The Retiree ADVOCATE

The Monthly Publication of
PUGET SOUND ADVOCATES FOR RETIREMENT ACTION
"Uniting Generations for a Secure Future"

Vol XXXI, No 2 **February 2015**

Watch Out Social Security Here They Come Again Page 5

The IMF Made Ebola Worse Page 10

Join PSARA Members at Senior Lobby Day

PSARA members will be heading to Olympia on Senior Lobby Day, February 26, to ask legislators to consider the essential priorities for Washington residents in the years ahead.

PSARA's 2015 Legislative Agenda includes:

- **Elimination of tax exemptions with no public benefit & raising revenue.**
- **Allocation of new resources for low income housing.**
- **Supporting steps to expand health care coverage.**
- **Establishing a state minimum wage.**
- **Investment in public transportation creating Green Jobs.**
- **Study of costs for creating a long-term care social insurance program and a supplemental Social Security program for Washington residents.**

PSARA is offering its members transportation to reach Olympia on February 26. PSARA will also cover the registration fee established by the Senior Lobby for participating PSARA members. This fee includes a continental breakfast and a lunch. If you haven't already signed up, contact us at govrelations@psara.org or the PSARA office at (206) 448-9646. (More information available on Page 6.)

February 23 Forum on Expanding Social Security

By Robby Stern

Nancy Altman and Eric Kingson are co-directors of Social Security Works, an influential and effective advocacy coalition in Washington D.C. Nancy and Eric have authored a book that was recently released, *Social Security WORKS!: Why Social Security Isn't Going Broke and How Expanding It Will Help Us All*. They will be two of the featured speakers in a forum on Monday, February 23, at 7 p.m. at United Food & Commercial Workers Local 21, Joe Crump Hall, 5030 First Avenue South in Seattle.

The forum, entitled "Social Security: Why It's Not Broke and How We Can Expand It" will provide critical information on what we need to know and how we can best organize to win the fight to preserve and strengthen Social Security.

Joining Ms. Altman and Prof. Kingson on the program are two well-respected local leaders. Seattle City Councilmember, Kshama Sawant, and Washington State Labor Council President, Jeff Johnson, strong supporters of expanding Social Security, who will provide us with their views on how we win the battle to expand Social Security and how we organize to stop those who want to cut benefits and/or privatize the system.

The newly published book reflects the growth of prominent voices in Congress and across the country who are calling for the expansion of our Social Security system. While the Republican congress mounted their newest attack on Social Security on the first day of the 2015 session, a growing number of people across the country know that Social Security is not "going broke" and does not add a penny to the national debt. The book provides a wealth of information that will be helpful to advocates. It will be available for purchase at the forum.

Adults, young and old, have a stake in understanding the real story. Social Security is critical to addressing the looming retirement crisis that will affect two-thirds of today's workers. All of us deserve to have a chance at experiencing dignified retirement years, which includes financial security.

The Social Security Disability program that helps to protect individuals and their families in the event of disability or premature death must also be preserved and enriched. The Republican Congress is trying to pit beneficiaries on the Social Security Retirement program against those on the Social Security Disability program. The forum will address how we can thwart their wedge strategy.

With the decline in defined benefit pensions and the total inadequacy of 401Ks, there is a looming retirement crisis that will affect more than two-thirds of today's workers. Social Security can help stop the collapse of the middle class, lessen the pressure squeezing families from all directions, and serve as a partial antidote to the upward redistribution of wealth. Scrapping the Cap will require the top tier on the income level to contribute their fair share to retirement security for all and provide the revenue to improve Social Security benefits. We have to continue organizing ourselves to win the battle!

Please plan to attend this exciting, movement-building forum on Monday, Feb. 23, from 7:00-8:30 p.m. at Joe Crump Hall, UFCW 21, 5030 First Avenue S., Seattle.

For up-to-date information about PSARA and issues important to all of us, go to the PSARA web site:
www.psara.org

Need to reach us?

Here's a directory of Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action email addresses:
PSARA or its President,
Robby Stern: president@psara.org
Administrative Vice President,
Maureen Bo: adminvp@psara.org
Membership Vice President,
Susan Levy: sjlevy.01@gmail.com
Outreach Vice Presidents,
Vivian O. Lee: vivilee@intergate.com
Mildred Ollie: mildredollie@comcast.net
Secretary, **Frieda K. Takamura: ftakamura08@comcast.net**
Interim Treasurer, **Tom Lux**
Diversity Committee Chair, **Frank Irigon: diversitycommittee@psara.org**
Education Committee Chair, **Mark McDermott: markmmcdermott1@msn.com**
Environmental Committee Co-chairs,
Kristen Beifus & Tom Lux: envirocommittee@psara.org
Government Relations Committee Co-chairs,
Chuck Richards & Tom Lux: govrelations@psara.org
Retiree Advocate Editor,
Mike Andrew: msand76@hotmail.com
Our web page: www.psara.org
Web Master, **Reed Wacker: info@psara.org**
Or phone our office at **(206) 448-9646**.

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
Interim Treasurer: Tom Lux
Secretary: Frieda Takamura
Board Members: Kristen Beifus, Jackie Boschok, Tim Burns, Richard Champion, Rick Erickson, Jim Grayson, Frank Irigon, Steve Kofahl, Gene Lux, Tom Lux, Mark McDermott, Mac McIntosh, Bonny Oborn, Chuck Richards, Bobby Righi, Magdeleno Rose-Avila, Bob Shimabukuro, Ronnie Shure, Sarajane Siegfriedt, Rita Smilkstein, Aganita Varkentine, Michael Warren, and Imogene Williams.
Editor, Retiree Advocate: Mike Andrew
Associate Editor: Bob Shimabukuro
Printing: Trade Printery

With PSARA at MLK Day

Photos by Garet Munger

PSARA joined with several thousand community members to rally and march in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to join in solidarity with the "Black Lives Matter" movement, and to declare PSARA's commitment to "Fight for Our Rights in 2015!"

Bonny Oborn, PSARA Executive Board member and PSARA's representative to the Martin Luther King County Labor Council, engages in discussion with Governor Jay Inslee at the Dr. Martin Luther King Day rally and march.

Stretching for blocks, the march made its way through the Central District and downtown Seattle to the Federal Courthouse at 7th and Stewart.

Social Security and Medicare: Facts and Figures

By Robby Stern, adapted from the Alliance for Retired Americans

The Alliance for Retired Americans recently published a 2015 fact sheet on Social Security and Medicare. The information is worth keeping. Family members and friends may ask some of the questions that can be answered by the information on this fact sheet.

Social Security

- Nearly 168 million workers contribute to Social Security through payroll taxes.
- Nearly 59 million people receive monthly benefits including:

- 41.9 million – retirement benefits
- 6.1 million – survivors' benefits
- 10.9 million – disability benefits

Average 2015 monthly Social Security Benefit:

- A retired worker - $1306
- A retired couple - $2140
- Disabled worker - $1146
- Widow or widower - $1253
- Young widow or widower with two children - $2635
- Maximum monthly Social Security Benefit - $2663 (worker at full retirement age)

Social Security Cost of Living Adjustment for 2015 – 1.7%

Cap in 2015 - $118,500. Workers and employers each pay 6.2% up to when the worker reaches the cap.

Medicare contribution – 1.45% for worker and employer

2015 Social Security Eligibility :

- Full retirement – age 66
- Early retirement – age 62 (Early retirement can reduce Soc. Sec. benefits up to 30%.)

Applying for Social Security: You should apply for Social Security three months before the date you want your benefits to start. You can apply by:

o Visiting your local Social Security office.

o Calling Social Security at 1-800-772-1213. If deaf or hard of hearing, you can call Social Security at TTY 1-800-325-0778.

o Go online: https://secure.ssa.gov/iClaim/rib

Medicare

Nearly 168 million workers contribute to Medicare through the payroll tax. Approximately 53.6 million receive Medicare benefits including:

- 44.6 million individuals 65 and older
- 8.9 million disabled people

2015 Medicare Part A (Hospital Coverage)

- Deductible - $1260 (first 60 days of Medicare-covered inpatient hospital care).
- Coinsurance - $0 (Days 1 – 60), $315 per day (Days 61 – 90)

2015 Medicare Part B: Physician's Charges

Individuals Income	Couple's Income	2014 Part B Monthly Premium
$85,000 or less	$170,000 or less	$104.90
$85,001 - $214,000	$170,001 - $214,000	$146.90
$107,001 – 160,000	$214,001 - $320,000	$209.80
$160,001 - $214,000	$320,001 – $428,000	$272.70
Above $214,000	Above $428,000	$335.70

2015 Medicare Part D (Prescription Drug Coverage)

- **Monthly Premium:** Varies by plan (higher income consumers may pay more).
- **Deductible:** Varies by plan, $320 maximum.
- **Doughnut Hole:** $2960 - $6680. Beneficiaries in the doughnut hole pay 47.5% of their plan's costs for covered brand name drugs and 72% of the price for generics.
- **Cap on out-of-pocket costs:** $4700 (prior to catastrophic and excluding premium for plan).
- In addition to monthly plan premium, high-income individuals will pay an income-related monthly adjustment amount as noted below:

Individual's Income	Couple's Income	Income-related monthly adjustment amount
$85,000 or below	$170,000 or below	$0.00
$85,001 - $107,000	$107,001 - $214,000	$12.30
$107,001 - $160,000	$214,001 – $320,000	$31.80
$160,001 – $214,000	$320,001 - $428,000	$51.30
$ Above $214,000	Above $428,000	$70.80

Applying for Medicare

Generally, Medicare is available for people 65 and older, younger people with disabilities, and people with end-stage Renal Disease. If you already receive Social Security, you are automatically enrolled in Medicare Parts A and B, provided you are 65. To apply for Medicare, you can call 1-800-772-1213 or visit their website, http://www.socialsecurity.gov/medicareonly. Thanks to the Alliance for Retired Americans for providing this helpful information!

Key websites:

https://secure.ssa.gov/iClaim/rib

http://www.socialsecurity.gov/medicareonly.

http://www.psara.org

http://www.retiredamericans.org

Update on the Keystone XL Pipeline

By Kristen Beifus, Member of PSARA Executive Board and Co-Chair of PSARA's Environmental Committee

The Republican-controlled Congress started 2015 promising to move forward on the controversial Keystone XL pipeline. For the 10th time, in January, the House and Senate passed legislation approving the construction of the 1,179 mile oil pipeline, which would carry an estimated 800,000 barrels of tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, through the U.S. to Gulf Coast refineries.

At time of press, the State Department had given federal agencies only until February 2 to weigh in on whether the $8 billion Keystone XL pipeline serves the national interest, a determination required for all border-crossing pipelines. The State Department has not committed to a timeline for their final decision.

A new batch of lawsuits have just been filed in Nebraska by seven landowners who have received written warnings that TransCanada plans to file eminent domain papers to gain access to their land. Other lawsuits have been tossed out clearing some of the way for TransCanada, which is using the courts to force landowners to sell access to their land. Some landowners have said they will not negotiate.

With support from both houses of Congress, the decision on the Keystone XL pipeline will come down to President Obama's power to veto the legislation and then Congress' ability to sustain that veto. The margin of support in Congress currently is not strong enough to override the veto.

What is clear is that this decision will happen soon and have an indelible impact on our planet. PSARA will keep you up-to-date on what is happening and how you can take action to stop the Keystone XL pipeline.

Our elected leaders need to put this project to rest once and for all and focus instead on reversing global warming, while creating and maintaining living wage jobs.

Carbon Pollution Accountability

By Sameer Ranade

Charging polluters for their planet-warming carbon emissions will unleash the transition to a robust 21st Century clean energy economy. Along the way the new clean economy can eradicate poverty, create more jobs, and make a healthy environment accessible to all. We are at a crucial point where we can do the right thing by tackling global warming. Or we can listen to special interests that beg us to ignore science and innovations, thus allowing the prospect of preserving human civilization slip from our reach.

Recognizing that we must choose a brighter future, Governor Inslee sent the Carbon Pollution Accountability Act to the Legislature, a bill that uses proven market-based tools to protect our cherished state. It is designed to meet critical priorities while adding Washington to the growing list of places that charge a carbon pollution fee, from Chile to China to California.

The Carbon Pollution Accountability Act makes polluters aware of the cost of carbon, and encourages innovation and capital investment in clean projects. Starting in July, 2016, Washington's emissions would be capped. Emitters would buy permits at an auction for each ton of carbon -- limited in supply by the cap. Specifically, entities that emit over 25,000 tons of carbon annually would fall under the cap, thus covering only meaningful emitters. Importantly, the bill guarantees Washington meets the emission reduction targets in the years 2020, 2035, and 2050 that the Legislature established in law in 2008.

Washington is estimated to raise $947 million from permit auction revenues after year one. About 80% of that would be distributed evenly between education and clean transportation. The remaining revenue would be directed to provide tax relief for energy intensive businesses and working families, affordable housing, forest protection, and rural economic growth. The bill would also create an environmental and economic equity committee to help guide implementation. These combined elements ensure a Just Transition to a thriving clean energy future.

The Carbon Pollution Accountability Act is an economic boon. Worsening climate impacts like ocean acidification and drought cost businesses real money. Less carbon pollution would save taxpayer dollars. Fighting last year's raging forest fires cost Washington $85 million, compared to $1 million in 1970.

Critically, switching to clean energy accelerates job growth. Consider that every fossil fuel Washington consumes is imported. Thus, homegrown clean energy stimulates additional in-state job creation and spending. Investing a million dollars in building efficiency retrofits, for example, would create seven times more direct jobs than putting that money in oil or natural gas. We have enormous untapped potential to retrofit buildings, generate farmers' revenue from growing sustainable biofuels, and leverage our low-cost power to manufacture things like solar panels and electric vehicle parts.

Finally, clean energy can empower communities. For instance, an electric-powered bus saves fuel, lowering transit agency expenses and enabling investment in fare reduction, more routes, and better-paid drivers.

Whether motivated by economic, environmental, or moral reasons, the Carbon Pollution Accountability Act is an excellent bill. We must advocate for it with the sense of destiny in President Kennedy's moonshot, and the urgency of my great inspiration, Dr. King, as our struggle is ultimately one of human rights and unity.

Sameer Ranade is Climate and Clean Energy Campaign Associate with the Washington Environmental Council and a PSARA member.

Watch Out Social Security - Here They Come Again!

By Steve Kofahl, President of AFGE 3937 and member of PSARA's Executive Board

The most successful family insurance program in U.S. history is once again under attack. It's been that way for 80 years. Our enemies hate this wildly-popular government program because of its success. It has demonstrated that we can take care of ourselves and eachother collectively, and be protected from the loss of earnings that result from the retirement, disability, or death of a worker. Social Security's continued existence threatens their Darwinian world view, by which only the "fittest," the rich and powerful, deserve to prosper and feel safe.

On the very first day of business this year, the House of Representatives passed House Resolution 5, establishing their rules for the 114th Congress. One of the rules prohibits transfer of surplus funds from the Old Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) Trust Fund to the Disability Insurance (DI) Trust Fund unless accompanied by changes that improve the long-term finances of the Social Security system overall. It artificially creates a crisis, because the DI Trust Fund surplus is due to run out next year, while the OASI surplus lasts until 2034. Because the OASI Trust Fund is so much larger than the DI Trust Fund, reallocation would keep both in surplus until 2033.

Congress could scrap the cap on earnings subject to payroll taxes in order to raise revenue, but that is not going to happen this year or next. That leaves benefit cuts as the only option. Cost of living adjustments could be cut by instituting the Chained CPI, the full retirement age could be raised once more, and/or benefits could be means-tested so that those with the most political power would no longer have a stake in Social Security and would press for privatization.

Congress has shifted surpluses from one Trust Fund to the other (in both directions) 11 times, 4 times when Reagan was President, and most recently in 1994. For the first time, Social Security is being held hostage to force benefit cuts. It is particularly ugly to pit retirees and survivors against 11 million disabled beneficiaries and 2 million of their dependent children, who would see 20% cuts in payments if nothing is done to balance the Trust Funds. That is exactly what our elected leaders are up to, the old "divide and conquer" approach.

Social Security Administration Chief Actuary, Stephen Goss, says that although reallocation is blocked, there could be limited borrowing of OASI Trust Fund reserves that may get us

through another year, but that action must be taken in 2017 at the latest. Interesting, don't you think, that 2017 just happens to be a Presidential election year? I can imagine certain candidates railing against the President and his party for refusing to "reform" Social Security, and for allowing this "crisis" to come to a head.

Fortunately, we can take action now to discourage the Senate leadership from adopting a similar rule. Five Senators, including Patty Murray, have launched a petition drive online. Just go to www.nosocialsecurityhostages.com. Ask your family and friends to do the same.

At the event honoring long-time activist and PSARA member Catherine Pottinger, Admin Vice President Maureen Bo, and PSARA members Norma Kelsey and Rev. Harriett Walden join SEIU 6 President Sergio Salinas in expressing our appreciation for Catherine. (Photos: Garet Munger)

2015 PSARA Senior Lobby Day

8th Annual PSARA Senior Lobby Day

In Olympia

Thursday, Feb. 26th

Join others from your Legislative District to visit your legislators.

RSVP now to join PSARA on Senior Lobby Day.

PSARA carpools leaving Seattle at 7:30 a.m.!

For RSVPs and carpool information contact

govrelations@psara.org

or call PSARA at (206) 448-9646

Morning Updates: 9 to 11:30 a.m.

Box Lunch provided: 12 noon

Visits with legislators to discuss our main issues:

- **Elimination of tax exemptions with no public benefit**
- **Allocation of new resources for low-income housing**
- **Supporting steps to expand health care coverage**
- **Establishing a state minimum wage**
- **Investment in public transportation creating Green Jobs**
- **Studies of costs for a long-term care program for Washington residents & costs for creating a state-based supplemental Social Security program.**

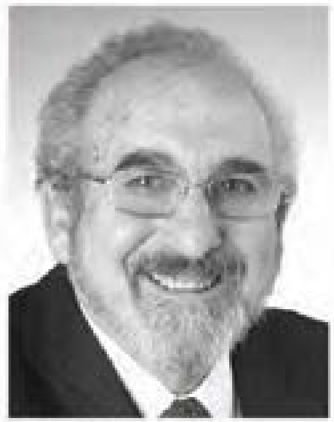
Social Security:

Why It's Not Broke and How We Can Expand It

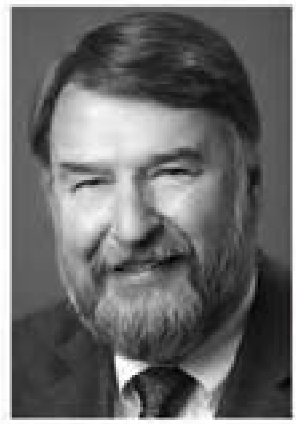
A FREE PUBLIC FORUM FEATURING:

Kshama
Sawant
Seattle City Councilmember

Nancy
Altman*
Co-director, Social Security Works



Eric
Kingson*
Co-director, Social Security Works



Jeff
Johnson
President, Wash. State Labor Council

**Co-authors of the new book: "Social Security Works!: Why Social Security Isn't Going Broke & How Expanding It Will Help Us All"*

MONDAY FEB 23RD 7:00 P.M.

JOE CRUMP HALL, UFCW 21

5030 1ST AVENUE SOUTH #200, SEATTLE, WA 98134

SPONSORED BY: Social Security Works - Washington || ENDORSED BY: American Federation of Government Employees, 3927 | American Federation of Teachers Washington - Retirees | Economic Opportunity Institute | M.L. King County Labor Council | Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) | Seattle NOW | Socialist Alternative | UFCW 21 | Washington Community Action Network | Washington Young Emerging Labor Leaders | WA Alliance for Retired Americans | Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO | Washington State Retired Public Employee Council

What Does the Fed Have to Do with Social Security? Plenty!

By Dean Baker, reprinted from Reader Supported News

Most of the people who closely follow the Federal Reserve Board's decisions on monetary policy are investors trying to get a jump on any moves that will affect financial markets. Very few of the people involved in the debate over the future of Social Security pay much attention to the Fed. That's unfortunate because the connections are much more direct than is generally recognized.

The basic story of Social Security's finances is that, while the program is entirely sound for the near future, the program is projected to face a shortfall in the decade of the thirties. Under current law, at that point it would be necessary to reduce benefits from their scheduled level, unless additional revenue can be raised.

Of course the answer from those on the right is to cut benefits, and the sooner the better. Progressives, along with most of the public, would like to see the current benefit level maintained and possibly increased. Most workers are approaching retirement with little other than Social Security to support them, which means that cuts from currently scheduled benefit levels will mean serious hardship for many.

By raising interest rates, the Fed can slow the rate of growth, thereby keeping people from getting jobs and propping up the unemployment rate higher than it would otherwise be. If fewer people are employed, fewer people are paying into the Social Security system. This trend, therefore, directly weakens its finances.

The Fed figures in this picture both directly and indirectly. The Fed is not always able to provide as much of a boost to the economy as it might like. Following the Great Recession of 2008 the Fed wanted to promote growth and employment. It did so by lowering short-term interest rates to zero and initiating its quantitative-easing policy of buying long-term bonds.

These policies helped stimulate demand by making it easier for people to buy homes or refinance mortgages and for businesses to invest. But by themselves, they did not come close to restoring the economy to full employment.

Although the Fed cannot always boost the economy as much as it would like, there is little doubt that it can slow the economy. Higher interest rates would dampen the housing market and discourage other forms of consumption. They would also slow investment. By raising interest rates, the Fed can slow the rate of growt, thereby keeping people from getting jobs and propping up the unemployment rate higher than it would otherwise be.

If fewer people are employed, fewer people are paying into the Social Security system. This trend, therefore, directly weakens its finances. (The system will pay out less in benefits, but this result will not be close to offsetting.) In addition, lower rates of unemployment strengthen workers' bargaining position. At low rates of unemployment, workers at the middle and bottom of the wage distribution have the bargaining power to secure themselves a share of the gains from economic growth.

This affects Social Security directly, since one of the main reasons that the program is now projected to face a

shortfall in the decades of the thirties is that so much wage income has been redistributed above the cap on the Social Security tax, which currently stands at $118,500. Back in 1983, the last time major changes to the system were instituted, only 10 percent of wage income was above the cap. Because of the massive upward redistribution of the last three decades, 18 percent of wage income is now above the cap.

If the Fed allowed the unemployment rate to fall back to the levels of the late 1990s (@4.0 percent to 5.0 percent) and stay there, the share of wage income going to workers earning above the cap would fall, increasing the revenue going to Social Security.

In addition to direct Fed policy affecting Social Security's finances, there is also an important indirect channel. Over the long-term it will likely be necessary to raise tax rates to maintain scheduled benefit levels. Any substantial increase in taxes would impose a hardship on low- and moderate-income workers in the current context of stagnant wages. However if wages were rising in step with productivity, workers would be able to pay a somewhat

Continued on Page 10

"Hope Has Arrived!" Greek Voters Dump Austerity Government

By Mike Andrew

"Hope has arrived!" an exultant Alexis Tsipras told a huge election night rally in downtown Athens. His SYRIZA party – the Coalition of the Radical Left – had just swept to power, upsetting an entrenched right-wing government that had ruled Greece since 2012.

"Hope is on the way!" was SYRIZA's campaign slogan, and on the night of January 25 Tsipras was able to tell his supporters that the expected hope was finally a reality.

"Today we celebrate, tomorrow we start the hard work," Tsipras added. "Today was a defeat for Greece of the elites and the oligarchs. The Greece that works and hopes has won.

"We are regaining our dignity, our sovereignty again…The mandate of the Greek people today cancels, in an indisputable way, the memorandums. It makes the troika a thing of the past."

The troika – the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund – forced Greece to sign a series of memorandums agreeing to austerity measures in order to qualify for "bailout" loans after its 2008 fiscal collapse.

To understand the joy of Greek voters on election night, and the shock felt by European bankers, we have to be clear about one central fact – the "bailout" was not a bailout of Greece or the Greeks, but a bailout of the banks that had invested in Greek bonds and stood to lose billions of dollars if the country defaulted.

The terms imposed on Greece by the troika were savage – cut social spending, cut wages, cut pensions, increase working hours, privatize public assets. The effect on Greek workers was catastrophic.

Money stopped flowing into the Greek economy, and the GDP fell by 25%. One in four Greek workers is unemployed, as are over half of workers under 25. The average wage fell to 600 Euros ($690) a month, well below the 2008 minimum wage.

Greece is now more in debt than ever, owing the troika 240 billion Euros ($270 billion). Its debt-to-GDP ratio is also the highest ever, 175%.

"What have five years of sacrifice got us? In a word: Nothing," Tsipras wrote in a pre-election article. "All we got is despair: 1.3 million unemployed, 3 million without health insurance, and pensioners who cannot afford to buy medicine."

To restore the Greek economy SYRIZA wants to bring back social programs that were cancelled at the troika's insistence.

- They promise to raise the minimum wage to the pre-2008 level of 751 Euros ($840) a month.
- For those with monthly pensions less than 700 Euros, SYRIZA will restore the "13th month" bonus, giving the poorest Greeks an extra payment every year.
- Some 300,000 households would get food and electricity coupons.
- The new government will repeal the tax on heating fuel.
- People's primary residences would be protected from foreclosure.

SYRIZA estimates that this stimulus program will cost some 12 billion Euros ($13.5 billion), which Greece will pay for by reducing exorbitant payments on the national debt, redirecting EU funds to social spending, and making the richest Greeks pay a fair share of taxes.

Tsipras has also promised to renegotiate the terms of the troika's loans to Greece, getting them to reduce the country's debt by half. Needless to say, this has not gone down well with European bankers.

Less than 24 hours after SYRIZA won the election, the EU issued a stern warning to Greece that its place in the Eurozone is at risk if the new government fails to comply with the troika's austerity and debt requirements.

Continued on Page 11

SYRIZA leader and new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras greets supporters after voting in Athens.

SYRIZA voters dance in the streets as election results are announced.

What Does the Fed Have to Do with Social Security?

Continued from Page 8

higher tax rate and still have higher after-tax wages.

According to the most recent projections from the Social Security trustees, average hourly compensation in 30 years will be more than 60 percent higher (after adjusting for inflation) than it is today. If the tax rate were increased by one to two percentage points in order to prevent cuts to scheduled benefits, workers would still pocket close to 60 percent more for each hour of work in 2044 than they do today, assuming the gains from growth are evenly shared.

Whether most workers share in the gains from economic growth or we continue to see the massive upward redistribution of income of the last three decades will depend largely on the policies of the Fed. If the Fed allows the unemployment rate to fall back to the levels we saw in the late 1990s, then workers could anticipate substantial wage gains in the decades ahead. Covering the cost of Social Security will pose little problem.

On the other hand, if those pushing for higher interest rates now get their way, then most workers will not see their wages rise by much. In that case, paying for Social Security through the current payroll tax could be a problem.

People who are concerned about the future of Social Security should be paying a great deal of attention to what the Fed does. Raising interest rates will not only affect the economy today, but it will also affect Social Security tomorrow.

Dean Baker is a macroeconomist and co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC. He previously worked as a senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute and as an assistant professor at Bucknell University.

IMF Austerity Policies Made Ebola Worse

By Mike Andrew

The World Health Organization (WHO) said on January 27 this year that it would streamline procedures to fight Ebola in the future.

Surprising as it may sound, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) may have a bigger impact on disease control in the developing world than WHO does.

Austerity policies imposed by the IMF on several West African countries made the Ebola epidemic worse, according to a new study by British sociologists.

"A major reason why the Ebola outbreak spread so rapidly was the weakness of healthcare systems in the region, and it would be unfortunate if underlying causes were overlooked," said Cambridge University sociologist and lead study author Alexander Kentikelenis.

"Policies advocated by the IMF have contributed to underfunded, insufficiently staffed, and poorly prepared health systems in the countries with Ebola outbreaks."

Researchers at Cambridge examined policies enforced by the IMF before the Ebola outbreak, using information from IMF lending programs from 1990 to 2014, and analyzed their effects on West African countries.

The IMF required African countries to slash government spending and reduce public debt before they could be eligible for new financial assistance. IMF guidelines were "extremely strict, absorbing funds that could be directed to meeting pressing health challenges," the study found.

In a December 22 interview with BBC News, Kentikelenis said that public sector wage caps meant countries could not hire heath staff and pay them adequately. The IMF's emphasis on decentralized healthcare systems had also made it difficult to mobilize a nationwide response to health emergencies such as the Ebola outbreak, he added. Similar policies were also applied to European countries like Greece and Spain, with a similar reduction in services and capacity, but their healthcare systems were better funded and more developed to begin with.

A spokesman for the IMF said that the organization's cost-cutting mandate did not specifically direct cuts to public health, so it was "completely untrue" that the spread of Ebola was a consequence of IMF policies.

Nevertheless, Cambridge sociologist Lawrence Kind, co-author of the study, said that officials from Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone – the three countries hardest hit by the Ebola epidemic – met IMF economic goals, but did not allocate funds for healthcare needs.

"In 2013, just before the Ebola outbreak, the three countries met the IMF's economic directives, yet all failed to raise their social spending despite pressing health needs," Kind said.

In November, an alliance of African mayors called on the IMF and the World Bank to cancel debts owed by countries affected by the Ebola outbreak. Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia together owe approximately $370 million to the IMF, according to the faith-based activist network Jubilee USA. Of this, $55 million is due in two years or less. Meanwhile, World Bank numbers from 2012 show that Guinea pays approximately $45 million more per year on servicing its existing debt than it spends on public health.

"Hope Has Arrived!"

Continued from Page 9

"Change Greece, Change Europe!" Hope for workers, fear for bankers. Greeks reach out to Europeans looking for a change.

But nothing worries the troika more than the SYRIZA's pledge of an international conference on debt relief involving all debtor nations.

According to Reuters, German commercial banks still own $28 billion worth of Greek bonds, and French banks another $5.6 billion. While banks worth hundreds of billions if not trillions of dollars could probably withstand losses like that, they could not withstand the domino effect of many debtors following Greece's lead.

Tsipras has promised that Greece will remain within the Eurozone as long as the county's debt burden is reduced, but if the troika digs in their heels, it may come to what international observers have come to call a "Grexit" – Greek exit from the European common currency – followed by unilateral revision of Greece's national debt.

"PSARA is where the action is—and they have a great newsletter to inform us of issues we may not be aware of."

At our Summer Meeting PSARA members were asked to describe the organization in one sentence. This is what one of our members said about us.

The Washington State Labor Council Diversity Committee, the Ingersoll Gender Center, and the City of Seattle Present

Changing Times, Changing Minds:

A Forum on Transgender Workers' Issues

An opportunity for leaders and activists in the labor and civil rights communities to learn how to communicate with their membership and networks to stop Trans discrimination.

February 12, 2015 from 6 to 8 PM
Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO
321 16th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98144

Welcome from Mayor Ed Murray
Light refreshments provided

Thank you to our sponsors:	LGBTQ Allyship	SEIU 775	UNITE HERE 8
AFSCME District Council 28	MLKCLC	SEIU 925	WA YELL
AFT WA	Pride at Work	SEIU WA State Council	WFSE 1488
Casa Latina	PSARA	Teamsters 117	WFSE 483
IBEW Minority Caucus	SEIU 1199NW	UFCW 21	Working Washington

To Subscribe, Renew, or Donate

Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action
2800 1st Avenue, Room 262, Seattle WA 98121
Email: info@psara.org; Website: www.psara.org

- ☐ Basic Dues: $20
- ☐ Limited income/living lightly: $15 or whatever you can afford
- ☐ Supporting: $50 ☐ New member
- ☐ Sponsoring: $100 or more ☐ Renewing member

Name (Please print): ______________________________

Address: ______________________________________

Phone: ________________ Email: __________________

Meetings and Events

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Wednesday, February 4, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First Ave., Seattle. All members welcome as we make final plans for Senior Lobby Day.

PSARA Environmental Committee: 10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m., Thursday, February 5, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Ave., Room 208, Seattle. All members welcome as PSARA determines how we can best contribute to the struggle to address the causes and solutions to the fossil fuel-created climate crisis.

Green Lake Discussion Group: Noon to 1:30 p.m., Thursday, February 12, Green Lake Library, 7354 East Green Lake Drive N., Seattle. Brown bag lunch. The topic of discussion will be Housing Alternatives for Seniors. All are welcome. For further information contact Susan at outreachvp@psara.org.

PSARA Diversity Committee: 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Thursday, February 19, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30 Ave S, Seattle. Members welcome as the Committee evaluates the tour of the NW African American Museum and begins planning for the next committee project.

PSARA Executive Board Meeting: 12:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m., Thursday, February 19, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Avenue S., Seattle. All PSARA members are welcome.

Social Security: Why It's Not Broke & How We Can Expand It: 7:00 – 8:30 p.m., Monday, February 23, Joe Crump Hall, UFCW 21, 5030 First Avenue S., Seattle, WA 98134. Forum speakers include Nancy Altman & Eric Kingson, authors of the recently released book, *Social Security WORKS!: Why Social Security Isn't Going Broke & How Expanding It Will Help Us All*. Also speaking will be Seattle Councilmember Kshama Sawant and Washington State Labor Council President, Jeff Johnson. See article on Page 1 & flyer on Page 7.

PSARA Education Committee: 10:00 a.m. – noon, Tuesday, February 24, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 234, 2800 First Ave., Seattle. All members welcome as we discuss developing a new retirement security educational program focusing on the fight to expand and enhance retirement security for all.

Senior Lobby Day: 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Thursday, February 26. Join with PSARA members and participate in Senior Lobby Day. PSARA carpools leave at 7:30 a.m. For RSVPs and carpool information contact govrelations@psara.org or call the PSARA office at (206) 448-9646. More information in flyer on p. 6