Opposing a Corporatist Agenda & ALEC  
By Joe Kendo  

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) empowers America’s largest corporations in their efforts to co-opt state lawmakers and drive through a 50-state corporatist agenda. As the Legislative and Policy Director of the WA State Labor Council, I see the impact of ALEC everyday during the legislative sessions.  

ALEC is a bill mill – an organization that brings policy makers together to brainstorm and develop model legislation that elected officials bring back to their communities. At first glance, there’s nothing necessarily nasty about this process, and there are other organizations that facilitate this kind of idea sharing. National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) also brings lawmakers together to share legislative ideas, but there’s really no comparison. NCSL empowers idea sharing, and ALEC empowers corporations; NCSL mandates bi-partisan leadership, while ALEC puts corporate players in control of public policy.  

What makes ALEC and its model legislation so disturbing is that good public policy in the interest of the people is set aside in favor of legislation that pits the interests of the states against the desires of the wealthiest corporations in the country. At ALEC, each of its nine policy committees are co-chaired by representatives of big business, so it is no surprise that the results of these “intellectual exchanges” are bills that promote the degradation of environmental protections, the elimination of workers’ bargaining rights, the refusal to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, and the refusal to address climate change.  

Continued on Page 11  

Speaker Chopp to address PSARA Legislative Conference  
By Chuck Richards, PSARA Government Relations Co-Chair  

PSARA’s Legislative Conference on Nov. 12 will feature two knowledgeable and excellent speakers: Speaker of the House Frank Chopp and PSARA Lobbyist, Pam Crone (both of whom are PSARA members!). Both speakers will provide their analysis of the impact the 2014 election will have on the 2015 Legislative session and the likelihood of success for PSARA’s 2015 Legislative Agenda. (See President’s column on page 3 for proposals on our Legislative Agenda.)  

After the speakers and the Q & A, PSARA members will have a discussion about our legislative program and our work during the 2015 Legislative session. We will then break into table discussions by legislative districts to plan appointments with legislators before the session begins on January 12.  

The gathering will be on Wednesday, November 12, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon at UFCW Local 21 on 5030 First Ave. S., Seattle. A light breakfast will be served. Parking is available in the parking lot or on the street.  

December Membership Meeting and Holiday Potluck  
By Maureen Bo, PSARA Administrative Vice President  

Please join us at our fabulous holiday potluck as we celebrate the spirit of community shared by PSARA members in our quest for a more just and humane world.  

We will have a brief but important business meeting, where we will elect officers and board members and discuss long-term plans for PSARA. Included in the discussion will be a proposal to change our dues structure in order to strengthen and expand PSARA.  

Our featured speaker is Jeff Johnson, President of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, who has spent decades fighting for workers’ rights and continues to lead action for progressive solutions to state issues.  

The PSARA Executive Board is fun and interesting, but requires work and participation in PSARA’s issues and goals. If you are interested in running for a board position that begins January 2015, please contact this year’s chair of the election committee, Maureen Bo, at adminvp@psara.org, or call 206-448-9646 and leave a message.  

Also please RSVP for the membership meeting to Maureen Bo at adminvp@psara.org or 206-448-9646. Tell us what food or beverage you can bring to the potluck, i.e. main dish, salad, dessert, juice. Also please consider bringing a non-perishable food or drink item or cash for the ML King County Labor Council Food Bank.  

The meeting will be at the Greenwood Community Senior Center, 525 N 85th St, Seattle, Thursday, December 18, from 12:30 to 3:00 pm. (See the flyer on Page 7 for more information).
Interview with Will Parry, Part IV

Editor’s Note: In 2010 former Retiree Advocate Editor and lifelong working class activist Will Parry gave a 90th birthday interview to Real Change reporter Cydney Gillis. This is the concluding part of that interview.

For those who knew Will, his answers to these final questions illustrate the boundless optimism and faith in working people that kept him going even through the worst years of the McCarthy period.

Can the labor movement ever regain its strength?

I wouldn't underestimate its remaining strength. It's all connected with things like NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement] and the export of jobs to low-wage countries and the destruction of our manufacturing base, which was the base of strength of the labor movement. Look, here are the garbage workers—there are still people on strike fighting for the best contract. The UFCW [United Food and Commercial Workers] at the grocery stores are in the middle of negotiations and the employers are trying to water down their health care and increase deductibles and take away some of their benefits, and the workers are not going to stand for it. If necessary, there'll be a strike ... They're not horsing around. They mean business about protecting what they've won.

What keeps you so optimistic?

What keeps me so optimistic is, among other things, my 21 years [with the workers] at the Longview Fibre Company. I know firsthand all their shortcomings, defects, misunderstandings, lack of sophistication, [but] my God, they're strong and I believe in workers. ... No matter how they transform the economy, the work has to be done and capitalism creates workers. It has to—you can't have any profits without workers. You can have all the bankers in the world, but if you don't have someone cleaning the toilets, you don't have a society ... When I was young, I thought by now we'd have socialism in America. But I go by the advice of the rabbi of two millennia ago: “You are not required to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to abstain from it.” None of us finish the work. It goes on, but we have a responsibility while we're above ground to do something about it.

The Retiree ADVOCATE

Published monthly by the Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action, 2800 First Ave., #262, Seattle, Washington, 98121. Phone (206) 448-9646.
President: Robby Stern
Administrative Vice-President: Maureen Bo
Outreach Vice-President: Susan Levy
Treasurer: Edyth Koch
Diversity Committee Chair: Frank Irigon
Education Committee Chair, Mark Mc Dermott: markmmcdermott1@msn.com
Environmental Committee Co-chairs, Kristen Beifus & Tom Lux: envi rocommittee@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.

Will shares a laugh with Gene Lux at a PSARA meeting.
Proposed Legislative Agenda

By Robby Stern

PSARA will be active in the 2015 legislative session. The Executive Board’s proposed legislative agenda will be discussed at our Legislative Conference on Nov. 12. We believe these proposals reflect many of the values and policies that are important to PSARA members.

The legislative agenda includes the following:

1. PSARA supports legislation to increase transparency and accountability in the budget process including, but not limited to:
   a. Requiring the legislature to adopt a tax expenditure budget as part of the state biannual budget process. (This would require the legislature, when they pass their two-year budget, to also vote to renew the tax breaks they previously passed. It also makes those tax breaks more transparent.)
   b. Eliminating tax exemptions that do not have a demonstrated public benefit.

2. PSARA supports allocating significant resources to provide a much larger stack of low-income housing for the growing population of seniors who will rely solely or in large measure on Social Security as their source of income, as well as the many Washington residents who are unable to afford adequate housing because of the preponderance of low-wage jobs and the erosion of defined benefit pensions.

3. PSARA believes that comprehensive affordable health care is a fundamental human right. In the 2015 Washington State Legislative session, we will support all legislation that furthers the goal of universal health care coverage in Washington. Legislation should include:
   - Requiring Paid Sick Days for workers statewide
   - Adopting the Federal Basic Health Option (FBHO) to promote access to care and continuity of care for low-income families. Until the FBHO is available, people on Washington Apple Health (Medicaid) should be eligible for 12 months rather than establishing eligibility every month.
   - Protecting Washington Apple Health (Medicaid) by requiring shared employer responsibility. (This would require low-wage large employers who shift the cost of covering their employees onto the Medicaid system to contribute financially to the cost of that coverage.)
   - Passing legislation that supports Washington applying for a Section 1332 Affordable Care Act waiver that would allow Washington to establish a universal health care system in our state.

4. PSARA supports legislation that establishes a state minimum wage of $15 per hour.

5. PSARA supports passage of legislation that invests in a 21st Century transportation system, including a greater investment in public transportation, our state infrastructure, and projects that address the challenges created by climate change and the fossil fuel economy.

6. PSARA supports a study of the costs and benefits of a state program that will provide assistance with the costs of long-term care for Washington residents.

7. PSARA supports a study of the feasibility of establishing a state-based supplemental Social Security program.

Join us at PSARA’s Legislative Conference on November 12 where we will discuss this legislative agenda.

This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate

Naomi Klein’s new book has done an extraordinary job of analyzing what can and must be done to address one of the most compelling crises of our time, sustaining our global communities in the face of dramatic climate change. Despite the immensity of the challenges we face, she believes we can fight and win the battle to establish a new set of values and policies on our planet and create new environmentally sustainable jobs that will replace the jobs that will be lost.

Klein posits that communalism and caring for each other is a better way to live than the hierarchical and selfish values that dominate the thinking of the 1% and their various messengers. The crisis created by climate change requires us to intensify our struggle against the Milton Friedman/Koch Brothers vision of what the world should look like. Because failing to achieve a different approach on how we live together means whole peoples, cities, nations, and other living things will disappear. Not one of us, nor our children, grandchildren, or generations to follow will escape the forces that are being unleashed.

Ms. Klein emphasizes that the task ahead will require us to confront our fears and hopelessness when trying to make big changes. It is not just about individual acts like recycling, using different light bulbs and buying energy-efficient cars. We must also come together on a movement scale to insist that policy makers not serve as handmaidens for the 1% who benefit from the way things are. Capitalist values are failing the vast majority of people on our planet as well as the very survival of life on our planet.

We can no longer allow the politicians to lead. Instead, we have to build a movement that insists that those in power take the resources that are now so disproportionately in the hands of the 1% and use those resources to address the transition to a renewable energy economy that creates a more equitable society. These changes will require major government investments, the empowerment of local communities, and the creation of the jobs required to renew our infrastructure, remodel our transportation system, and repair the damage that has been done.

Ms. Klein brings an optimistic outlook even as she recognizes the difficulty of the challenges that lie ahead. Reading her book is worth our time.
Reflections on *This Changes Everything*

*By Bob Shimabukuro, Associate Editor of the Retiree Advocate and member of PSARA’s Executive Board*

Naomi Klein’s September 28 daytime meeting with labor, environmental, and community groups was puzzling to me. She was, after all, scheduled to speak to an already sold-out Town Hall, to promote her new book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, so the purpose of this daytime meeting of representatives of selected groups seemed redundant, if it was just to sell books. So I thought that she was going to announce something or talk about some great movement happening elsewhere.

She quickly doused that idea in her opening remarks, saying she was interested in finding out what was going on in Seattle, that it seemed like this is where there are a lot of things (political organizing) happening.

It was, strangely enough, the third event in a month, where I had heard someone say that things were “happening” in Seattle, and made me wonder what I had been missing.

Just when I was about to give up on her, I heard the words, “People who have been on the front line of our toxic economy should be the first in line for any benefits of the new economy,” and then added so that no one could misinterpret her, “[T]he first beneficiaries should be the indigenous.”

Klein’s statement also got the attention of Got Green advocate Michael Woo. He welcomed the proposition, noting that sometimes people of color and poor people don’t have the resources to be working with environmental issues; yet we need to get real specific as we talk about availability of jobs.

I was drawn to Klein’s comments because they were very similar to something I had noted in a previous Advocate. Writing about education and jobs, I quoted Grace Lee Boggs, from *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (2011):

...[A]s citizens of a nation which had achieved economic growth and prosperity at the expense of African Americans, Native Americans, other people of color, and people all over the world, our priority had to be in correcting the injustices and backwardness of our relationships with one another, with other countries, and with the Earth.

This idea is not new. In 1974, James and Grace Lee Boggs had written in *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*:

The revolution to be made in the United States will be the first revolution in history to require the masses to make material sacrifices rather than to acquire more material things. We must give up many of the things which this country has enjoyed at the expense of damning over one-third of the world into a state of underdevelopment, ignorance, disease, and early death. ... It is obviously going to take a tremendous transformation to prepare the people of the United States for these new social goals.

(Upon further review, the similarity shouldn’t come as too big a surprise. Both Klein and Boggs credited Martin Luther King as a source.)

Klein was well received and if the purpose of the meeting was simply a chance for all the different groups present to let other groups know what they were doing, then I would say that was a worthwhile meeting.

Klein is an exceptional story teller. Throughout her book is a series of stories of guerilla warriors, farmers of ancient knowledge growing perennial grains, Big Green organizations with oil wells, or sinking islands, etc. And what she is saying is this: We have to change what we have going on now; we have to do it quickly and collectively; we need to be inclusive; we need to transform ourselves; we need to be more equal; we need to pay reparations.

A tall order, indeed. But Klein is very optimistic.

It’s difficult to cover all the issues brought up in *This Changes Everything* (and in Klein’s previous book, *The Shock Doctrine*), but we can have a very brief look (more correctly, a glance) at two.

We are currently locked in a consumer-based society. People go into debt to consume. The people who loan money own and make money on that wealth. And a lot of that money is from investments in coal (and natural gas). The investors (and workers) are not going to give up their investments (or their jobs) easily.

As Klein writes about tar sands workers in Fort McMurray, Alberta:

And with so few well-paying blue-collar jobs left, these extraction jobs are often the only route out of debt and poverty. It’s telling that tar sands workers often discuss their time in northern Alberta as if it were less a job than a highly lucrative jail term: there’s “the three-year plan,” (save $200,000, then leave); “the five-year plan,” (put away half a million); “the ten-year plan,” (make a million and retire at 35). ... [T]he plan is always pretty much the same: tough it out in Fort Mac (or Fort McMoney as it is often called), then get the hell out and begin your real life.

Continued on Page 10
Sounding the Alarm on Climate Change

By Bobby and Michael Righi

In September we decided we would spend our fossil fuel allotment for the year and fly to New York City to take part in the People’s Climate March to demand an end to the burning of fossil fuels. We stayed in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a primarily African American community. Nearly every corner shop we visited in the neighborhood had posters and flyers about the climate march. We began to realize that this was not going to be the typical climate demonstration.

On Saturday, the day before the march, there was a “Climate Conference” with over 100 presentations and workshops held in 18 places across the city. We split up and attended one on the role of unions, one on the plight of young Black men, and another on the potential of agro-ecology to slow climate change. Each of these was in a packed auditorium and was sharp, inspiring, and raised provocative questions – each could be another Advocate article.

On Sunday morning, PSARA Climate Change signs in hand, we took the A train to Central Park West and 59th St. We tried to find the area where we should assemble because the organizers, knowing the crowd would be large, published a plan with six large sections describing where groups should assemble. We chose the “WE Can Build the Future” section, because we fit into several of those categories: Unions, Families, Elders, and Students.

The labor contingent was big and impressive, including members of United Steelworkers, Teamsters, IBEW, UFCW, AFSCME, AFT, ATU, UAW, and the New York Nurses Union, just to name the ones I could see. It was a sign of the gathering strength of the climate movement – we need the voices and organization of labor.

There were groups from all over the world and areas of this country. One beautiful banner read “New Orleans: The Seas Are Rising and So Are We.” Whole neighborhoods of communities that had been devastated by Hurricane Sandy marched together. They knew the power of climate change to cause damage to lives and jobs, and they learned that the wealthy people mainly responsible for causing the problems in the first place were not anywhere in sight when they were left without electricity and water for weeks. It was the people of Occupy who helped.

As the march got going, people were packed together, chanting and singing. It began to dawn on us that we were an enormous and diverse mass of people and we had become part of something historic. As the march began, those of us at about 72nd St. did not get to move for almost an hour because so many people were pouring into the march from the side streets. The route of the march was only a bit over two miles but it took three hours to reach the end point because of the size of the crowd. And when we did reach it, the later sections had not even started the march.

Along the route there were giant LED screens with pictures of the march. At one point all of the screens posted a notice to have a moment of silence for the victims of climate change. The huge crowd went silent and then, after a minute, the cheers began rolling down from one block to another, creating an inspiring and goose-bumpy feeling.

The march was criticized by some for not having any concrete demands. As we marched, we saw a wide diversity of people in organized contingents from neighborhoods, unions, schools and communities taking the time to march. It seemed that this broad call to fight climate change fit the diversity. We all need to work to change our society to make it sustainable and that fight will take different forms. The emphasis was on going back into peoples’ respective communities and continuing to organize on local and regional scales.

At the end, we were tired. Knees hurting, we watched the march for a while and then went home and prepared for the next day’s march from Battery Park to “Flood Wall Street,” organized by the folks from Occupy. Everyone was to wear blue to signify the waters rising around the capitalists of the financial center of the world.

The next morning, after a rally in Battery Park, four or five thousand of us marched without a permit into the streets of the financial district and occupied the streets for several blocks. Many people sat in the streets, sang songs, and danced to the music of the bands in the march. This went on all day and into the evening, when over 100 people were finally arrested. It was clear that the police were not anxious to make arrests and cause more ruckus.

Because of all of the work that went into turning out over 400,000 in New York and hundreds of thousands more around the world on the same day, it is clear that there is a climate movement, and like other historic movements before, it is made up of diverse groups and communities with different demands, but determined to keep going and building to stop climate change, and take power into our hands.

We are sounding the alarm on climate change, one of the greatest threats our world has ever faced. We are demonstrating the tide of anger, joy, and resolve that is going to do something about it.

Bobby and Michael Righi are retired college teachers and active members of PSARA.


2014 PSARA Legislative Conference

Wednesday, November 12th 
10 a.m. – 12 noon

UFCW Local 21
5030 First Ave. South • Seattle WA

METRO Route #121 on 1st Ave. So
METRO Route #23 on 4th Ave. So

Learn about the impact of the Nov 4th election on the 2015 Legislative Session
Registration & light breakfast at 9:30 a.m.

Presentations: Program begins promptly at 10 a.m.

Speaker Frank Chopp
(Speaker Chopp speaks with Q & A at 10 a.m. and then he must leave for another meeting.)

and

Pam Crone,
PSARA’s Olympia lobbyist

We will discuss our 2015 Legislative Agenda

Gather with PSARA members from your legislative district and plan for meetings with your legislators to advocate for PSARA’s legislative agenda.

To help us plan materials and food for the conference, please RSVP to PSARA at 206-448-9646 or to adminvp@psara.org.
PSARA Annual Winter Party & Membership Meeting

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2014

Featured Speaker: Jeff Johnson, President of Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

12:30 Potluck lunch and socializing: Please bring a main dish, salad, fruit, dessert or soft drink to share at the party.

RSVP to office phone and let us know the food item you can bring: 206-448-9646 OR e-mail to Maureen at adminvp@psara.org.

Also, if you can, please bring items of non perishable food for the Labor Agency Food Bank.

1:00 p.m. Jeff Johnson speaks and takes questions.

1:45 p.m. Business meeting and election of PSARA officers and board members.

2:30 p.m. Enjoy the food and socializing with other PSARA members.

Location: Greenwood Community Senior Center, 525 North 85th Street, Seattle. On Bus Line #48. Parking at the Center and in nearby neighborhood.

If you cannot drive or take public transit and need a ride, or if you can offer a ride to a member who cannot drive, please e-mail Maureen Bo at adminvp@psara.org or leave a message on the office phone 206-448-9646.
North Carolina’s Forward Together Moral Monday Movement –
“We Are a Movement, Not a Moment”

By Mark McDermott, Chair of PSARA’s Education Committee

I

n September, my wife, Diane, and I traveled to North Carolina to meet with leaders of the “Moral Monday Movement.” We met with Rev. Curtis Gatewood of the state’s NAACP, James Andrew, President of the state AFL-CIO, and Rev. George Reed and Aleta Payne, two top leaders of the North Carolina Council of Churches. We wanted to learn about their broad movement that brought upwards of 80,000 to the steps of their state Capitol in February, the largest progressive rally in the South since 1965. They were demanding economic justice; labor rights; education equality; health care for all; environmental justice; equal protection under the law without regard to race, creed, class, gender, sexual orientation or immigration status; expansion of voting rights; and more. Why the mass organizing?

The people of North Carolina are under siege from an extreme right-wing Republican leadership backed by Corporate North Carolina that has done the following and much more:

• 500,000 denied access to Medicaid
• Repeal of state Earned Income Tax Credit which helps poor working families
• Tens of thousands denied unemployment benefits
• Consumer loan rates shooting up with deregulation
• Thousands of low-income children losing pre-kindergarten education
• Voting rights restrictions which may deny 300,000 the right to vote – disproportionately people of color, seniors, students, and the poor

• Loss of tenure for public school teachers
• Tuition increases of 56% since 2008

At the same time, the wealthy and profitable corporations were given massive tax cuts.

These attacks are not going unchallenged. The Moral Monday Movement is leading a long-term statewide fight against these attacks, but more importantly, is projecting a positive vision of what a just, equitable, moral, and sustainable North Carolina looks like. Since the spring, they have organized 13 statewide and more than 25 local Moral Monday rallies. Their rallying cry is “Forward Together: Not One Step Back.” How has this permanent coalition been built?

In December 2006, Rev. William Barber, chair of the state NAACP, brought leaders from many organizations and movements together with a call to build a permanent statewide coalition across many movements. They were deeply dissatisfied with the failure of the ruling Democratic Party to lead their state forward to a more economically just, equitable, and sustainable future. Within two months they had hammered out a long-term vision and agenda agreed to by 60 organizations. In February 2007, 3,500 rallied at the state Capitol demanding the ruling Democrats take action.

Steady patient coalition-building coupled with grassroots organizing led to a rally of 80,000 in February 2014 with more than 160 organizations in the permanent coalition. The movement’s leadership recognizes that they are in a long-term struggle which requires a permanent coalition that will continue to deepen and broaden their movement.

Our state is very different from North Carolina, but we also see growing injustice. We asked these leaders: What lessons can you share that you think are relevant for our state? Here is what we learned:

• You can’t simply import our model. You have to address the uniqueness of your state.
• Build a transformative long-term diverse coalition with a goal of winning unlikely allies.

• Work from a shared common ground of injustice, discontent, and desire for change.
• Develop a vision anchored in deeply held moral and constitutional values.
• Create unity around a concrete agenda with short-term and long-term demands.
• Pressure the government leaders regardless of their party – this is not partisan politics.
• Understand success is not merely measured by electoral success. It is rooted in meaningful transformational changes.
• Lift up the voices of those who are directly affected by immoral and unjust polices.
• Resist the “One Moment Mentality” – We are building a movement!
• Engage in grassroots organizing across the state.

We asked: “Why the need for a permanent coalition?” We were told that various organizations and movements had a long history of building temporary issue-based coalitions that rose and fell. It became increasingly clear that this approach was not working long-term, despite periodic successes. Building a durable coalition became a major priority and was necessary to sustain their efforts against increased attacks and to fight forward effectively.

These leaders stressed the importance of pressuring both political parties and entrenched corporate power. Democratic rule was yielding unacceptably slow gains and the Coalition was formed to press forward. Six years of building their strength was invaluabale with the electoral victory of an extreme right-wing Republican Party in 2012. They were ready to step up their game free of claims that they were shills for the Democrats. They had demonstrated they were the champions of justice, equity, and a better future, making demands on anyone in power who was blocking needed reforms and progress.

The North Carolina model of long-term organizing is worth examining carefully as we try to build more effective political and economic justice organizing in our state. More on this later.
Remember Reaganomics? You know, cut taxes for the rich and money will somehow “trickle down” to working people. A nice story, but it just doesn’t work out that way. In fact, Reaganomics is a disaster for working families.

The sorry record of Republican governors who came into office in the “wave” election of 2010 lays out the real-world consequences of Reaganomics for the whole world to see. And it’s not pretty.

Kansas governor Sam Brownback, for example, swept into the governor’s mansion with supermajority Republican backing in his state legislature and promised a “real live experiment” in Republican governance.

Advised by Arthur Laffer, the father of supply-side economics, and supported by billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch, Brownback pushed through legislation that slashed taxes and spending, eliminated state jobs, and cut back on public assistance.

Brownback promised that this policy would drive economic growth, create jobs, and stabilize the Kansas budget. But the state is now reporting a revenue shortfall of more than $300 million. The poverty rate has increased, while the state’s economy expanded only 2.3% over the past two years, half the rate of its four neighbors. And Kansas’s credit rating has been downgraded, as investors doubted that the state could meet its obligations.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), other states have been able to reinvest money in key programs like education as the economy has recovered and revenues have bounced back. But Kansas has been moving in the opposite direction.

Schools, for instance, have suffered a reduction in per-student K-12 funding. In 2008-09, Kansas spent $4,400 in base state aid per pupil. Last year, it was $3,838, according to the Kansas Legislative Research Department.

“The tax cuts made it very difficult for Kansas to recover from the recession in terms of school funding and funding for other services,” said Michael Leachman, director of state fiscal research at CBPP. “In most states, school funding per pupil is up.”

Brownback is not the only Republican governor to wreck his state’s economy.

New Jersey governor and Republican presidential hopeful Chris Christie has consistently refused to raise state income taxes, and, in 2012, he slashed state payroll taxes.

The immediate effect was to defund the New Jersey Temporary Disability Insurance fund to the tune of $190 million per year, putting injured state workers in jeopardy of losing their disability incomes. The long-term effect was to plunge New Jersey into a series of budget crises and to wreck the state’s credit rating.

New Jersey’s credit rating has been downgraded eight times since Christie was inaugurated in 2010. Among US states, only Illinois is in worse shape. In fact, New Jersey’s credit has been downgraded twice this year alone.

The first time, Standard and Poor’s rating agency downgraded the state’s credit in April, followed by Moody’s and Fitch Ratings in May, after the governor announced an $807 million hole in his budget.

Fitch downgraded the state’s rating again in September after Christie said he would try to plug the budget gap by cutting $2.4 billion in funding for the state’s already strained pension system. In other words, the governor is willing to rob state workers of their retirement funds to keep taxes low for his wealthy allies.

Fitch said Christie’s decision to cut the pension payments this year marked a “repudiation” of a bipartisan plan he signed to fix the retirement system for public workers, which is underfunded by nearly $40 billion, according to state estimates.

Instead of pumping bigger cash infusions every year into workers’ retirement accounts to save them from collapse, as Christie agreed to do in his first term, New Jersey is now stepping away from its plan, Fitch warned.

“New Jersey benefits from a wealthy populace and a broad and diverse economy,” Fitch wrote. “However, the state’s economic performance has lagged behind the nation in recovery from the recent recession, with improvement in 2013 trailing off at the close of the year, and very slow year over year ... employment growth continuing through 2014.”

But wait, that’s not all! Ohio Gov. John Kasich sliced personal income taxes by 10% and compensated by raising the sales tax. At a time when 32% of the residents of Ohio’s eight largest cities live below the poverty line, according to the Ohio Organizing Collective, Kasich wants to shift more tax burdens on to the poor, who have to pay out a larger proportion of their incomes in sales taxes than in income taxes.

And these guys were supposed to be the fiscally responsible ones!
Reflections on This Changes Everything
Continued from Page 4

Gary Delgado, Senior Fellow at University of California for New Racial Studies, sees another situation, besides climate and economy, developing in the US that may affect the course of both: By 2050, people of color will outnumber whites. He pointed out that no one is talking about who will hold the political, structural, and institutional power then. But that is behind a lot of the voter restriction/registration drives going on now.

When I was growing up in Hawaii, my dad (and a lot of other people) used to refer to the Big Five (Theo H. Davies, Castle & Cooke, American Factors, Alexander & Baldwin, and C. Brewer and Co.) who ruled Hawaii. Hawaii, at the time, was in my dad’s estimation (and therefore in mine) a colony of the United States. The term “territory” was just another euphemism. A small population of whites ruled a majority people of color (including indigenous Hawaiians), citizens in a so-called democratic territory. The political leader, called a Governor, was appointed by the President of the United States.

Seventy-five years later (if I live that long), I could find myself in exactly the same situation as I was in Hawaii. I need someone who can do the math here.

Help. Somebody tell me, if five companies ruled Hawaii during the 1950s, is that greater or less (population-wise) than the 1% that is ruling the USA today?

Perhaps this should be a Common Core question.

Austerity cuts take "Social" out of Security
By J. David Cox, national president of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE).

Like most federal agencies, the Social Security Administration has faced deep, across-the-board cuts in recent years. These cuts have seriously degraded the administration’s ability to service a rapidly growing customer base and forced the agency to make tough choices about its future.

SSA turned to the National Academy of Public Administration to devise a strategic plan to reform its customer service model to better reflect this austere fiscal climate. The result was the Vision 2025 plan, released in July, which calls for a drastic reduction in the number of community field offices and a transition to an Internet-centric customer service model.

In an austerity mind-set, this approach would make sense: Fewer resources should naturally result in fewer services. But this experiment has already failed before it even begins. Over the past several years, SSA has closed nearly 80 offices, 500 contact stations and shed 11,000 trained staff members. Americans who go to the remaining offices will find shorter operating hours and longer lines. If they look for alternative methods of service, they’ll find a phone service plagued by long wait times and an overly cumbersome MySSA website.

To date these cuts have only exaggerated the program’s customer service problems — not improved them. Millions of baby boomers are becoming eligible for retirement, but SSA continues to cut services, offices and staff. The number of recent hires pales in comparison to the number of staff lost, and the workforce still faces an overwhelming workload.

Doubling down on a complex, error-prone MySSA website will do nothing to make up for the rapidly growing service gap. According to a 2013 survey by the Pew Research Center, more than 40 percent of Americans over the age of 65 do not even use the Internet. Nearly 60 percent lack a broadband connection. But the problems don’t end there. Even for those who do use the Internet, those who file for benefits online often mistakenly leave out important information that could result in a loss of benefits.

Even if these concerns are addressed, the fact of the matter is that Internet solutions will never replace the comprehensive, professional and personalized service that is offered at community offices. That has been proved by the 43 million people who come to community offices every year. They don't come because they lack an alternative, but because they get good answers to difficult, unique and deeply personal questions. Wouldn't you want to talk with a live professional when making financial decisions that will impact the rest of your life?

When charting its next 10 years, Social Security must not lose sight of the fact that it is a paid-for benefit with paid-for services earned by millions of Americans through a lifetime of hard work. Any process to reform the program must be customer-driven, not just budget-driven.

Social Security needs to provide its growing customer base with an array of services fit to meet the needs of all customers, not just the most easily automated cases. It should maintain regular business hours, fight for additional staff resources and develop its online service as a supplement to, not a replacement for, face-to-face service.

What we need is an “all of the above” strategy to service a growing customer base, and we should not be afraid to fight for the resources needed to build it.

By proposing a plan that decimates the field office structure and relies almost exclusively on technology, Social Security is effectively taking the “social” out of America’s most beloved public program. Social Security needs to rethink its plan and envision a future that benefits everyone.

AFGE represents more than 670,000 federal and D.C. government employees nationwide, including 25,000 at the Social Security Administration.
able Care Act, block granting Medicare, and the privatization of Social Security. The so-called "Stand Your Ground" laws, with vociferous support of the firearms industry, are a direct result of this disturbing alliance between corporate America and the elected leaders who are supposed to keep our communities safe. ALEC also proudly touts tort reform in an effort to limit damages that tobacco companies must pay for decades of social misdeeds and immoral advertising aimed at addicting generation after generation to its harmful products.

Recently, a number of corporations including Microsoft, Facebook, Google, and even Occidental Petroleum have severed ties with the organization – big names to add to the growing list of over 80 corporations who have opted to split from the increasingly unpopular legislative exchange. Some of the proposals from ALEC have become embarrassing and/or a public relations nightmare for these corporations. It is important, however, to note at some point these corporations were interested enough in supporting ALEC that they paid tens of thousands of dollars to influence the direction of the organization.

The majority of Washingtonians are negatively impacted by the efforts of ALEC and its allies. As part of the Koch Brothers’ nationwide think-tank funding scheme, groups like the Olympia-based Freedom Foundation embrace ALEC legislation and get their legislative allies to introduce bills that attack labor unions, labor rights, and environmental and community group efforts to make our state a better place for working families, kids, and seniors.

During the 2014 Legislative Session, five ALEC bills were introduced by Republican state senators, and championed by the Freedom Foundation. This legislation would have weakened and defunded labor organizations representing public servants. Fire fighters, police officers, public health nurses, and utility workers would all have been harmed had these ALEC bills found their way into our laws.

As ALEC and its allies like the Freedom Foundation continue to press hard for laws aimed at harming working families and our environment, the public is coming to better understand the implications of a country governed by this legislative nihilism. Google, Microsoft, and Coca-Cola didn’t leave ALEC because they had a change of heart; they left ALEC because the people that make them rich, consumers like you and me, were outraged and said something. And as ALEC and their local incarnations identify new targets for their bill peddling – like the small towns of Blaine, Chelan, Sequim, and Shelton – it is even more important that our communities stay informed and remain vigilant.

So, what can YOU do to push back against this bill mill? It’s simple. ALEC only works if elected leaders carry their water, and this isn’t a problem limited to conservatives in Olympia. A handful of state Democrats have been ALEC members in the past, though they have cut their ties due to the poisonous association and outrage expressed by their constituents. That’s the key. When you’re communicating with elected leaders, especially if you are from a rural or more conservative community, ask if they will stand against ALEC and its ideological allies. Be sure that they know you’re an informed member of their community and that it’s the community’s values they should be championing, not those of Philip Morris, Exxon Mobil, and Koch Industries. It’s true that they have the money, but when you act, you’re the one who has the power.

Joe Kendo is the Legislative and Policy Director at the Washington State Labor Council and a proud member of PSARA.

Working Older Americans

During the summer months this year, an average of 35.9% of men 65 to 69 years had jobs as did 25.6% of women in that age group. Both figures are the highest for those months since those numbers became available in 1981. Additionally, the employment rate for women 70 to 74 was higher than any previous summer.

On the other hand, the percentage of people under 30 with jobs remained far less than it was before the recession. Older people are putting off retirement while younger people are having trouble getting jobs.

Experts are calling it the 401(K) effect. 401(K)s are not a substitute for defined benefit pensions. Younger and older people have a genuine common interest in strengthening Social Security and increasing Social Security benefits!

To subscribe or renew visit

http://psara.org/become-a-member-of-psara
Meetings and Events

**PSARA Education Committee:** 1 – 2:30 p.m., Tuesday, November 4, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First Ave., Seattle. All members welcome as we continue our education program planning.

**PSARA Government Relations Committee:** 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Wednesday, November 5, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First Ave., Seattle. All members welcome as we finalize plans for PSARA’s Legislative conference.

**PSARA Legislative Conference:** Light breakfast served 9:30 a.m. Program begins promptly at 10 a.m. – noon. Wednesday, November 12, UFCW 21, 5030 First Ave. S. Feature presenters include Speaker of the House, Frank Chopp, and PSARA lobbyist, Pam Crone. More information on Page 6 of this newsletter and in article on Page 1.

**PSARA Environmental Committee:** 2 p.m.- 3:30 p.m., Thursday, November 12, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Ave., Room 226, Seattle. All members welcome as we discuss the work PSARA will do to add our strength to the struggle to address the causes and solutions to the crisis created by climate change.

**PSARA Diversity Committee:** 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 13, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Ave., Room 226, Seattle. All members welcome as the Committee continues our work on planning a tour of the Northwest African American Museum for PSARA members.

**Green Lake Discussion Group:** Noon to 1:30 p.m., Thursday, November 13, Green Lake Library, 7354 East Green Lake Drive N., Seattle. Brown bag lunch. The gathering will discuss the topic, “Aging Creatively – What Does It Mean to You?” Bring your lunch, your questions and your knowledge for lively discussions.

**PSARA Executive Board Meeting:** 12:30 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, November 20, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Ave. S., Seattle. All PSARA members are welcome.

**PSARA Annual Winter Party & Membership Meeting:** 12:30 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, December 18, Greenwood Community Senior Center, 525 North 85th St., Seattle. Featured speaker, Jeff Johnson, President, Washington State Labor Council. More information on transportation and food on Page 7 of this newsletter.

**PSARA Government Relations Committee:** 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Wednesday, December 3, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First Ave., Seattle. All members welcome as we plan for PSARA’s participation in the 2015 legislative session.