

Rita Smilkstein taught for 28 years at North Seattle Community College, where she was also president of the Seattle CC faculty union for two terms. Before that she co-created the Northwest Part-Time Instructors’ Association to lobby in Olympia and across the state for better wages for part-time faculty; the legislature awarded the community college system three million dollars for this purpose. Since retiring, she teaches two or three classes a year for Western Washington University’s Woodring College of Education.

Donations in Honor of Will Parry

Minnie Caruso    Tom Parry    Catherine Pottinger

We Thank You

The family of Will Parry wish to express profound gratitude to all of you who have sent contributions to honor his memory. This is the way we can carry on his lifelong struggle for justice.

In April of 2000 we celebrated Will’s 80th birthday in Hall One of the Labor Temple. In his acknowledgment Will quoted Rabbi Tarfon, who lived in the 2nd Century CE. The Rabbi said, “It is not given to you to complete the task, but neither can you refrain from it.”

Carry it on!
I delivered the following speech on behalf of PSARA at the well-attended January 12 kickoff rally in support of the adoption of a $15 minimum livable wage in Seattle.

Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) is prepared to add our voice and our energy to the movement for a $15 minimum livable wage in the city of Seattle and ultimately for all of Washington.

PSARA is an organization of people from the age of 21 to 96. We, through our collective activism, want to help create a just and peaceful world where all people can live with dignity and respect. We are committed to working for economic and social justice, environmental sustainability, economic security, and equal rights and opportunities for retirees and future retirees.

The fight for a $15 minimum livable wage begins to address the transcendent crisis we face as a result of the inequitable distribution of wealth in our region and country. We stand ready to fight for the $15 wage, just as we have fought for Paid Sick Days legislation and as we continue to fight for good family wage jobs for people during their working lives.

PSARA also leads the fight in our region for preserving and strengthening our Social Security and Medicare systems so that seniors and future generations of seniors can live lives of dignity, respect and economic security.

We stand ready to fight with you in this campaign for a $15 minimum livable wage.

We also hope you will join with us in the campaigns that are presently going on and those that lie ahead as we take on the challenges of making our society one in which economic and social justice rain down like a mighty stream.

Please join with us to fight for the ability of seniors and future seniors to live their lives with dignity, respect and economic security. Let’s win the $15 wage and then take up the fight to create good family wage jobs as we take on the task of sustaining our environment from the ravages of our fossil fuel economy.

We can win these battles, if we stand together and fight together.

Next Steps

On Saturday, February 15, at 2 p.m., active supporters of the $15 minimum livable wage will gather at the headquarters of SEIU 775, 215 Columbia St., Seattle, for an organizing session. People who want to work on the campaign are asked to attend.

The campaign plans to organize neighborhood by neighborhood. We will educate and mobilize to help the fight for $15 succeed against what promises to be very well financed and active opposition.

The only way to counter the power of big corporations like McDonalds and other large low wage employers is by building a genuine grassroots campaign. As we learned from the Sea Tac initiative, the success (or defeat) of this campaign will be felt across our country and even have an international impact.

PSARA members are invited to attend the Day of Organizing meeting on February 15 and are encouraged to bring friends who might be interested in lending a hand.

Senior Economic Insecurity

The D.C. based Economic Policy Institute recently released Briefing Paper #362 on senior economic insecurity. To quote, "Many of America’s 41 million seniors are just one bad economic shock away from significant material hardship. Most seniors live on modest retirement incomes, which often are barely adequate – and sometimes inadequate – to cover the cost of basic necessities and support a simple, yet dignified quality of life.”

The authors point out that Social Security and Medicare are the “bedrock” of financial security for most seniors and changes to these programs that lead to a decline in benefits are likely to have a very negative impact on a significant portion of the elderly population.

According to their research:

- Nearly half (48%) of the elderly population is "economically vulnerable," which is defined as having an income less than two times the supplemental poverty threshold (SPT). This poverty measure is considered more accurate than the calculation of the Federal Poverty Level since it takes into account the costs of goods and services including medical expenses. Roughly 19.9 million seniors are economically vulnerable.
- People 80 and older have a higher rate of economic vulnerability, i.e. 58.1% compared to people 65 to 79 (44.4%).
- Women are 10.7% more likely to be economically vulnerable.
- A majority of elderly blacks and Hispanics are economically vulnerable; 63.5% of blacks and 70.1% of Hispanics age 65 and older are economically vulnerable, while 43.8% of whites are economically vulnerable.
- The share of economically vulnerable seniors varies by states with Washington estimated to have 40-44%.
- The Paul Ryan proposed changes to Medicare would increase the vulnerable senior population by 8.4% or almost 3.5 million.
- The switch to the Chained CPI would also push more elderly and particularly those 70 and over into economic vulnerability.

This Briefing Paper puts into context why we must aggressively work to build a movement to increase Social Security and Medicare benefits.
Senior Lobby Day

Continued from Page 1

Senior Lobby Day begins with registration at 8 a.m. and morning presentations at 9 a.m. at The United Churches of Olympia, 110 Eleventh Ave SE, across from the capital campus. There is parking available nearby. Study the map for other public parking found at http://www.leg.wa.gov/legislature/Pages/Parking.aspx.

PSARA will pay registration for PSARA members, which includes a box lunch, for those who sign up by Friday February 14th.

PSARA’s 2014 legislative agenda was approved by PSARA’s Executive Board. The full agenda and the companion Talking Points can all be found on PSARA’s webpage at http://psara.org/senior-lobby-day.

We will have our Legislative Agenda in hand when we meet with our legislators to urge their support:

- To pass legislation providing Paid Sick Days for workers statewide
- To adopt the Federal Basic Health Option (FBHO) promoting access to care and continuity of care for low-income families.
- To protect Washington Apple Health (Medicaid) by requiring shared employer responsibility.
- Budget items for 2014 include:
  - Allocating $400,000 for a Long-Term Care financing study that will examine new models for financing long-term care.
  - Restoring the cuts in the Housing Trust Fund to $100 million.
  - Restoring funding to Medicaid funded home care services
  - Ending corporate tax breaks that fail to produce more revenue
  - Supporting restoration of full funding for the Public Guardianship Program.

Please contact your LD coordinator by Fri. Feb 14th to reserve a place, and a lunch. We hope to have you join us on the 20th!

Devastating Cuts to Our Bus Service

By Imogene Williams

On Thursday, January 16, two forums on transit were held at Seattle Central Community College (SCCC), sponsored by the college, the Transit Riders Union (TRU), the Sierra Club and others. About 120 anxious people attended. The moderator, Domenic Holden of the Stranger, questioned whether we are losing our ability to be a city.

Chris Arkills of Metro Transit said Metro carries 400,000 passengers every day. The buses are funded only 29% by our fares and 60% from sales tax, which is much reduced since the recession. They have struggled against a $75 million per year gap in funding by cutting services and raising fares. The drivers gave up their raises.

In the legislature, a sticking point is the Majority Coalition Caucus (MCC) in the state senate. In the 2013 session, Senator Rodney Tom of Bellevue and three other Senators prevented the Comprehensive Transportation Package from coming to a vote so Metro got no help from them. They do not seem to care about the real effects of crippling transit in Seattle.

Transit drivers have not had cost of living adjustments for 5 years. Over 55% of bus riders are fulltime workers or fulltime students. The economic well-being of our region depends on the buses. Metro, if nothing is done, will be forced to completely eliminate 74 routes and reduce service on 104 routes.

It would help if King County were allowed to enact a Motor Vehicle Excise tax but the state legislature would have to authorize King County to implement such a tax. The Senate Majority Caucus seems determined to deny King County that authority.

Metro is recommending a $60 King County car tab fee, a 25% fare increase and a 0.1% increase in the county portion of the sales tax. A new low-income fare of $1.50 would be available. King County Executive Dow Constantine and the King County Council are considering putting a ballot measure to King County voters that would implement the revenue recommendations proposed by Metro.

What can we do? We can call our legislators and insist that they pass a transportation package that among other things funds transit at the level needed to keep an effective transit system operating in Seattle and throughout the state.

Imogene Williams is a PSARA Executive Board member, represents PSARA on transit issues and is a frequent bus rider.

Pictured are some of the PSARA members who marched from Garfield High School to downtown Seattle with the PSARA banner on Dr. Martin Luther King Day. (Photo: Garet Munger)
France OKs millionaire’s tax, US still tied to Reaganomics

By Mike Andrew

In December, France’s highest court approved a 75% tax on salaries above one million Euros ($1.4 million), effective for 2013 and 2014.

The millionaire’s tax is one of Socialist President Francois Hollande’s signature policies, and the court’s final approval capped more than a year of legal wrangling over the details.

The new tax law will require about 470 companies and a dozen soccer teams (soccer stars earn salaries equivalent to those enjoyed by leading professional ball players in the United States) to help pay taxes for their top earners.

Because French income taxes are already among the highest in Europe, the tax is not expected to net much new revenue for the government. Some estimates put the increase at only $290 million per year, and all observers agree it will not top $1 billion.

Hollande himself acknowledged that the millionaire’s tax would not produce enough new revenue to prevent cuts in services, but he defended it as a symbol of “solidarity” with France’s working people at a time when more than 3 million French workers are unemployed.

Although Hollande has advocated increased public spending to stimulate domestic demand, which has still not recovered from the recession of 2007-2008, as a member of the Eurozone France is bound by international agreements that restrict the government’s freedom to spend money.

Nevertheless, the millionaire’s tax puts Hollande at odds with his partners in the Eurozone, who rely mainly on the VAT (Value Added Tax), essentially a glorified sales tax, to finance government services.

It also puts France at odds with the United States, where income taxes for the very rich have been declining since the Reagan administration.

When the modern income tax was first established in 1913, the top rate was only 7%, but within a few years the top rate rose to 77% to help finance US involvement in the First World War.

Under Republican Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon – himself a multi-millionaire – the top tax rate was cut four times in the 1920s, till it reached a low of 24%.

During the New Deal, the top rate reached 75%, but only applied to incomes over $5 million, a princely sum in the 1930s. In 1944 and 1945, the top tax rate reached its all-time high of 94%, to help finance World War II.

For nearly 30 years, from 1950 to 1980, tax rates for the richest Americans fell somewhere between 35% and 45%.

Then the “Reagan revolution” hit. Reagan was in love with so-called “supply side” or “trickle-down” economics, the idea that if you give rich people even more money, they will spread it around and everyone will be happy.

Reagan cut the top tax rates to 28%, the lowest they’d been since the Roaring Twenties, and “flattened” tax brackets to “relieve” high income Americans and spread more of the tax burden to ordinary working families.

Along with this, Reagan began to shift the cost of social services from the federal government – where it was financed by income taxes – to the states and municipal governments – where it is financed by sales and property taxes, which force poorer taxpayers to bear a disproportionate share of the cost.

We now know from 30 years of experience that cutting taxes for the super-rich does not result in more jobs or higher wages for working people. On the contrary, real wages have declined since the Reagan years, and only the richest Americans have benefitted from the supposed “economic recovery.”

A US tax system still tied to the false assumptions of Reaganomics only exacerbates income inequality and delays real economic recovery.
Teachers' Salaries
Forwarded to The Retiree Advocate by Rich Austin, one of PSARA’s active members from Skagit County

Somebody blogged about how teachers’ hefty salaries are driving up taxes, and how teachers only work nine or ten months a year! The complainer then went on to say it’s time we put things in perspective and pay them for what they do -- babysit! The blogger said we can get that for less than minimum wage.

A woman named Meredith Menden responded with some facts that bear repeating. She said, “That’s right. Let’s give them $3.00 an hour and only the hours they work; not any of that silly planning time, or any time they spend before or after school. That would be $19.50 a day (7:45 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. with 45 min. off for lunch and planning -- that equals 6-1/2 hours). So each parent should pay $19.50 a day for these teachers to babysit their children. Now how many students do they teach in a day...maybe 30? So that’s $19.50 x 30 students for a total of $585 a day.

And remember, they only work 180 days a year!!! Forget paid vacations.

Now let’s see...

At $585 per day X 180 days we come up with $105,300 per year. (Hold on! My calculator needs new batteries.)

What about those special education teachers and the ones with Master’s degrees? Well, we could pay them the federal minimum wage of $7.75 per hour, and just to be fair, round it off to $8.00 an hour. That would be $8 per hour X 6-1/2 hours X 30 children X 180 days. Mmm, that would be $280,800 per year.

Wait a minute -- there’s something wrong here! There sure is!

The average teacher’s salary (nationwide) is $50,000.

How does that break down?

Well, let’s take that $50,000 divided by 180 days. The result equals $277.77 per day. Now let’s divide that amount by 30 students. The result is $9.25. Now divide that by 6.25 hours divided by 6.5 hours. The product is $1.42 per hour per student -- a very inexpensive babysitter and they even EDUCATE your kids!

WHAT A DEAL!!!

Show this to the grouchies who assert that teachers’ wages are too high.

SSA Again Cuts Field Office Hours, Services
By Steve Kofahl

Social Security Administration (SSA) field office hours and services will be cut again in 2014, according to SSA plans released in December 2013. In announcing the plans to shut down the field offices on Wednesdays, leaving four-day office hours of 9a.m.-3p.m., the SSA also reported that its Benefit Verification Letter Program and Social Security Number Printouts would no longer be handled by community field offices. What do these cutbacks mean for seniors and low-income benefits.

Benefit Verification Letters (BVL)

In the fiscal year ending September 2013, the agency issued over 5.5 million benefit verification letters to field office visitors. Low-income beneficiaries most often need this proof of income so that they can be certified or re-certified to receive assistance from other federal, state, and local government agencies, and non-profit organizations. Without a BVL, many beneficiaries may be denied essential needs like housing, energy, clothing and food.

Instead of having field offices issue BVLs, SSA wants beneficiaries to register for a “MySocialSecurity” account (the SSA online “self-help” program for SS recipients), request a benefit verification letter online, and print it themselves.

Or they may call the Agency’s toll-free number, and wait 5-7 days to receive one in the mail, a delay that can cause a real hardship.

Registration can be a difficult process, access to established accounts is too-often blocked, and many low-income people do not have a computer and printer. Computers and printers at libraries and other public locations are not secure. SSA claims that data exchanges with other government agencies limit the number of printed benefit verifications that are needed, but many providers do not have access to the data, and some who have access don’t know how to interpret the information. (Slated to go into effect September/October)

Social Security Number Printouts (SSNP)

While SSA wants people to print out their own Benefit Verification Letters, they don’t want anyone printing out Social Security Numbers. SSA issues 6 million SSNPs each year, to low-income beneficiaries who need them to qualify for assistance, get a driver’s license, state ID card, or a job.

SSA instead wants people to get a replacement SS card, a process which takes minimally 7-10 days. SSA says that agencies and organizations can verify SSN online, but there is a fee involved, and the “verification” is not always accurate. More importantly, a significant number of citizens and lawfully-admitted immigrants are incorrectly identified as not authorized to work, and, as a result, can be fired if their employers fail to give them a chance to correct the error with SSA and/or U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (Slated to go into effect June-July)

Closing field offices, slashing services and hours to the most vulnerable should be the last things SSA does to save costs. Join Social Security Works and other advocate organizations working to stop these latest cuts by voicing your disapproval to your Congressional delegation.

Steve Kofahl is President of American Federation of Government Employees Local 3937 representing Social Security workers regionally and is a PSARA Executive Board member.
2014 PSARA
Senior Lobby Day

7th Annual PSARA Senior Lobby Day
In Olympia
Thursday, Feb. 20th

Join others from your Legislative District to visit your legislators. RSVP now to join PSARA on Senior Lobby Day.

PSARA carpools leaving Seattle at 7:30 am!
For RSVPs and carpool information contact
govrelations@psara.org
or call PSARA at (206) 448-9646

Morning Updates: 9 to 11:30 am
Box Lunch provided: 12 noon
Afternoon legislative visits for our 4 issues:
- Pass legislation providing statewide Paid Sick Days.
- Adopt the Federal Basic Health Option (FBHO) to promote continuity of care for low-income families.
- Require shared employer responsibility in order to protect Washington Apple Health (Medicaid).
- Support several important Budget items

Let’s be heard in Olympia in the 2014 session!
Dear Mr. McNerney:
The squeeze that you and Boeing are putting on your machinist workers’ pensions, pay scales and your stance on other labor issues regarding the assembling of the new 777X airliners is unseemly for several reasons. First, consider your pay this year of $21.1 million, a 15 percent increase from the previous year, and much higher than your predecessors. That sum does not demonstrate a moral authority to require sacrifices from your workers at a time of rising Boeing sales and profits, dividend increases, cash hoard, and another notorious $10 billion stock buyback. I say notorious because stock buybacks per se do little for shareholder values and a lot for the enlarged stock options of top executives.

Second, you’re holding an auction for your long-time workers’ jobs in other states, inciting a bidding war whereby states are giving away taxpayer assets to lure your 777X assembly factory with huge tax holidays and other subsidies. Washington State outdid itself with a new law, signed by Governor Jay Inslee with the largest state business tax break package for Boeing in history. The tax escape law “will give Boeing and its suppliers about $8.7 billion in tax breaks between now and 2040,” according to the Citizens for Tax Justice (CTJ) calculations. CTJ adds that “Boeing has managed to avoid paying even a dime of state income taxes nationwide on $35 billion in pretax U.S. profits.” Boeing also received tax advantages from the federal government, including $1.8 billion in federal income tax rebates on its $35 billion in U.S. profits between 2003 and 2012.

Third, in 1997 the Justice Department allowed Boeing to merge with McDonnell Douglas, making Boeing the only manufacturer of commercial jet planes in the United States – a domestic monopoly, justified by the only other foreign competitor – Airbus Industries in Europe. Another valuable gift by Uncle Sam brought about by your company’s Washington lobbyists.

Fourth, recall Boeing’s contract with the Department of Defense for the initial phase of Air Force’s KC-46 aerial tanker program that provoked sharp criticism by Senator John McCain in July 2011 for the excessive burdens on American taxpayers from cost over-runs in a supposed “fixed price” contract. In a letter to Department of Defense Undersecretary Ashton B. Carter, Senator McCain wondered “why under a fixed-price, relatively low-risk contract, taxpayers may have to pay 60 percent of any overrun within that band – up to $600 million.”

A book could be written about the Boeing company’s strategy for externalization of a variety of its costs onto innocent, defenseless people – whether workers or taxpayers. Boeing’s systemic campaigns for corporate welfare are shameful. Your company is one of the major corporate welfare kings in America, running a close race with the champion – General Electric. As CTJ wrote: Boeing “employs an army of site location and tax consultants, whose job has been to blackmail states into giving Boeing lavish tax breaks.” These include sales and property tax breaks which drain communities’ ability to provide for school and other public facilities.

Fifth, there is the gigantic subject of your outsourcing to foreign suppliers, in particular Japan where your technology transfers, damaging the longer term viability of U.S. competitiveness in the aerospace sector for short term gains favoring Boeing, merit thorough examination by the Congress. As you know, Boeing’s foreign outsourcing brought your company considerable quality control and delay troubles with the Dreamliner.

You need to read the 2005 report by the Defense Science Board about the hollowing out of domestic capability in the electronics industry from this kind of overseas outsourcing migration by U.S. companies.

For starters read the current copy of The American Conservative magazine’s cover story titled “Japan’s Plan to Unmake Boeing,” describing the full assistance of Boeing. No doubt, if your further cruel downward pressure on your machinists culminates in your destroying their union local and their jobs by leaving the state of Washington and going for example to the anti-union state of South Carolina, there will be further public inquiries. Such as how perverse incentives provided by your suppliers in Japan and elsewhere have furthered job losses here, and accelerated your company’s technology transfers, perhaps beyond the tipping point against the U.S. national interest.

Sincerely yours,
Ralph Nader
A generation ago, middle-class families were able to put away enough money during their working years to make it through their later years with dignity. On average, they saved about 11 percent of their take-home pay while working. Many paid off their homes, got rid of all their debts and retired with strong pensions from their employers. And where pensions, savings and investments fell short, they could rely on Social Security to make up the difference.

That was the story a generation ago, but since that time, the retirement landscape has shifted dramatically against our families.

Among working families on the verge of retirement, about a third have no retirement savings of any kind, and another third have total savings that are less than their annual income. Many seniors have seen their housing wealth shrink, as well. According to AARP, in 2012, one out of every seven older homeowners was paying down a mortgage that was higher than the value of their house.

And just as they need to rely more than ever on employer support, employers are withdrawing from their traditional role in helping provide a secure retirement. Two decades ago, more than a third of all private-sector workers - 35 percent - had traditional, defined benefit pensions - pensions that guaranteed a certain monthly payment that retirees knew they could depend on. Today, only 18 percent of private-sector workers have defined benefit pensions. Employers have replaced guaranteed retirement income with savings plans, like 401(k) plans, that leave the retiree at the mercy of the market, and, sometimes, at the mercy of dubious investment products. These plans often fall short of what retirees need, and nearly half of all American workers don't even have access to those limited plans. This leaves more than 44 million workers without access to a workplace retirement savings plan.

Add all of this up - the dramatic decline in individual savings and the dramatic decline of guaranteed retirement benefits and employer support in return for a lifetime of work - and we're left with a retirement crisis - a crisis that is as real and as frightening as any policy problem facing the United States today.

With less savings and weaker private retirement protection, retirees depend more than ever on the safety and reliability of Social Security. Social Security works - no one runs out of benefits, and the guaranteed payments don't rise and fall with the stock market. Two-thirds of seniors rely on it for the majority of their income in retirement, and for 14 million seniors, this is the safety net that keeps them out of poverty. Social Security also protects retirees' spouses and children, disabled workers and family members who survive the death of the family's earner.

And at the very time seniors most need to rely on Social Security, it has come under attack. Monthly payments are modest, averaging about $1,250, and over time, the benefits are shrinking in value. This puts a terrible squeeze on our seniors.

Social Security is rapidly becoming the only lifeline that millions of seniors have to keep their heads above water. And, yet, instead of taking on the retirement crisis, instead of strengthening Social Security, some in Washington are actually fighting to cut benefits.

The fact is that today, Social Security has a $2.7 trillion surplus. If we do nothing, Social Security will be safe for the next 20 years and even after that will continue to pay most benefits. With some modest adjustments, we can keep the system solvent for many more years - and could even increase benefits.

If we want a real middle class - a middle class that continues to serve as the backbone of our country - then we must take the retirement crisis seriously. Seniors have worked their entire lives and have paid into the system, but right now, more people than ever are on the edge of financial disaster once they retire - and the numbers continue to get worse. That is why we should be talking about expanding Social Security benefits - not cutting them.

The decisions we make about Social Security benefits are not just about math. At their core, these decisions are about our values. I believe we must honor our promises, make good on our values, and support the right of every person to retire with dignity - and that means protecting and expanding Social Security.
nary findings for those services assessed do not appear to suggest that communities predominately served by religious hospitals are experiencing barriers to care.”

It also specifically discussed the Swedish-Providence affiliation:

“...it is important to note that the affiliation Swedish has with Providence differs from other hospitals’ affiliations – and, in fact, Swedish considers itself a secular institution. While under the provisions of their affiliation they have agreed to not perform elective terminations, Swedish retains the right to perform an abortion if the mother’s life is at stake or if the fetus has a fatal anomaly; their physicians also retain the right to participate under the provisions of DWD when caring for terminally ill patients.”

This would be reassuring if it were true. However, in February 2013, The Stranger reported about a Seattle woman, 24 weeks pregnant, who came to Swedish Hospital because she was miscarrying and bleeding profusely. Swedish refused to perform an abortion and only acted to save the mother’s life after the fetal heartbeat had ceased. Fortunately, in this instance, the mother survived.

This lends credence to the information published in Catholic Watch-keeping watch on Catholic health care that the affiliation is now led by a 19-member board, with 5 members from Swedish and 14 from Providence. The board directs both Swedish and Providence.

“It’s been just over a year since Providence, …took over Swedish Medical, the largest nonprofit hospital system in the Seattle area. What’s the result? Swedish is now operated as a brand within Providence, with oversight from the Catholic Bishops. Prayers are held before management meetings. And abortions are no longer allowed, although Providence officials say they have been done when a woman’s life is in danger.”

The “oversight from the Catholic Bishops” refers to the “Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services” [EDS].

Presently, in WA and OR, 30-37% of all hospital admissions are to Catholic hospitals. In King, Pierce and Spokane Counties, 50-99% of the hospitals are religiously affiliated. Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, Stevens, Cowlitz, Franklin, Kitsap and Walla Walla Counties have no non-religious-affiliated hospitals available to their residents.

Most of the affiliated or merged hospitals are public hospitals that receive considerable public funding. In addition to the tax breaks to which all nonprofit institutions are entitled, these hospitals also receive taxpayer dollars via public insurance programs like Medicare and Medicaid, as well as myriad federal programs that provide extra subsidies for such things as indigent care and medical research.

Attorney General Ferguson was asked to give an opinion regarding a San Juan County public hospital which had entered into an agreement with Peace-Health, a Catholic health care corporation, to construct and operate a hospital. At issue was the providing of Termination of Pregnancy [TOP] and contraceptive care.

Attorney General Ferguson cited RCW 9.02.100 and .160 which were adopted as part of Initiative 120 (I-120) in 1991.

Accordingly (1) Every individual has the fundamental right to choose or refuse birth control, and (2) Every woman has the fundamental right to choose or refuse to have an abortion, except as specifically limited by RCW 9.02.

In August of 2013, Attorney General Ferguson rendered the following conclusion:

“A public hospital district that provides, directly or by contract, maternity care benefits, services, or information to women, through any program administered or funded in whole or in part by the district, must also provide the substantially equivalent benefits, services, or information required by RCW 9.02.160 and .100.

Such opinions are not legally binding. For now, the major concern is whether persons whose only access is to a religiously affiliated hospital are able to receive regular or emergency care that is forbidden by the EDS.

WA’s Death With Dignity Act (2008) “permits terminally ill, competent adult WA residents medically predicted to die within six months to request and self-administer lethal medication prescribed by a physician.” No physician who is bound by the directives of the EDS can honor that request if his private office is in a building owned by a religiously affiliated hospital.

Abortion is legal in WA State, but it is only one of the many services that may no longer be available at these institutions. The EDS states not just that contraception in any form cannot be provided, but education about any form of contraception is prohibited. The only exception to that rule is that married couples can be informed about “methods of natural family planning.” In vitro fertilization cannot be provided even to a heterosexual married couple. Artificial fertilization, even using a married man’s sperm to impregnate his wife, is also forbidden. Assistance for surrogacy in any form is not available.

Ectopic pregnancies may not be surgically terminated in advance of life-threatening complications even though lack of timely treatment may result in permanent sterilization or death for the mother. Pregnancy complications cannot be treated until there is no fetal heartbeat even if delaying treatment risks the death of the mother. It appears that this was the reason that the woman reported in The Stranger did not receive care in the early part of her miscarriage.

According to the EDS, a tubal ligation or vasectomy can never be done, although the “Access to Care” report by the Department of Health states that they are done.

For now, we can only be vigilant and hope that all legal and appropriate care is provided to all who seek it. But we should remember that while the Attorney General’s Opinion is not legally binding, it may well carry weight if a lawsuit for denial of care is brought.

If you, or anyone you know, has been denied care or provided care only after the EDS requirements have been met, contact the author of the “Access to Care” report, Joe Campo, at joe.campo@OFM.wa.gov. Send a copy of your report to Governor Inslee and Attorney General Ferguson.

Maybe we can get the care we are legally entitled to without a loss of life.
The Supreme Court is Undermining our Democracy
By Jay Heymann and Dorothy Van Soest

If you’re old enough to collect Social Security you’re also old enough to recall a time when we learned in school that our democracy is a government of, by, and for the people. Well, that’s no longer the case. Most schools don’t teach civics anymore and we have a government that’s largely of, by, and for giant corporations and the wealthy few.

The good news is that a democracy movement is rising up across the land. It started when the Supreme Court (2010 Citizens United v. FEC) granted corporations the same constitutional free speech rights as people and equated political campaign spending with speech. This unleashed the immense financial resources of corporations in elections. Since corporations cannot “speak” in the same way as people, they buy campaign ads, expend unlimited money to influence legislation and use the courts to drown out the voices of real people—like when they got the Supreme Court to rule that a law protecting Massachusetts’ children from cigarette advertising was a violation of the tobacco industry’s corporate speech rights.

But the undermining of democracy goes even deeper than giving corporations free speech rights. Over time, corporations have aggressively sought and acquired other constitutional rights that were intended for people including the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Fourteenth amendments. The latter secured the political rights of former slaves. Yet of the 150 cases heard during the first twenty-eight years after its passage, 135 involved business entities and only 15 involved blacks. And now corporations are trying to gain the rights of religious freedom, too.

When laws and regulations safeguarding the rights of real people get in the way of profits, corporations get State and Federal legislatures and the courts to favor their interests by successfully using their resources to claim rights as “persons.” They have insinuated themselves between us and our elected officials so that it has become impossible to solve problems related to the economy, environment, education, healthcare, agriculture or any other issue you care about.

We need to pass an amendment—like we did seven times before overturning erroneous Supreme Court decisions—that restores governmental authority to limit campaign spending and clarifies that corporations are not people with constitutional rights and money is not speech. We’re already one-third of the way there with 125 members of Congress, over 600 local governments (16 in our state) and 16 states calling for an amendment.

It’s time for Washington to join the other sixteen states. But our state legislature refuses to act. That is why the Washington Coalition to Amend the Constitution (WAmend), comprised of twenty-seven organizations, has mounted a campaign to get the issue on the state ballot in 2014. To join the growing democracy movement in Washington State, go to www.wamend.org and sign up to help.

We the people have amended the U.S. Constitution 27 times before in order to realize the constitutional promise of political equality for all and a government of, by, and for the people. We can and must do it again.

Jay Heymann & Dorothy Van Soest represent the Washington Coalition for a Constitutional Amendment and are PSARA members.

PSARA Matters More than Ever!

In this issue we write about a number of attacks on working people, from cuts in Metro bus service, to reduced hours and services at our Social Security offices, to the Boeing Company’s so-far successful drive to deprive Machinists of a secure retirement.

These cuts are serious for all of us, but they impact the most vulnerable - women, people of color, and the oldest of us - the most.

That’s why we need organizations like PSARA more than ever!

Only by banding together with like-minded people to stand up and make our collective voices heard will we have a chance of keeping the social safety net we’ve already paid for through a lifetime of taxes, much less making progress towards a healthier and more humane world.

In times like these, we have to stand together. Won’t you join us today? You can use the coupon below to renew your subscription, buy a new one, or give the Retiree Advocate to a friend or neighbor.

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

**PSARA Education Committee:** 10 – 11:30 a.m., Wednesday, Feb. 5, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First AV, Seattle. All members welcome as we plan a series of educational forums for the spring.

**PSARA Government Relations Committee:** 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Wednesday, Feb 5, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First AV, Seattle. All members welcome as we make final plans for Senior Lobby Day.

**PSARA Environmental Committee:** 2 p.m. – 4 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 13, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First AV, Room 208, Seattle. All members welcome as Committee continues work on PSARA’s position paper and an exciting public program.

**Senior Lobby Day:** Thursday, Feb. 20, 8 a.m. registration, 9 a.m. program begins, Thursday, February 21, United Churches, 110 11th Ave. SE, Olympia WA. Join with PSARA members and others from across the state to make our priorities known to our legislators. PSARA will be organizing car pools for our members. Please contact Chuck Richards, legaffairs@psara.org or call the PSARA office if you can drive or if you need a ride.

**PSARA Executive Board Meeting:** 1 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, Feb 27, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Avenue S., Seattle. All PSARA members are welcome. (Note this is the 4th Thursday as the 3rd Thurs. is Senior Lobby Day)

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**Correction from our January Issue**

The email address for Outreach Vice President, Susan Levy, in the article in the January issue about our 2014 membership campaign was incorrect.

_The correct email address is outreachvp@psara.org_

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**Tweet from Sen. Patty Murray:**

Senator Patty Murray @PattyMurray

Attn: #GOP - it’s not your "tone" women find offensive, it’s your outdated & misguided policies