Vote YES by April 22 to Save Our Metro!

By Katie Wilson

If you’re a registered voter in King County, you’ll be getting a ballot in the mail around April 5. This is the first April special election in our county’s history. There’s just one issue to vote on, and the repercussions are huge.

If Proposition 1 fails, this fall King County Metro will begin cutting 17% of bus service, eliminating 74 routes and reducing service on another 107. Transit riders will wait longer for their bus and watch as over-packed buses pass them by. Many riders who do not have the option to drive will be left stranded, especially if they cannot walk many blocks or climb steep hills. Traffic will clog our roads, and 20,000 more cars will exacerbate air pollution and climate change.

Why would anyone vote “no”? In fact, there is little organized opposition to Prop 1. The danger is more subtle, and more revealing. Prop 1 will create new revenue for Metro – and also for cities in King County, which may choose to use their portion on transit or local road repair – by increasing sales tax by 0.1% and raising car tab fees to $60. These regressive taxes will further burden working-class taxpayers. Many voters can be expected to vote “no,” especially if they don’t realize what’s at stake.

We’re being forced to choose between devastating service cuts and more regressive taxes. Who is to blame for this choice? Our State Legislature, of course. Olympia has the power to tell King County what we can and can’t do to raise revenue, and time and again they’ve failed to pass progressive, stable transit funding options for King County and other transit districts. They won’t even let us tax ourselves, let alone dedicate state funding to public transit! So even if we succeed in saving our bus service on April 22, the fight isn’t over. We need to build up our people-power and demand that Olympia make public transit a priority – not to mention overhauling our state’s shamefully regressive tax system.

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Remembering Will on his Birthday

Will Parry:
A Man For All Seasons

By Tim Wheeler

In the days before he passed away last May 13, Will Parry was surrounded by people who loved him, Imogene Williams first of all. Will lived with Imogene in her gracious house on Capitol Hill. As he failed, Will’s daughter, Naomi, his son, Jon, and his brother Tom came to be with him.

Women and men from all the progressive movements came in a steady stream to tell Will how much they admired him for his decades of unwavering leadership. It included members of Will’s Communist Party Club in Seattle that he attended every month even as his health was failing.

Imogene and the CP Club put on a birthday party for Will last April 21, his 93rd. Family and friends gathered in Imogene’s living room, and Imogene’s daughter Ruth brought in a chocolate cake supplied by Catherine Pottinger, decorated with two glowing candles.

We sang Happy Birthday, and Will’s face, weary and drawn, broke into a radiant smile. It was the same humorous, gentle smile we all knew. At that moment, we all hoped that Will would bounce back and live another 10 years.

What was it about Will Parry that made people love him so? In his youth, Will Parry was the “best and the brightest.” He was well-born, handsome, a track & field star. He graduated from college Phi Beta Kappa. He was a U.S. Coast Guard veteran. He married a

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Letter to the Editor:
Comment on “A Legacy in Jeopardy” in the Retiree Advocate, March 2014

My strong suggestion to PSARA is for the organization and its members to seek the counsel of all concerned when discussing “Big Coal.” Has PSARA spoken with miners, workers at coal preparation plants, and those involved in its transport? What are the alternatives that are going to replace those jobs? Where are the new jobs going to be coming from? While proclaiming a “dawn of a new era of sustainability, a future of clean, renewable energy” one wonders where workers figure into that grand design.

Our environment is more than the air we breathe, the water we drink, or the food we eat. Economic and societal needs must also be included in the discussion. The purest water, food, and air means exactly what to an undernourished kid living in a vermin-infested tenement, or to a dirt-poor parent seeking family-sustaining employment?

PSARA would be wise to very publicly align itself with organizations that seek win-win solutions to conflicts dealing with climate change - in all its manifestations. A recent study called Jobs Beyond Coal found that in a number of cases unions representing workers in coal-fired power plants have actually supported the planned closing of their highly-polluting workplaces – because environmentalists and government officials worked with them to ensure a “just transition” in which workers’ livelihoods and the needs of their communities were addressed.

Just as the New Deal in the Great Depression of the 1930s put millions of unemployed people to work doing the jobs America’s communities needed, so today we need a “Green New Deal” to rebuild our energy, transportation, building, and other systems to drastically reduce the climate-destroying greenhouse gas pollution that pours into the air. Such a program would put an end to the “jobs versus environment” conflict because environmental protection would produce millions of new jobs, and expansion of jobs would protect the environment. Such a program provides a road for both labor and environmentalists to move beyond our current dilemma.

We must pursue the vision of a new economy. Just expanding the kind of economy we have will just expand the problems of inequality and environmental catastrophe our current economy is already creating. Instead, we need to be guided by the vision of a new economy where we all have secure livelihoods based on work that builds a sustainable world.

A job with equal or better benefits must await the miner the Monday following the Friday he leaves the pit for the last time. Without Just Transition the “dawn of a new era” will be in danger of “postponement,” perhaps terminally so.

Rich Austin
PSARA Member - Mount Vernon, WA

(Full disclosure by RA: Some of the content of this message was plagiarized from the website of “Labor Network For Sustainability”.)

Readers: see PSARA’s statement "Environmental Justice and Full Employment" on Page 7 of this issue -- Editor
PSARA's Vision and Mission

By Robby Stern

PSARA is in the midst of an organizational long-term planning process. The PSARA Executive Board has approved a draft Vision & Mission Statement. From this statement we will develop a refinement of our unique role in the broader progressive movement and an articulation of our long- and short-term goals.

Proposed Vision

Through our collective activism, Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) is helping to create a just and peaceful world where all people can live with dignity and respect.

Proposed Mission

PSARA, a multi-generational and multi-racial organization, is committed to working for economic and social justice, environmental sustainability, economic security, and equal rights and opportunities for retirees and future retirees.

We welcome your comments. Your thoughts will be considered and discussed. Please email president@psara.org. The whole package of vision, mission, role, goals, and structure to carry out these tasks will be brought before a general membership meeting either in June or December.

The vision and mission statements are the framework for the short-term and long-term goals that will form the basis of the work of the organization for the foreseeable future. The long-term planning committee will propose these goals to our twenty-nine-member Executive Board within the next couple of months. All members are invited to attend.

We have yet to tackle the thorny structural and financial issues that we know are ahead of us. With a growing membership (a very good thing!), administrative responsibilities and tasks have grown enormously. For example, every month we mail letters to members who are in arrears on their yearly membership and we mail three notices. The number of letters has grown to over one hundred per month.

Additionally, the work of the organization is, for the most part, performed by volunteers. With our growth and with the addition of new areas of work (e.g., environmental sustainability), the coordination of the activities of the organization requires full-time oversight. We are examining creative ways to meet the growing organizational demands and stay a feisty and activist progressive voice for the rights of seniors and all people to live with dignity, respect and economic security.

Senior Economic Security

As the baby boomers age, there is an exponential increase in the number of seniors. A recent report on CNN Business points out that the U.S. is facing a growing crisis of economic insecurity for seniors. To quote from the report, “U.S. retirees are facing worse conditions for their golden years than retired workers in many other developed countries – from Canada and the United Kingdom to South Korea.”

The U.S. ranked 19th in retirement security for the second year in a row, according to a report from Natixis Global Asset Management. Eight of the top ten spots were taken by European countries with strong public and private pension systems and comprehensive health care systems.

In the U.S., workers are trying to save for their own retirements with 401(K) plans that are proving to be totally inadequate. The study identified four categories that are critical to economic security for seniors and identified how the U.S. is doing in each of those areas.

- Healthcare (U.S. ranks 21st) Healthcare spending in the U.S. is higher than any other country, yet life expectancy is lower than in most advanced Western countries. (e.g., there is a two-year life expectancy difference between the United Kingdom and the U.S., 81 to 79.)
- Finances (U.S. ranks 22nd) Not enough money in 401(K)s & low interest rates.
- Quality of Life (U.S. ranks 24th) According to the study, while Americans appear to be “generally satisfied with the quality of their lives,” environmental factors such as water and air pollution caused a reduction in the ranking. (While not in the study, you can be sure that growing income inequality and the decline of the middle class has a big impact on quality of life.)
- Economic well-being (U.S. ranks 36th) The authors of the study attribute this low ranking to persistent unemployment and income inequality. (They do not discuss the types of jobs the economy is creating and the fact that such a huge proportion of the jobs are low-wage.)

The authors of this study are an asset management outfit. They are probably not on our side of the political spectrum, which makes their conclusions all the more interesting. They fail to mention the decline in unionization, which is critical to understanding the growing income inequality and retirement insecurity. They also do not mention the growing elimination of defined benefit pensions which many of us were taught was a critical third leg of a retirement program that offered the opportunity for a secure retirement.

PSARA works to help build a progressive movement in our region that promotes both needed reforms and systemic change. It is our unique role to insure that part of the discussion of the goals of that movement include retirement security for all generations, both those of us now in our senior years and for the generations to follow.
The TPP and Global Health?

By Mary Anne Mercer

Only six months ago when the TPP, or the Trans-Pacific Partnership, was brought up in discussions, even well-informed activists generally gave blank stares. TP what? But in recent weeks it’s been the subject of increasing news coverage, along with exposure to the so-called fast track authority bill that would grant President Obama authority to sign the agreement without prior Congressional review.

Extensive negotiations on the TPP have been going on in secret over the past several years. As information about the TPP becomes better known, activist groups around the world have organized to oppose it. Just what is the TPP, and why do we care about it?

There is good evidence 20 years after NAFTA that poverty and inequality have increased in Mexico and wages in the U.S. have stagnated. The promises of NAFTA have not been kept.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a “trade” deal (but encompassing many other areas of corporate rights) among 13 countries of the Pacific Rim, including the United States. Official discussions are held behind closed doors without public information or input, and without input from our elected representatives in Congress, so little is known about the specific terms of the agreement. However, WikiLeaks has published two leaked chapters over the past few months detailing regulations concerning intellectual property and the environment. We have good reason to expect that the TPP will ratchet up terms that are prominent in existing trade agreements that have been signed between individual countries. So, although only the negotiating committees, which include about 600 diplomats and corporate representatives, know the exact terms of the deal, we have substantial cause for concern.

Local, national, and international groups concerned about global health have voiced opposition to many terms of the agreement, believing that they would affect the health and quality of life of people around the world if enacted. Some of the main health-related concerns about the TPP include:

- Restrictions on individual countries’ abilities to pass and enforce laws protecting public health. Through a mechanism known as Investor-State Dispute resolution, corporations would be entitled to sue sovereign governments for passing laws that ‘restrict trade’ – even public health measures such as restricting tobacco advertising on cigarette packaging, which the Australian and other governments are now facing.
- Intellectual property laws that would set up barriers to accessing generic medicines and other health commodities (including AIDS drugs), thus dramatically increasing their costs. By extending the already lengthy duration of patents and other corporate protections, Big Pharma will have an even stronger hold on the economic gains to be made from health problems around the world.
- Detrimental effects on equity, including the distribution of income and other resources. There is good evidence 20 years after NAFTA that poverty and inequality have increased in Mexico and wages in the U.S. have stagnated. The promises of NAFTA have not been kept.

But the TPP is far from a done deal. Many progressive groups, including PSARA, are joining together to oppose the TPP and the Fast Track bill. Locally, the Washington Fair Trade Coalition, a coalition of a large number of labor, environmental and community organizations, are leading the fight.

Sen. Harry Reid, Majority Leader in the U.S. Senate, has indicated that he is not interested in the Senate voting on legislation granting Fast Track Authority this year. There is no question that Reid’s decision is a result of mobilization of voters across the country. We will continue to educate and inform as many people as possible about the content of the TPP and the negative impact it will have on jobs, the environment, public health and the democratic process.

Mary Anne Mercer is a Senior Maternal & Child Health Advisor for Health Alliance International, teaches in the Public Health program at University of Washington, and is a PSARA member.
“Ancestry is not a crime,” said historian Roger Daniels, recalling Gordon Hirabayashi’s succinct criticism of President Franklin Roosevelt’s 1942 Executive Order 9066. The Executive Order established military zones in the western halves of the Pacific coast states, and empowered the military to remove all persons of Japanese ancestry from their homes, force them into makeshift housing in the animal stalls at the Puyallup Fairgrounds and other such “assembly centers,” then later “relocate” them to one of 10 concentration camps for 3-1/2 years.

Daniels made the comment during a “Day of Remembrance” event, February 22, 2014, at the University of Washington, during which the Hirabayashi family donated to the University Library the personal papers, journals and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in the United States, awarded to Gordon in 2012.

Why was Hirabayashi awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom? Because he broke a law (Presidential Order) which was ruled constitutional in 1944. And also because he steadfastly maintained that it wasn’t constitutional until the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals vacated his conviction in 1987.

The Day of Remembrance (DOR) commemorates February 19, 1942, the date that President Franklin Roosevelt issued his infamous Executive Order 9066. We want people to remember how we were treated back then, and we want people to be aware of what’s happening now.

DOR also is very much in my mind because I am part of a community advisory panel helping to produce the exhibit “Resist: Asian American Acts of Struggle” about Asian American civil disobedience at the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience. Now a recognized model, a community advisory approach was started to plan and curate “E.O. 9066: 50 Years Before and 50 Years After,” the first major exhibit at the Wing after Ron Chew was hired as Executive Director.

At the time, attendance was lagging at most museums, and Chew said that the only way to get more people into museums was to open the door and invite people in. Simply put. But very revolutionary in terms of museums. Ask community members to decide what was important historically, he was saying. And the 50-year-old Executive Order 9066 became the centerpiece of a new way of developing exhibits and interpreting history.

“E.O. 9066” opened on February 19, 1992. It was a huge success, measured in terms of attendance, local and national reviews and the way the exhibit was curated. Most important was the community participation, with hundreds donating or loaning artifacts, designing and building the exhibit itself, and telling personal stories. Like the original DOR itself, it gave Japanese Americans the opportunity to speak of the way their community grew despite widespread discrimination, was destroyed by presidential edict with Congressional support, and rebuilt despite intense on-going discrimination.

So how does all this relate to the Wing’s exhibit on API civil disobedience? The first DOR, after all, was not on February 19, and was advertised as a “community potluck,” to “stand for redress with your family on Saturday, November 25, 1978.”

How could a potluck be considered an act of civil disobedience?

At the first meeting of the advisory panel, the question, “What is civil disobedience?” was up for discussion.

The quick answer was risking arrest to protest and dramatize an intolerable situation. During that discussion, the question was turned into, “What does civil disobedience do, what is it for?” And then the discussion turned to taking a risk.

Culture plays a huge role in determining how we think and what we do and what meaning we give to our activities. Being arrested should not be the only criterion for civil disobedience when people of a targeted ancestry/culture are arrested, even killed, for walking down the street. Everything you do is risk-taking. As my dad always told his kids, “Watch out what you do. Rich kids can hire lawyers, poor kids cannot. And rich people make the laws.”

The main point of civilly disobedient action is to raise public consciousness, so that we all can take a stand against injustice. To stand up, in struggle and in solidarity with others, telling your story, and still not be sure that you won’t be carted off to some place behind bars or barbed wire, that is really what civil disobedience is. People’s fears, then and now, about incarceration, torture and, yes, murder, are realities for some populations, and need to be taken into account.

Some Japanese Americans did not attend the original DOR, fearing what might be done to them, but because it was a community potluck, sent food. Others were going back to “Camp Harmony” at Puyallup Fairgrounds, “which had been home for 7,200 Japanese

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Legislature Kicks the Can to 2015

By Pam Crone, PSARA Lobbyist

The word on the street prior to the 2014 legislative session was “keep your expectations low,” but that’s not PSARA. We had high hopes. Finally emerging from the Great Recession, it was time to get on with passing legislation that serves the needs of the majority of Washington residents.

Our Legislature alternates 105-day “long” sessions with 60-day “short” sessions. Last year in overtime we passed an operating budget for the 2013-15 biennium. We understood that this year a short session would be one of tweaking that budget without major new spending. So PSARA carefully crafted a modest, but important policy and budget agenda.

Here is how it panned out.

First, we stood shoulder to shoulder with our allies in the Washington Work and Family Coalition led by the stalwart Marilyn Watkins to advance paid safe and sick days legislation. And advance we did! Last year the House Labor & Commerce Committee had a hearing on HB 1313, but the bill never even made it to the House floor for a vote. This year we not only got it to the floor, but we passed it.

The Senate was another story. We showered our senators with emails, phone calls and visits on Lobby Day to get a hearing in the Senate. Our advocacy paid off, and we got a hearing. But that was the end. The bill was killed in the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee. Next year we will work to advance a bill all the way to the Governor’s desk. We want to make sure workers don’t have to lose a day’s pay when they are sick or taking care of a sick child or parent. This is a choice no one should have to make.

Second, we advocated relentlessly for the Federal Basic Health Option (FBHO) brought to us as part of the Affordable Care Act by our own Senator Maria Cantwell and Congressman Jim McDermott. The FBHO would assure that no one would fall through the cracks in accessing the healthcare they deserve. Healthcare shouldn’t break the bank. Working with the Healthy Washington Coalition, HB 2594 drew farmers, students, low-wage workers, and immigrants to tell their stories in a well-attended hearing in the House Health Care and Wellness Committee.

We fought the good fight and along with Healthy Washington Coalition we successfully passed the bill off the House floor. But once again, we were thwarted in the Republican-controlled Senate. We will continue to advocate for healthcare for all. We will find a way!

Third, we worked with the Healthy Washington Coalition to introduce a bill that would require large employers to share responsibility with taxpayers in funding Apple Health (Medicaid). Too often, some large employers shift the cost of providing healthcare coverage to the state without helping out. We will be talking about this issue for years to come. This year we helped to spearhead the effort to start the conversation.

Fourth, we advocated along with our allies in the Senior Lobby for funding of a long-term care financing study that would have examined new models for financing long-term care including public and private options. We lobbied both Republicans and Democrats in the House to pass a bill off the House floor that would have examined how we are going to pay for the care and support of Washingtonians as they age. The Supplemental Budget that was passed failed to fund the study. Once again, we will have to come back to the legislature to begin the process of addressing the looming crisis of funding long-term care for the growing senior population.

We have Sen. David Frock and Rep. Steve Tharinger to thank for saving the Office of Public Guardianship. Without these compassionate leaders we would have lost funding for public guardians for vulnerable low-income seniors and others lacking decision-making capacity who have no friends or family to look after them.

If the 2014 legislative session is remembered for one good thing, it will be the passage of the Dream Act. Nothing was more delightful and heartening than to cheer with the “Dreamers” who new will be eligible for financial aid for college tuition along with their classmates because Governor Inslee signed the Act into law.

In 2015, we will once again roll up our sleeves to get the job done. We expect the same of our Legislature. It will not satisfy us to see bills pass in the House only to die in the Senate. All 98 seats of the House of Representatives and critical Senate seats are up for election. Together let’s make our Legislature accountable for its successes and failures. We need a legislature that will address the funding needed for our education system, transportation including transit, and infrastructure. Let’s work to elect a workable Legislature that passes public policies that make the lives of the majority of Washington residents better.
PSARA: Environmental Justice and Full Employment

“CLIMATE CHANGE is a wake up call spoken in the language of fires, floods, storms and droughts – telling us that we need an entirely new economic model-one based on equity, sustainability and good jobs.”

- According to the World Health Organization, climate change is the biggest global health threat of the 21st century. Between 1970 and 2004, there were over 140,000 deaths annually attributable to the use of fossil fuels.
- Today the polar ice is melting; seas are rising. We are experiencing more extreme weather like Hurricane Sandy and the hurricane that slammed into the Philippines in November, 2013.
- Scientists studying tropical diseases maintain that diseases like malaria and dengue fever will become more widespread as mosquitoes and other pests move north.
- Food production is expected to decrease by 2% every decade.
- The oceans are becoming more acidified. Plankton, the microscopic organisms at the base of the food chain, is rapidly moving toward the poles and decreasing in number.

These facts are met with business as usual by the fossil fuel industry and many government leaders. Meanwhile poor and working people are suffering from the damage caused by climate change.

While the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere passed 400 parts per million in May 2013, fossil fuel corporations are planning to dig and transport more coal, and destroy more land and water by fracking more oil and gas. They tell us we stand in the way of progress when we object.

The fossil fuel corporations work hard to keep us divided with the promise of jobs for construction, mining and refining.

We do need jobs that pay living wages and allow families to live with dignity. We need to create and expand work that promotes healthy communities and a healthy planet. Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) will fight to ensure there is a just transition for those workers whose jobs are replaced by a new energy economy.

The refusal of Congress to tax billionaires while cutting social services and other programs critical to survival of the planet has to end. Income inequality today is worse than at any time in history. PSARA demands robust programs to respond to the threat of climate disaster and the destruction of lives and hope created by extreme income inequality.

We need nothing less than a large marshalling of the country's resources to put people to work repairing our crumbling infrastructure. We need to be building the new systems and services necessary to survive the disastrous effects that have already been set in motion by the loading of too much CO₂ in the earth's atmosphere.

PSARA calls for significant government spending to help save the planet.

We need smart electrical grids carrying renewable energy. We need jobs to build mass transit and we need energy-efficient affordable housing along those transit lines. We also need major investments in the old infrastructure to cope with the coming storms.

This is no time for austerity – it is time for massive government investment.

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1Naomi Klein speech at the founding convention of UNIFOR, created by the Canadian Autoworkers and the Canadian Energy and Paper Workers Union.
2World Health Organization “Climate Change and Health Fact sheet N°266 Reviewed November 2013”
3Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2013 report
4The ICES Journal of Marine Science (International Council for Exploration of the Sea)
Acting SSA Commissioner Gets Push-Back on Office Closures, Needs More

By Steve Kofahl, President of AFGE Local 3937 and a member of PSARA’s Executive Board

A couple of years ago, Carolyn Colvin, Acting Social Security Administration Commissioner, told AFGE that the Agency was getting very little "push-back" when SSA decided to close field offices. Some of us took that as a challenge, and our efforts are finally beginning to bear fruit. Nowhere have community and elected leaders challenged SSA’s office closures as strongly as we have in Seattle.

Twenty-one months ago, two accessible community offices were closed and consolidated into the Jackson Federal Building, where significant access barriers disadvantage the disabled, the poor, and those with limited English language proficiency. We had fought the decision for one year prior to the closures, and we are still fighting, now pressing SSA to do what’s right and re-establish a branch office or contact station that can properly serve all residents of South and Central Seattle. PSARA, Social Security Works Washington, and an impressive coalition of International District community leaders have led the charge.

On January 14 of this year, we received the following message from Senator Patty Murray’s State Director, Brian Kristjansson:

"Senator Murray worked to include report language addressing Social Security Administration office consolidations and closures in the omnibus appropriations bill that will be voted on this week in the House and Senate. The Appropriations Committee staff originally included some basic language requiring a study on the office closure process, but we worked to beef up the language to address some of the social justice issues we have been discussing. As we continue the conversation about the Seattle Social Security office, I want you to know the concerns you have expressed to the delegation are being heard - and are influencing national policy going forward."

The report language reads:

"Field Office Closings. - Concerns remain that in recent years SSA has lacked comprehensive, transparent policies regarding field office closings, including data on specific populations impacted by office closures and plans to mitigate the effects of closures. The Commissioner is directed to submit a report to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees within 90 days of enactment of this act on its policies and procedures for closing and consolidating field offices, including any policies and procedures related to assessing the community impacts of closing or consolidating offices, and the metrics used to calculate short- and long-term cost savings. In addition, the Commissioner is directed to provide a readily available public notice of proposed field office closures to ensure that impacted communities are aware of proposed changes and allow an opportunity for public input on the proposed changes and possible mitigation to ensure continued access to SSA services."

Unfortunately, SSA has arrogantly continued, unabated and without meeting these Congressional expectations, to announce additional office closures. Kingston and Amherst in New York, and Barstow and Redlands in California, are the latest communities threatened with field office closures. Senator Chuck Schumer objected to the Kingston announcement in a press conference, and an angry Congressman Brian Higgins did the same on behalf of his Amherst constituents. The Barstow City Council passed a resolution opposing the closure of their office. Rep. Higgins took it a step further by introducing a bill on February 5 that would codify and strengthen the requirements of the report language so that SSA would have no choice but to satisfy the desires of Congress. The Higgins Bill is HR 3997. Please ask your representative in the House of Representatives to sign on as a co-sponsor, and urge your Senators to introduce companion legislation.

SSA has arrogantly continued to announce additional office closures unabated and without meeting Congressional expectations.
Ancestry is Not a Crime

Continued from Page 5

Americans,” for the first time since they were shipped out to Minidoka or other concentration camps, and were apprehensive about what would happen to them. In fact, when they were allowed out of the concentration camps, they were cautioned to, “for their own safety,” not assemble with more than four at a time.

When some organizers first suggested folks chaining themselves to the fences of the Fairgrounds for the first DOR, local community organizers Henry Miyatake and Shosuke Sasaki nixed it, saying nobody would come. They proposed the potluck, along with the “Art From the Camps” display, a talent show, and to make sure nobody forgot, some even cooked “camp food” for the potluck.

With that change they got more favorable press for DOR and support for redress from Governor Dan Evans, Seattle Mayor Charles Royer, and the entire Seattle City Council. More than 2,000 Japanese Americans showed up at the event. As poet Lawson Inada observed, “It was the largest gathering of Japanese Americans since the camps.” It became a joyous and powerful community reawakening.

That reawakening is still needed by all of America. Ancestry is still treated as if it is a crime in this country. We need to stand up together, using whatever means we can, in struggle and in solidarity whenever we can with those who need help getting their stories heard, and demanding rights and respect for all.

Just as the first DOR broke open internally repressed doors for the Japanese American community, the “Executive Order 9066” exhibit showed a new way to document our experience and link the past with the present by using community advisory committees to help curate the show. Other museum exhibitions, such as the Museum of History and Industry’s (MOHAI) “Revealing Queer,” have followed the same process. Check out these exhibits when you can:

The “Revealing Queer” exhibit at MOHAI opened February 14 and runs to July 6, 2014. The Wing’s exhibit of Asian Pacific Islander civil disobedience will open May 1, 2014.

Making Swedish-Providence Our Community Hospital Again

By Evangeline Domingo Keefe, RN and PSARA member

This era of hospital mergers is leaving not just patients but also communities behind. As our community hospitals become part of large multi-state chains with their eye more on the bottom line than on patients’ needs, it’s up to us to make sure their priorities reflect ours.

In 2012, Providence, a five-state chain that operates 32 hospitals, purchased Swedish, where I work as a nurse at the Ballard Campus. What used to be our local hospital with an industry-leading focus on quality patient care is now part of a Catholic-affiliated non-profit that made $412 million in profits and investment returns in 2012.

An end to an era of quality, cutting-edge care?

Not long after Providence’s takeover, staff began noticing that the culture started shifting. Support services like dietary and housekeeping were deeply cut, leaving the remaining staff scrambling to pick up the extra work. Groundbreaking partnerships forged with the staff to promote staff wellness and keep down employee healthcare costs got abandoned. And workers with simple HR questions had their calls re-routed to Providence headquarters.

From inside the hospitals, the change was dramatic.

For two years in a row—both years since Providence took over—management has hiked the cost of employee healthcare coverage to the point where some of us cannot afford to cover our own families.

Nurses in particular are alarmed at the new resistance we’re facing as we work to ensure we get the rest and meal breaks we need to stay alert at the bedside. Staffing is one of the biggest indicators of patient safety, yet short staffing often means we don’t have time to even use the restroom. Our nurses’ union, SEIU Healthcare 1199NW, is standing up for safer staffing.

Community benefits, minus the Community

The impact of the merger extends beyond the hospital walls, too. Hospitals, particularly non-profits, have a unique position in our communities. They don’t pay income taxes like the rest of us. These institutions are instead expected to offset their contribution to our communities in the form of “community benefits.” The IRS very loosely defines this term and often hospitals count doctor education, giveaways at community events, and even sponsoring sporting events (where the end result is self-promotion). Charity care is scarce and the system is difficult to navigate. And the benefits our community really needs are passed up for flashier options.

But what would a true community benefit be to us, the community? And why haven’t hospitals asked us?

What should Swedish-Providence be doing?

Swedish-Providence has a responsibility to our community to provide safe, accessible, affordable care and to use some of its profits to meet our community’s needs. Swedish-Providence can be a good healthcare provider and a good neighbor again, as it once was. But it needs to take responsibility for offering the benefits we need. That ranges from in-person translation (as opposed to the phone service they now use), accessible transportation to the hospital, good jobs for our community, openly available charity care to all who need it, affordable healthcare for its employees and its patients, and access to all the services patients need regardless of the Catholic directives.

A campaign is beginning to hold Swedish-Providence accountable. Washington CAN! is working with patients, and SEIU Healthcare 1199NW is leading a staff effort. It’s going to take all of us to hold this huge corporation accountable. Stay tuned for how you can get involved!
Will Parry: A Man For All Seasons

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lovely, gifted woman, Louise Long, and they had two beautiful children.

Will could have been a millionaire. He could have been a U.S. senator. While he ran for office, winning was always secondary to his principles: “People and Nature Before Profits.”

Early in life, Will took a different path. Maybe he had read that lovely line of Jose Marti we hear today in Guantana-mera: “Con los pobres de la tierra/Quiero yo mi suerte echar.” (With the poor people of this earth I wish to share my fate.)

He loved working-class people, sang for them and strumming on his battered guitar, invited them to sing with him. Once at a People’s World barbeque at Genesee Park, Will was leading the crowd in singing “Goodnight Irene.” People were remembering the verses and singing them. Will sang: “Sometimes she wears pajamas/ Sometimes she wears a nightgown/ But when they’re both in the laundry/ Irene is the talk of the town.” The crowd erupted in laughter and applause and Will himself was laughing and strumming his guitar. His handsome face radiated so much joy. He was drawing that joy from the crowd. His connection with the people, especially people fighting the good fight, was the source of his strength and eternal optimism.

Will devoutly believed that masses of working people—women and men, African American, Latino, Asian Pacific, Native American Indian, and white—will determine the destiny of our nation and the world. Ultimately, he believed that the internal contradictions of capitalism would lead the people to opt for a system of maximum economic and political democracy----socialism. Will himself played a huge role in helping organize those coalitions. He understood that those movements are invincible if they are fully united and mobilized.

Will understood the deadly dangers posed by Karl Rove and the Koch Brother billionaires. Utilizing their age-old trusty weapons -- racism, sexism, and homophobia -- they would drive wedges into that movement.

That is why Will was such a determined foe of racism. He plunged into the movement to rescue the Central Area Senior Center when it faced bankruptcy. Working together with Thurston MusKelley, they raised $131,000 to fund the center that serves the mostly African American community. Will was a strong supporter of Mothers for Police Accountability and its leader, the Rev. Harriett Walden, which fights to end police brutality in Seattle.

Will and Louise were targets of another wedge issue used by the ultra-right to divide and weaken the movement for progressive change: anti-communism. Will was hounded and harassed by the FBI, blacklisted from every well-paying job. His refusal to buckle to the fear and intimidation, his defense of his beliefs and his staunch upholding of the Bill of Rights is another reason Will Parry was embraced as a hero of the people’s movement.

Will was a strategic thinker. He put his energy and brainpower where he thought it mattered most. When he reached retirement age, he gave all his energy to organizing the senior citizen movement. He knew that Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid were the crown jewels in a century of struggle by the working class and its allies.

Driven by profit-greed, the corporate ultra-right poured out lies about “Social Security going broke” and how the answer was private accounts in the Wall Street banks. A brilliant word craftsman, Will exposed the thieves and mobilized PSARA and the people to fight back.

In the June edition of the Retiree Advocate, Robby Stern, president of the Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) wrote a tribute to Will calling him “the guiding spirit of PSARA.”

Stern added, “In his 90s, Will developed a growing urgency to address the threat of climate change and the damage being done by the fossil fuel industry.”

Stern cited Will’s last major article that appeared under the headline, “To Save Planet Earth, Handcuff the Fossil Fuel Industry.” The lead sentence of the article reads, “This article is for my grandchildren. And yours. And everybody’s around all the world. I want them to live out their lives on a vibrant, living planet.”

We did not know it at the time, but Will was writing his own epitaph. We hear you, Will. We will try to live our lives the way you lived yours.

Tim Wheeler, a PSARA member, is a former editor of People’s World.
New Members -- and Chocolates

By Susan Levy, PSARA Outreach Vice President

Welcome to all our new members. So far, 75 lucky people have joined PSARA this year.

Thanks to all of you who gave gift memberships or recruited friends and family. We will all benefit from this growth. Our new members will get the benefit of up-to-date news and information in the Advocate, and all of us will have a stronger voice as we move forward with our agenda -- a safe and secure retirement now and in the future.

Just think. If we grew by 75 members in the first quarter of 2014, by the end of the year we should have over 300 new members -- what a growth spurt!

I think we can do it, do you?

Some new ideas have emerged about recruiting/gifting new members. I talked to my neighborhood librarian, gifted her a membership, and she will put the newsletter out for library patrons. Do you have a library or community center that might display our newsletter or publicize our events? A person I met at the MLK Day celebration gifted his parents a membership. Or you could host a small coffee or tea and ask your neighbors to join. Please let me know any other ideas you might have. And, as always, PSARA is willing to help you think of ideas and/or provide materials.

A sweet incentive: Outreach VP Susan Levy promises chocolates for any member who successfully recruits five new members. (Photo: Garet Munger)
Meetings and Events

PSARA Environmental Committee:  
1 p.m.- 2:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 1, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Ave, Room 226, Seattle. All members welcome as we engage in a discussion with representatives from the Power Past Coal coalition.

PSARA Education Committee: 10 – 11:30 a.m., Wednesday, April 2, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 208, 2800 First Ave, Seattle. All members welcome as we continue our planning for a series of educational workshops this spring.

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 2, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First Ave, Seattle. All members welcome as we discuss PSARA's participation in the $15 NOW campaign and our May Day activity.

PSARA Executive Board Meeting: 12:30 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, April 17, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Ave S, Seattle. All PSARA members are welcome.

Green Lake Discussion group: Noon to 1:00 p.m., Thursday, April 24, Green Lake Library, 7354 East Green Lake Drive N., Seattle. Brown bag lunch and discussion. Topic: Exploring End of Life Concerns. Co-sponsored by PSARA and the Northwest Center for Creative Aging.

Something to think about:

What we collectively decide about how to bail out our economy, how to pull our economy out of a ditch and what rules we put in place to make sure this problem does not happen again, will shape our country for the next 50 years. This is it.

Senator Elizabeth Warren