

The Retiree **ADVOCATE**

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“Uniting Generations for a Secure Future”

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What is the November election all about?
Jean Godden and
Kshama Sawant answer:
Pages 6 & 7

Important Workshop: Making the American Dream Real for Everyone

From 1-3 pm on Wednesday, April 29, at the Greenwood Community Senior Center, 525 N. 85th, Seattle, Mark McDermott, Chairperson of PSARA's Education Committee, will lead a workshop entitled “Making the American Dream Real for Everyone”. It is an interactive economic justice workshop that educates and inspires attendees to take action to reclaim a more just and secure economic future for all.

By using a combination of personal stories, history, and political and economic analysis, the workshop will identify the root causes of the historic shifts that have led to our present-day dramatic shift of wealth and power to the 1%. The workshop documents historic economic and social justice victories that have been won and demonstrates that we can move forward to create a more economically just and secure nation for all now!

Building from the economic difficulties experienced by workshop participants and those close to them, the discussion is anchored in a long historical perspective. Exploring the struggles of organized labor, working people, and retirees, the discussion will lead to how we can ensure that economic prosperity is shared fairly rather than concentrated primarily among the wealthy.

The primary goal of the workshop is to bring individual and collective hope based on our own history. Most importantly, the workshop demonstrates to attendees that we, the people, can once again build a better future for everyone. Given our history and current system steeped in injustice, we need to take action.

New Political Landscape For November Election Seattle City Council Districts

By Sarajane Siegfriedt, Member of PSARA's Executive Board

Electing Seattle City Councilmembers by district had failed in three previous attempts, so it was no sure thing when it ran on the November 5, 2013 ballot. The ballot sponsors were an eclectic group, but most of the funding (about \$200,000 of \$296,000 raised) was contributed by the main sponsor, Aurora Avenue businesswoman Faye Garneau.

Asked why she sponsored it, Garneau said it was money well-spent if it forces future council members to prioritize and be more responsive to neighborhood concerns outside the downtown core. “It’s my city. I love it,” she told the Seattle Times. “I want to leave it better than when I entered it. And I think it will be.”

Garneau was joined by Seattle Displacement Coalition’s John Fox, Fremont land use activist Toby Thaler, Fremont business leader Susie Burke, Ellen Taft, Jim Coombes, and City Hall aide James Bush.

For the first time, the proposal included its map, leaving nothing in doubt. The district map was created by Richard Morrill, professor emeritus of geography at the University of Washington. He said federal rules prohibit diluting minority voting blocs, and Seattle doesn’t have the minority population to create two strong minority districts, so he created one in South Seattle. They each contain approximately 88,000 people and the citywide positions represent 600,000 constituents.

The Seattle Times endorsed the districts model: “All but three of the country’s 50 largest cities have changed from at-large elections to district or hy-



brid models—for good reason. Seattle should do the same.”

The sponsors explained the need for election by districts: “We currently elect all nine Seattle City Councilmembers ‘at large.’ This means our Councilmembers...are not responsible to voters in any specific district. Seattle is only one of three [of the top 50 cities] that do elect our legislative branch in an ‘at large’ fashion.”

Calling their hybrid proposal “7-2”, sponsors said, “The other two will be elected to ‘at large’ positions.” When the map was applied to the current councilmembers, it was immediately apparent that there was no incumbent in District

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www.psara.org**

Vivian Lee Honored at Black Press Breakfast



PSARA member Vivian Lee was honored at the annual Black Press breakfast saluting 50 Women Trailblazers and Role Models for Equal and Civil Rights.

Vivian is a PSARA Executive Board member, and one of our Outreach Vice Presidents. A number of PSARA members along with Vivian's family were present to applaud Vivian as she was being honored.

(Photos: Karen Matsuda)

What Do We Want? Raises! When Do We Want Them? Now!



Imagine going almost three years without a raise. As you struggle to support your family, your boss refuses to negotiate a new labor agreement with you and your fellow workers. Managers fire the most vocal ones and threaten to do the same to the rest.

That's the situation Space Needle workers find themselves in. They have been working without a contract – and without raises – for more than 1,000 days, and are determined to win justice from the management of this Seattle icon.

On March 18, 100 Space Needle workers and their allies – including PSARA members – rallied at the foot of the Seattle landmark to demand raises and fair bargaining. After the rally they marched two blocks to Space Needle corporate headquarters to present their demands to management.

Social Security: Why It's Not Broke and How We Can Expand It

By Robby Stern

A large crowd listened and participated in the forum: "Social Security: Why It's Not Broke and How We Can Expand It" held on February 23. Nancy Altman, Co-director of Social Security Works, a national advocacy coalition, pointed out that an important difference between the Great Depression and the modern-day Great Recession was that Social Security made it possible for seniors to continue to receive modest incomes. Whereas, during the Great Depression, many parents were forced to move in with their children and grandchildren, during the Great Recession, parents were able to maintain a degree of financial independence and even offer financial assistance to their kids and grandkids.

Ms. Altman explained that Social Security is not a problem; it is a solution to some of the major problems facing our country:

1. **Economic insecurity of seniors** -- Social Security is not making anyone rich, but it is allowing seniors, survivors and disabled people to barely hold their own. Unlike former Senator Simpson's characterization, the vast majority of seniors are not "greedy geezers". They are, in fact, one incident away from financial crisis whether it is the need for long term care, a major housing expense, or other life circumstances that might arise. By expanding Social Security benefits we can help address this problem.

2. **The financial crunch faced by tomorrow's seniors** -- With the decline in union density and the commensurate elimination of defined benefit pensions, Social Security is going to be the major source of income for a vast majority of tomorrow's seniors. The average 401K retirement account is \$90,000. That will not be nearly enough to supplement retirement income for the average life expectancy. Expanding Social Security

benefits is the solution to this impending crisis.

3. **Tremendous squeeze on middle class families** -- The middle class incomes, often made possible by union family wage jobs, are being squeezed out by the upward redistribution of wealth. At the same time, middle class families are facing enormous demands on their incomes from costs of health care, higher education, housing, etc. Expanding Social Security creates a buffer against further economic demands brought on by the need to assist aging parents.

4. **Income inequality** -- By expanding Social Security benefits and eliminating the income cap and making other economic reforms on the revenue side of Social Security, we can force the upper 5-6% of the income ladder -- and particularly the upper 1% -- to transfer some of their ridiculous wealth to the social good that would arise from creating more income security for the vast majority of the population.

Ms. Altman asserted that what stands in the way of these solutions are the millionaires and billionaires who are fighting these needed improvements by funding politicians and think tanks, who instead are beating the drum to cut Social Security. It is up to us to build a movement to make the needed changes happen.

Prof. Eric Kingson discussed the effort by the new Republican majority to create a wedge between the recipients of Social Security retirement benefits and the people receiving Social Security disability. He warned that we should expect a multitude of attacks on the "lazy and fraudulent" recipients of Social Security disability in an effort to incite the recipients of retirement benefits to turn against those receiving disability.

In the past, it has been a common



practice to move dollars back and forth between the Social Security disability fund and the Social Security retirement fund. It was non-controversial. In fact the disability fund bailed out the retirement fund in the early 1980s. Had the dollars not been moved from the disability fund to the retirement fund, Social Security payments to retirees would have been dramatically reduced. Had that transfer in the 1980s not occurred, the disability fund would be financially in great shape. As it is, a transfer of funds from the retirement fund to the disability fund is required by the end of 2016 for the disability fund to continue to pay full benefits.

On the first day of the 2015 Congressional session, the House Republicans set up this wedge strategy fight by passing a rule that any transfer of dollars from the retirement fund to the disability fund will require cuts or new revenue to the retirement fund. While creating new revenue is a great idea, we all know that the Republican controlled Congress will not force their wealthy funders to pay more for the Social Security program. They will either attack the disability program or go after their big prize, Social Security retirement benefits.

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Korea Trade Agreement a Preview of the Trans-Pacific Partnership: *Jobs Gone!*

By Michael Righi, a retired economics professor and a member of PSARA's Education Committee



Why should it be a surprise? The Obama administration, negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Korea three years ago, made the usual promises – trade agreements bring jobs

and prosperity! Really? The results are in. Recent data show that the U.S. trade deficit with Korea since the start of the FTA has ballooned by \$12 billion. That translates to a loss of 85,000 jobs, mostly pretty good jobs in manufacturing.

We have seen this pattern with the World Trade Organization, now including China. We have seen it with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This is a large part of what trade agreements are about. They allow multinational corporations to locate operations where wages are lowest and import goods back into the U.S. to the shelves of WalMart and Best Buy and the warehouses of Amazon.

It's all history, right? No, unfortunately. Trade Representative Froman is making the same claims for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that the Clinton administration made for NAFTA and Obama made for the Korea FTA. These agreements were supposedly going to be good for working and poor people, bringing both jobs and lower prices.

The TPP is now being negotiated by the U.S. with 12 partners such as Japan, Chile, Vietnam and Malaysia (40% of the world economy.) It is being negotiated behind closed doors, with even members of Congress having to read the text in "secure" rooms with a security-cleared staff member. What are they hiding? Surely this is not just another job-destroying trade agreement?

Of course it is. How do we know? Because that has been the pattern, and because those few allowed to participate in framing the TPP come from the largest multinational corporations on the planet. Yes, they cannot only read it; they get to write it.

Which means that the TPP is about even more than shifting production to where wages are lowest, helping to dampen wages and increase inequality in the U.S. These corporations are also trying to write a whole separate corporate-controlled judicial system into the TPP that can override local and national laws. It is called Investor-State Dispute

Settlement – ISDS. (Apologies for the alphabet soup). For just one example, a program by the Province of Ontario to support local jobs in the solar-panel industry has been challenged under ISDS provisions.

There are possible provisions in the TPP that will extend patent protection for the big pharmaceutical companies' most profitable drugs and make it harder in other ways to produce cheaper generics. The more we know, the less we like what our so-called trade representatives are up to. So, to get this monster passed once negotiations are complete, the administration is asking for "fast-track" provisions in Congress that would speed up consideration of TPP and prohibit any amendments. Is this what democracy looks like?

Labor, environmental, and social justice organizations are mobilizing against fast track and the TPP. The Seattle City Council is considering an advisory statement against fast track because the TPP poses a threat to local sovereignty (the vote may occur as this newsletter is being mailed). Call or write or go see your Congressperson. Find out more (AFL-CIO, Sierra Club, Public Citizen, Washington Fair Trade Coalition websites), and explain to them what you think trade policy should be that protects our jobs, our environment and our standard of living.



PSARA members at our 2015 Senior Lobby Day in Olympia, February 26.

(Photo: Garet Munger)

Stop TPP Fast Track!

By Ronnie Shure, member of PSARA's Executive Board

Editor's note: Ronnie Shure delivered this statement at the Tacoma rally against Fat Track and also to the Seattle City Council.

I am a semi-retired pharmacist, and I am speaking on behalf of Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action. We are asking you to help stop Fast Track for the Trans Pacific Partnership.

I have worked with public health in Seattle, where I had the opportunity to participate in the dramatic improvements in health care that we provided in King County Jail. I moved over to Harborview Medical Center where I was part of changes in health care that were supported by the University of Washington. I am currently advocating for health care reform as a retiree, and it is even more exciting to be involved in health care reform.

We have made significant steps forward in improving the health care system, and I hope to see us improve our level of health care to reach the same level that citizens in other developed countries are receiving. The Trans Pacific Partnership seems to be trying to accomplish the opposite --- by adding some of the barriers we experience here to become barriers to health care in these other countries.

The high price of brand-name drugs can be explained by the profit-making, free market system for health care. We allow drug manufacturers to charge whatever the market can bear, even though it is not a direct correlation to the actual cost of the drugs. Certainly there are expenses in development and manufacturing of drugs, but it is astounding to see the amount spent on marketing and on protecting the patients that result in the massive profits that are made. These massive profits cause major problems in health care systems across our country. There are huge corporations that own drug companies that make a profit and insurance companies that can limit their payments to only the drugs that they make themselves. This is not "fair" trade --- it is controlled by these large corporations --- it is unfair trade.

The higher cost of these brand names drugs also impact patients directly and regressively. There are higher copayments for brand-name drugs that lead patients to avoid refilling their prescriptions. I have seen patients get refills for their generic prescriptions, but avoid refills for the brand name drugs. I have seen patients having low blood sugars from overuse of their generic immediate-acting insulin because they can't afford to refill their brand name long-acting insulin that is necessary



to control their baseline blood sugar. These higher costs have a greater impact on people with low incomes, so it is another regressive cost that perpetuates inequality in our health care system. It is unfair to force people to choose between buying food or paying rent or paying copayments for their prescriptions.

The secret negotiations that are taking place for the TPP include major US corporations that hope to spread their patented high prices for drugs to other countries. These high prices are a barrier to health care reform in the US. The TPP trade agreement may impose these same barriers on other countries. Please help us prevent our country from lowering the level of health care in our country and other countries in the Pacific Rim

Pacific North West Labor History Conference

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

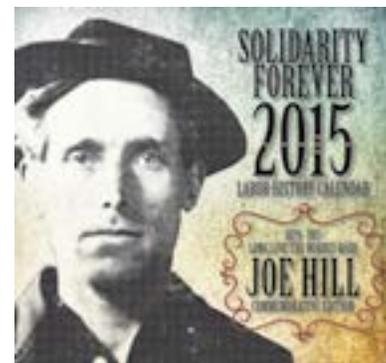
George Santayana

Many of us have read some labor history - some more than others - and it is always enlightening to learn something new about our history. It is even better when we can apply something we have learned to our lives and our work on one of PSARA's committees or actions.

We have a great opportunity to expose ourselves to a whole weekend

of labor history on May 1 - 3 when the Pacific NW Labor History Association convenes in SeaTac for their annual conference. All are welcome. Get all the information at www.pnlha.org or www.mayworkswa.org

The theme this year is: **Celebrate** (the 100th anniversary of the song "Solidarity Together"), **Honor** (100 years since the execution of Joe Hill), **Act** (how to strengthen the Labor Movement).



Seniors - Stand Up to Smoke and Mirrors Budgeting

By Jean Godden



The advantages of getting older are not inconsiderable. Active seniors among us can count on a number of pluses. As seniors, barring cognitive disease, we are savvier, wiser and no longer prone to the tensions that afflict young families.

We probably won't have to take our adult kids to soccer practice or bake cupcakes for a young child's home-room; we may even save a little on a movie ticket and on bus fares.

But, as elders, we do have far more

Citizens should insist that lawmakers who favor "across the board cuts" tell us where and how much these cuts will affect us. In other words: Specifics, please.

pressing concerns. More than ever, we need to be vigilant to keep strong those programs that we rely so heavily upon – programs like Social Security and Medicare. These and other entitlement programs like Medicaid and food stamps – programs won through years of hard-fought effort – are basic to our federal system. I'm a proud senior, proud of using accumulated wisdom to keep others from running away with

our hard-earned benefits. We must beware of those who would "fix" entitlements by exercising raw power and by such veiled and cynical approaches as raising the minimum retirement age or instituting means testing.

While we must remain united in protecting federal benefits, we must also face challenges within our own state system. In February, local seniors participated in a trip to Olympia for "Senior Lobby Day."

Among the issues seniors brought to lawmakers' attention were our robust backing for a state minimum wage, investment in public transportation, expanded health care coverage and new resources for low-income housing. Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) members also asked legislators to look at eliminating tax exemptions that do not produce a public benefit.

Meanwhile, because the state has a looming budget shortfall – perhaps as much as \$2.5 billion – the legislature likely will move to cut the state's health and human services programs. It will be particularly difficult to counter irresponsible budget cutting because it often comes in shrouded maneuvers.

Legislators are prone to talking airily about "across the board cuts," a term that seems to say that there can be fiscal savings, but no real pain.

This, of course, is the worst kind of stealth budgeting, some call it "voodoo finance." Faced with this ploy, citizens should insist that lawmakers who favor "across the board cuts" tell us where and how much these cuts will affect us. In other words: Specifics, please.

There is no question that eliminating a flat percentage across all state departments cannot help but lead to painful reductions. We will all be poorer for the loss of services. There, alas, is no free money, no magical way to save.

The governor spoke eloquently to a group of councilmembers from Seattle earlier this month, saying he feared

there will be attempts to fashion a state budget using this "across the board" technique. He said that it is his hope that constituents – city officials in particular – will demand to be told when and where the ax will fall. He said that it's time to stand up and insist on transparency and honesty in budgeting.

Without strong advocacy from all of us, seniors as well as others, there is the risk that there will be a number of gimmicks used to balance the state budget. We must look out for such tissue-thin tactics as one-time accounting changes and deferred responsibility for vital programs. We should oppose "across the board" nonsense.

It is scandalous enough that the state relies so heavily on regressive taxation, but to bank on obfuscation in budgeting state revenues is to compound the injustice. Seniors in particular need to face these issues and insist on the facts.

One of the great advantages of being a senior is that we have lived long enough to know when newcomer legislators are using the old "blue smoke and mirrors" routine to cut benefits we have worked for and deserve. Another advantage of being a senior is that there are now more of us who vote – and with senior voting can come much accountability by those wishing to stray. Make your voice and vote count in this legislature! This is nothing short of a call for action. If we do not speak out now on these concerns, in the end we will all be the losers.

Jean Godden is a member of the Seattle City Council representing District 4 (Eastlake, Wallingford, University District, Roosevelt, Ravenna, Wedgewood, Laurelhurst and Sand Point).

She currently serves as Chair of the Parks, Seattle Center, and Gender Pay Equity Committee. Jean is a long-time PSARA member.

A Tale of Two Cities

By Kshama Sawant

Seattle is becoming two cities. In one, glittering fortunes are being made for the super rich and the major corporations that dominate the landscape. In the other, where most of us live, life is becoming increasingly unaffordable.

We face dramatically widening income inequality and the nation's worst gender pay gap. And while Seattle is home to some of the most profitable corporations in the world, we have a highly regressive tax system and severely underfunded public services. In recent years it has become increasingly difficult to live a working class life and raise a family in many of our neighborhoods.

But this year spirit of change is in the air.

The move to elect Seattle City Council members by District – approved by voters last year – has dramatically changed the equation in Seattle politics. The resignation of three of the City's longest serving Council members has further thrown open the gates of City Hall.

Grassroots, worker-friendly candidates are at long last stepping forward in the hope that it may no longer require a massive financial war chest to reach voters. Working class and minority candidates may, for the first time, find a real seat at the electoral table.

Already, more than 39 candidates have filed to run for the nine Council seats, all of which are up for election this year. Grassroots, worker-friendly candidates are at long last stepping forward in the hope that it may no longer require a massive financial war chest to reach voters. Working class and minority candidates may, for the first time, find a real seat at the electoral table.

In light of this changing dynamic,

what should advocates for working people be watching for in the coming elections?

Housing. Seattle is facing a severe housing crisis. The for-profit housing model is not working, with big developers and speculators pushing workers and even middle-class families out of the city. Meanwhile the City Council is working on behalf of big business rather than ordinary renters and homeowners. While government officials give sweetheart deals to billionaire developers, we face the fastest rising rents of any major US city.

This crisis promises to be the defining issue of this election cycle.

We should be looking for candidates and proposals that challenge the current developer-centric model. Already new voices are calling for policies like rent control, enhanced renter's rights and massive investments in union-built, City-owned affordable workforce housing. Look for this chorus to grow, and for new coalitions to develop around new creative solutions.

Progressive taxation and inequality. Already this past year – in the wake of the historic \$15 per hour victory – the priorities of City Hall have begun to change. Much-delayed progressive proposals to increase Metro funding, begin a universal pre-K program, institute priority hire, and adopt reasonable developer fees have been put forward by Council members with an eye to the upcoming election season and rising public discontent.

My own council office has led the charge to investigate the feasibility of instituting a millionaires tax, issue hundreds of millions of dollars in city bonds to build new workforce housing, and provide emergency shelter to the more than 3000 homeless who live on our city's streets.

Look for an array of council candidates to at long last call for Seattle's most wealthy to pay a fair share of the costs of policing, social services, education, and desperately needed mass



transit. Those who make serious proposals on this front will have the best chance of connecting with the mood of our dissatisfied electorate.

A broken system. The political system in Seattle, and throughout the country, is broken. Beholden to corporate cash, the establishment cravenly serves big business while the 99% - working and middle class people, youth, and people of color - have little or no genuine political representation. In recent years Seattle has been no exception.

The door is now open for something new. Working people in Seattle are building our own political representation. As my election victory and our success in winning \$15 per hour showed, when we have independent political representatives helping to build grassroots movements, we can defeat corporate interests. When we change the balance of power by bringing ordinary people into political action, we can win.

The coming Seattle City Council elections present workers and their advocates with the greatest opportunity in decades to achieve this new representation. Lets seize it together.

Kshama Sawant is a member of the Seattle City Council and a member of PSARA.

2043 and the Social Security

By Bob Shimabukuro, member of the PSARA Executive Board and Associate Editor

“Your daddy was so happy,” Ze-nwa Uncle said. “He said, ‘All the kids doing fine. Roy was doing good in school. Ned going Punahou. Everybody doing well.’ ... We were eating. He told a joke, everybody laughed. Him too. But he pulled his head back, laughed and died.”

Two thousand forty three (2043): US Census Bureau projection of when the United States will become “majority minority,” that is, whites will comprise less than 50% of the U.S. population.

In 1980, a few months after Mom retired at 65, she traveled across the country to visit all of her seven kids and (then) two grandchildren for a few days, going through San Francisco, to the East Coast, then circling back to Seattle and Portland, Oregon, where I was living, before heading back to Honolulu. That was the plan.

But the reality: A week and a half in intensive care, two surgeries, the eruption of Mt. St. Helens with layers of volcanic dust all around us, rehab and exercises to boost her memory, extended Mom’s stay in Portland about a month.

My siblings alternated visiting about 1-2 weeks to help me during those difficult days with Mom recuperating in the hospital and at my home so that she could travel home. One of our tasks was to ask her questions such as “what day of the week is it?” and “what’s your name,” or “who’s the President of the United States.”

We decided to also ask her about her history. Stuff we didn’t know about. We learned a lot, like: her parents spoke mostly Uchinanguchi (Okinawan language) at home and she learned Japanese at Japanese School, which signaled to me that she was tri-lingual. After a third day of “testing her memory,” she abruptly waved us off with her hands and said, “Enough. I can remember. No more questioning.”

But I did have some more conversations with Mom as my daughter and I accompanied Mom home. An important one was about a nice Social

Security man (shortly after Dad died in 1962) “who came and advised me to get a job.

“‘Any kind of job. Just get a job,’ he said. ‘Because you will only get Social Security benefits for yourself until your kids finish college. After that you have to wait until you turn 65,’ he said.” Not only did he inform Mom about the payments, he also told her about the necessity of having an account of her own.

I’ve thought about her words often, especially ever since I first filed for Social Security: “...came and advised me.” Was Social Security doing outreach then?

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What a different era that must have been. Five years ago, when I first signed up for SSA, I was told that if the lines at the office were too long (which they were: 45 minutes minimum), I could set up an appointment by phone. Well, the wait time on my first phone call to set up the appointment was 20 minutes, which ended by a broken phone connection. After a 15-minute wait on the second call, I did manage to make an appointment for the following week.

A couple of years ago in order to verify my son had a bank account to receive his own SSA funds directly, the procedure took only 10 minutes, but the wait in line was over an hour.

More recently, last year, in July, I waited for 2 hours in a line to get inside the SSA office and then, once inside the office, I had to wait another hour and 45 minutes before spending a mere 5 minutes to resolve the problem.

When I told the SSA agent about the wait, she was horrified and said that I was the first person at the office she was serving that day, and that “the phone kept ringing the moment I hung up, so I had no time to work at the window.”

In just a five-year period, the service had gone from bad to worse. But judging from the agent’s description of her day and the service I actually

received once getting past the line, the real problem was there simply weren’t enough workers to carry the load.

“Is it like this every day?” I asked the security guard.

“If you come before we open,” he answered with a very straight face, “there is no line.”

“Wow,” I thought, “this really sucks.” But I decided to push my luck at getting answers. “I’m a reporter. I’m thinking of writing about this experience.”

He paused, didn’t answer immediately. I think he was wondering if I was secretly recording him. He answered, “It’s crowded every day. Not like this all the time. This is the beginning of the month. It’s more crowded then. But it’s always crowded. Like I said, ‘if you get here early enough, there’s no line.’”

This scene was taking place in the Kent SSA office. My SSA office. Where people sit patiently for 3, 4, 5 hours waiting for their number to flash on the screen because they have no other choice available. Some come with someone to translate for them. Some play games on their smart phone. Different languages can be heard. A very mixed crowd. Definitely a 2043 crowd. A “majority minority” crowd.

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For over four years community activists have been working with Social Security Works Washington coalition in fighting (1) to keep the SSA offices in the International District and in the Central Area and, once SSA went through with the move to the Jackson Federal Building, (2) to open a different, user-friendly office for our communities.

About two years ago, I wrote about the Jackson Federal Building: “Many of us know JFB. Intimidating. Even more so when there’s some demonstration going on there. It’s on a hill (a killer for grandma or granddad, and me too). No more free bus transportation to and from. Only expensive parking available.”

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Your Mail Service: Deliberately Made Worse

By David Yao

You may not be aware of this, but your mail service was just degraded. With little public notice, the U.S. Postal Service has undermined one of its most basic functions - the delivery of first-class mail. As of January 5, new service standards mean that such mail will now take longer to be delivered. For example, mail sent across town will no longer be delivered the next day, but will take a minimum of two days.

The public is seeing a delay in the delivery of bill payments, greeting cards, medicines, Netflix, ballots, newspapers, and checks.

Even worse, the new delivery schedules are not working. Since January 5, one-third of out-of-town mail, with a normal three-day delivery standard, has been delivered late.

While this may not seem like a big deal to some in the internet age, in fact this change degrades a basic function of the Postal Service, which is "to provide postal services to bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people" (Postal Reorganization Act of 1970). In addition: "It shall provide prompt, reliable, and efficient services to patrons in all areas."

Ruth Y. Goldway, Postal Regulatory Commissioner since 1998, criticized the latest service cut, which "threatens the very integrity and concept of Universal Service -- the Postal Service's primary obligation under the law...Under the law, the Postal Service is required to give the highest consideration to the requirement for the most expeditious collection, transportation, and delivery of important letter mail."

A further problem is the delay in determining the results of Washington's mail ballot elections, and potentially even voter disenfranchisement. The delay in counting returned ballots is an issue that has led to proposals for an Election Day deadline for receipt of ballots. If that change is made, most people would know that ballots mailed

on Election Day would arrive too late to be counted. But thanks to the new delayed mail standards, those mailed the Monday before, and even ballots mailed on Sunday or Saturday afternoon, would arrive too late to be counted.

82 Mail Processing Plants Threatened -15,000 Jobs

The reason given for the service cuts is to save money by enabling the closing of mail processing operations from 82 sites nationwide. Many such moves are scheduled for April. Facilities in Tacoma, Redmond, and Wenatchee are targeted to lose mail processing in July, affecting around 300 jobs in Washington State, out of an estimated total of 15,000 impacted nationwide.

If the closures proceed, there are serious doubts as to whether the mail processed in Tacoma and Redmond can be absorbed by other facilities, with a very real possibility that mail service will be degraded even further. This kind of scenario invites the right wing to begin calls for privatization, after public services are damaged by conscious decisions that hurt service.

There is no crisis in postal finances that would dictate such a drastic action as hampering the basic delivery of first-class mail, the product that meets the obligation to provide prompt, efficient, universal service. The Postal Service has returned to operational profitability since October 2012, with a surplus of \$1.1 billion in the last calendar quarter of 2014. The losses that are being announced by postal headquarters are entirely on paper, a product of the 2006 law which demanded \$5.5 billion in annual payments to the federal treasury, to be stored for future retiree health benefits. (That's in addition to the payments the USPS has been making all along to pay for current retiree benefits.)



You Can Help Restore Overnight Mail Delivery

Please contact the offices of Senators Patty Murray (915 2nd Ave., #2988, Seattle, WA 98174; (206) 553-5545) and Maria Cantwell (915 2nd Ave., #3206, Seattle, WA 98174; (206) 220-6400). Describe any delays in mail delivery you've noticed since January 5 and any problems these have caused. Please ask them to contact the Postmaster General to restore pre-January 5 mail service standards.

In February "A Grand Alliance" formed of over 60 organizations with the stated purpose "to save our public postal service." It aims to reverse the tide of cuts and restore and expand services, such as postal banking. At the website, agrandalliance.org, individuals can sign a pledge "to support the fight to protect and enhance vibrant public postal services now - and for many generations to come." We hope you will join us in this fight!

David Yao is Vice President of the Greater Seattle Area Local of the American Postal Workers Union and a member of PSARA.

New Political Landscape

Continued from Page 1

5, the area north of 85th Street that was annexed in 1954 and, according to local legend, was promised, but never received sidewalks.

The sponsors explained, "We will begin the transition to the 7-2 system at the next city election in 2015. In 2015, all nine Councilmembers will be up for a vote. The seven districted Councilmembers will be elected to 4-year terms. The two at-large Councilmembers will be elected to two-year terms. In 2017, the two at-large seats will be elected to four-year terms. This places the at-large Councilmembers on the same election cycle as the Mayor and City Attorney. The goal is to allow residents to vote on at least part of the Council at each city election."

Seattle Districts Now was favored by 65.92% of the voters, and opposed by 34.08%.

Councilmembers averaged 10 years' seniority when the proposal passed. Kshama Sawant in District 3, as of this writing, has three challengers. Tom Rasmussen of West Seattle's District 1 is not running in November. Neither is Sally Clark, faced with another city-wide race. Nick Licata, at 17 years the Council's senior member, has also decided to retire.

The advantages of incumbency — fundraising and name familiarity — seem to be balanced against the desire for a fresh face and a less downtown-centric agenda. Because of low turnout, districts may be won by running a credible campaign and knocking on just 12,000 doors, and campaign funds of \$75,000 to \$100,000, whereas a citywide race takes far more fundraising to pay for cable TV ads and all those oversized postcards that fill our mailboxes around election time (upwards of \$350,000).

As of March 20th, we have 39 candidates registered in the nine Council races, from 11 in West Seattle's District 1 to Sally Bagshaw, who is unopposed (so far) in District 7. There are five candidates for At-Large Position 8, including Tim Burgess, and three candidates running for Position 9, which has no incumbent. Filing week ends May 15th.

In the May Advocate, we will list the candidates and give as much information as we can.

Macy's Workers Begin Contract Negotiations

By Mike Andrew

Macy's workers have begun bargaining for their new contract, with an initial bargaining session March 18 and another one March 25. Their present contract will expire on May 2.

Workers at all seven Macy's stores in the Puget Sound area are covered by the contract, and are represented by UFCW 21.

The stakes for workers are high, according to members of the negotiating team who met with community allies, including PSARA, at UFCW's Georgetown headquarters March 18.

Lead negotiator Matt Wood told the meeting that Macy's management is trying to restructure jobs at the retail icon. While full-time jobs are defined as 37.5 hours per week, many workers are seeing their hours cut to 12 to 20 hours. As full time workers are losing hours, they are also expected to take on more responsibilities.

Negotiating team member Nicole Booker said that several times she was the only salesperson covering an entire floor. Obviously customers are dissatisfied with the slow service that results from understaffing, and when they complain, store management disciplines the employees, she added.

The bonus for the company is that workers need to work 32 hours per week to qualify for a full healthcare plan. Employees who work less get only catastrophic healthcare coverage. Workers also report that since raises depend on the number of hours worked, part-time workers can go for years before they qualify for a raise.

"We need raises all through the pay scale," negotiating team member Sharon Shearson told the meeting. "Even at the top of the pay scale, we only make 20 or 30 cents above minimum wage."

Minimum wages raise another issue, Wood said. While workers at the Seattle store are eligible for pay increases leading to a \$15 per hour minimum wage by 2018, workers in other cities are not covered by Seattle minimum wage ordinance. The union hopes to win comparable wage increases at all seven area stores.

Workers say the stakes go far beyond dollars and cents, however.

"This isn't just a job for us," negotiating team member Joe Fabiano said. "It's what we feel and what we do, and we don't want some corporation defining what we are."

PSARA members will get a chance to bring the fight for a \$15 per hour minimum wage to Macy's on April 15, a Day of Action for \$15 per hour. We can show our solidarity with Macy's workers and let the whole city know that \$15 is just the beginning!

April 15: Day of Action for Low-Wage Workers

2:00 p.m., Occidental Park, first gathering for day's activities.

3:00 p.m., support Macy's workers, Macy's downtown Seattle store, 1601 3rd Avenue

4:00 p.m., Seattle University, 901 12th Ave., support Adjunct Faculty who are not being allowed to have their votes for union representation counted.

April 15 is a National Day of Action for a \$15 per hour minimum wage.

There will be other activities around the state.

Check Working Washington website to learn more.

Social Security

Continued from Page 3

We are ready for the fight and will use the August 8th 50th anniversary of Medicare and 80th anniversary of Social Security to high light the need to enrich both of these programs that are so essential to the welfare of the vast majority of the American people. Scrap the Cap and create a Medicare Part E!

Progressive Alternatives In the Crosshairs in Seattle

The Seattle Democratic Party establishment does not like to be threatened from the left. The election of Kshama Sawant caught them by surprise, and we can now anticipate a major effort on the part of the Democratic establishment and the downtown business community to try and take her out. PSARA does not endorse candidates (although I do!). We do support strong advocacy for social and economic justice and often the best ideas as well as the grass roots organizing come from the left/progressive side of the political spectrum.

The ugly attacks have already begun. Keep your eyes on this race. A slap down is what the establishment has in mind and they will put big money into this battle.

What is PSARA?

"A progressive, activist organization that effectively advocates for issues important to seniors, and also on issues that impact people of all generations."

At our Summer Meeting, members were asked to describe PSARA in one or two sentences. This is what one member said about us.

Our ability to advocate for all generations depends on our ability to organize people of all generations to take up the fight. Won't you join, or sign up a new member today?

2043 and the Social Security

Continued from Page 8

The SSA's own data shows big drops in the numbers of field office visits--- 24% after the neighborhood offices were closed. Projected over a year, that's 17,000 less visits per year.

And what was SSA response to our report? SSA cut off our access to the data.

What happened between the era that Mom received some extremely important advice and the SSA of today which doesn't listen to us, or even worse, denies us access to what is really ours?

Is this because we're a 2043 crowd they're dealing with? A population not even worth thinking about? That has no political power?

After more than three years, we're still being stonewalled by SSA. Their only answer has been, "We have to cut services now or there won't be any SSA in the future."

Of course, this isn't true. But the "1%" that now governs us has become very mean and greedy over the last few decades, and we've got a national media corps that is asleep and passes on the message of the "1%" without doing their own research.

There are numerous plans being offered that could, in fact, provide revenue streams to successfully expand SSA, but the easiest way and most efficient way is to SCRAP the CAP.

All employees pay Social Security taxes, up until a ceiling, known as the "cap," which is currently set at \$118,500. What this means is that a person making \$118,500 a year pays 6.2% taxes for SS. A person making \$1,000,000/year pays only 0.68%, significantly less than one per cent. If everyone paid the same 6.2%, the SS system would be in good shape for future retirees.

Let's demand an expansion of SS programs. There are a lot more people now who need the kind of help that Mom got back in 1962. There are a lot more people who need the kind of help Mom got when she was in a coma in the hospital in Portland. And most of all, there's going to be a lot more people who will need the kind of help Mom got while she lived out her life in a nursing home in Seattle.

All of us "99%" should be working to stop the plans of the 1%. If they get their way, the world will be a very bleak world by 2043.

"Strengthen Social Security, SCRAP THE CAP!"

To Renew or Donate

PSARA Education Fund
2800 1st Avenue, Room 262, Seattle WA 98121
Donations are tax deductible

- Basic membership: \$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 Environmental Committee: 10 a.m.- 12:00 p.m., Thursday, April 2, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Ave., Room 208, Seattle. All welcome as we determine how we can best contribute to the education and action necessary to address the causes and solutions to the fossil fuel-created climate crisis.

Green Lake Discussion Group: Noon to 1:30 p.m., Thursday, April 9, Green Lake Library, 7354 East Green Lake Drive N., Seattle. Brown bag lunch. The topic of discussion will be "Poetry, Love it, Fear it, Write It." All are welcome. For further information contact Susan at outreach-vp@psara.org

PSARA Diversity Committee: 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Thursday, April 16, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30 Ave S, Seattle. Members welcome as we plan for the next committee project.

PSARA Executive Board Meeting: 12:30 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, April 16, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Avenue S., Seattle. All members are welcome.

Making the American Dream Stronger For Everyone: 1-3 p.m., Wednesday, Apr 29, Greenwood Community Senior Center, 525 N. 85th, Seattle. Mark McDermott, Chairperson of PSARA's Education Committee, will lead a workshop that uses a combination of personal stories, history, and political and economic analysis to identify the root causes of the historic shifts from growing economic injustice to justice and back to injustice today. The primary goal of the workshop is to bring individual and collective hope for a better future by discussing how we can move toward a more economically just and secure nation for all.

PSARA Education Committee: April date & time TBD. Seattle Labor Temple, Room 234, 2800 First Ave., Seattle. All welcome as we discuss developing a new retirement security educational program focusing on the fight to expand and enhance retirement security for all. (Call PSARA office for date & time in April)

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 6, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First Ave., Seattle. All welcome as we discuss important state and federal issues.

