

## A Challenge to PSARA Members

By Robby Stern

To further the goal of building for the long-term financial viability of the PSARA Education Fund, the 35 members of the PSARA Education Fund Executive Board and the PSARA Board have pledged to donate \$9,550 collectively for the last GiveBIG Day sponsored by the Seattle Foundation. The Board members are challenging our 1,300 members, through their individual donations, to match that amount.

The two Boards are committed to assuring the long-term financial viability of the PSARA Education Fund. *The Advocate*, a publication of the Education Fund, is a unique publication that often provides information not found in other progressive communication outlets. In addition, the Education Fund sponsors community education on a variety of issues that impact the ability of seniors and future seniors to live with dignity, respect, and financial security.

Early online giving for GiveBig Day starts on April 26. To schedule a donation, you will be asked to create a simple account at [GIVEBIGseattle.org](http://GIVEBIGseattle.org). You will receive a confirmation email receipt upon submitting your information. The donation will not be processed until May 9. You will receive a receipt from the Seattle Foundation confirming the donation once the gift has been successfully processed on May 9. You will also receive a thank you letter from the PSARA Education Fund documenting the donation and the 501(c)3 status of the Education Fund.

Another good alternative is for members who would prefer not to donate online to write a check to the PSARA Education Fund any time between now and May 9. Write in the memo line, GiveBig, so we know it is in response to the challenge, and mail it to the PSARA office. Choosing this option would also



save the PSARA Education Fund the small percentage processing charge for each online donation.

If 200 of our members each donated \$50 or more for GiveBig, the challenge from PSARA's leaders would be

*Continued on Page 10*

## Aiko Schaefer Talks About I-1631, the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy Initiative

By Bobby Righi

Mark your calendars! Aiko Schaefer will talk to PSARA members about Initiative 1631, the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy Initiative, on April 19 at 11a.m. The event will be held at the Washington State Labor Council's Seattle office, 321 16th Avenue S.

Aiko Schaefer is the director of Front and Centered, a statewide communities of color coalition working to achieve environmental justice by asserting policy solutions that focus on equity.

She is also the Co-Chair of the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy steering

committee and has been one of its leaders since the beginning.

She was the founding Executive Director of the Poverty Action Network and was on the faculty at the University of Washington School of Social Work.

"While I agree climate change affects us all, it disproportionately and unjustly impacts people of color and people with lower incomes, both globally and locally," she says.

*Continued on Page 10*



## The Retiree ADVOCATE

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or visit PSARA on Facebook

## The New PSARA Singers



Recently spotted at a Seattle Labor Chorus fundraising event, this new PSARA group sang "If I Had a Hammer." Fortunately for them, several PSARA members are also Labor Chorus members and kept all in tune!

### PSARA Environmental Committee Changes Its Name

At its March 1 meeting, the Environmental Committee voted unanimously to change its name to the Climate and Environmental Justice Committee. It took this action in order to more accurately communicate the work of the Committee.

The Committee meets on the first Thursday of the month from 10:00-11:30 a.m. at the Washington State Labor Council, 321 South Jackson Street, Seattle. We invite all PSARA members to join the Committee and attend the monthly meetings.

Please email [climateenviro@psara.org](mailto:climateenviro@psara.org) or call the PSARA office at 206-448-9646.

### PSARA Trains Ambassadors

PSARA Executive Board member Mark McDermott and PSARA's Education Committee hosted a training on March 16 for PSARA "ambassadors" -- members who want to connect one-on-one with their friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

If you want to get involved in this important work or just want to learn how to use your personal story to explain why PSARA is important to you, contact the Education Committee by email, [educationcommittee@psara.org](mailto:educationcommittee@psara.org), or call the PSARA office, 206-448-9646.



# Initiative 1631 Filed

## All Hands on Deck for Signature-Gathering

By Bobby Righi

On March 2, the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy (AJCE) filed Washington State Initiative I-1631. This measure puts a fee on carbon from fossil fuels. It will help to stop climate change, and the fees will be used to protect Washington's land, air, and water and move us towards a strong, healthy, clean energy economy.

The Alliance is made up of unions, communities of color, environmental organizations, health professionals, businesses, tribes, and faith and community organizations. It took several years and the work of all of these diverse groups to put together this initiative which will price fossil fuel pollution. The funds generated will be used to develop more clean energy, protect waterways and forests, and address the inequities produced by climate change and environmental degradation faced by poor communities.

This initiative is complicated. It reflects the long and deep study that the Alliance members engaged in all across the state. It is truly historic because of the depth of the planning and the breadth and diversity of groups who put ideas and energy into developing it. It is a citizens' initiative in the strongest sense. If it gets on the ballot and passes, Washington will be the first state to take action to fund a just transition for workers, provide funds to help promote clean air and water, and work to help climate-impacted communities.

The Initiative proposes to put a fee on carbon of \$15 per ton beginning on January 1, 2020, then raise the fee \$2.00 per ton each year until the state's green-house reduction goals are met. This fee would raise around \$1 billion in revenue to be divided into the following broad categories:

- 70% to Clean Air and Clean Energy Investments in job-creating projects

and investments that yield verifiable reductions in carbon pollution, including solar, wind, and other renewable energy; clean transportation options; energy efficiency; and carbon sequestration in natural resources like forest, farm, and marine landscapes. A minimum of 15% of these investments will assist low-income residents in the transition to a clean energy economy.

- 25% to Clean Water and Healthy Forests Investments to increase the resiliency of the state's waters and forests to the impacts of climate change.

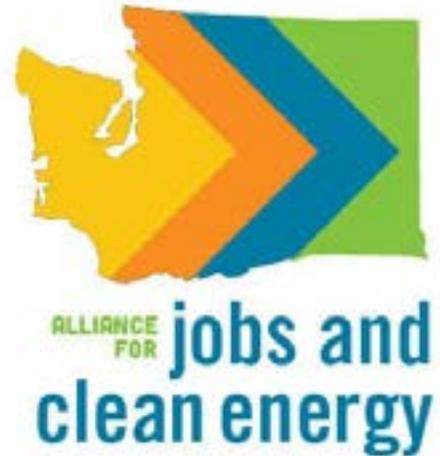
- 5% to Healthy Communities Investments to prepare communities for challenges caused by climate change and to ensure that the impacts of climate change are not disproportionately borne by certain populations.

Of the above, a minimum of 10% of state expenditures must be used for projects endorsed by the governing body of a federally recognized tribe.

There are many more details, and you can find out more about the initiative on the website of the Alliance: <https://jobscleanenergywa.com/ballot-filing-statement/>

On March 10, at the First Baptist Church in Seattle, around 120 people, "Climate Justice Stewards," gathered from all across Washington to make plans for gathering the signatures needed to get this initiative on the ballot in November. It will take a lot of work by committed people. There are more of these trainings coming up.

Please become a Climate Justice Steward. PSARA is a member of the Alliance steering committee, and we should be a very active part of this campaign. Sign up at: <https://jobscleanenergywa.com/climate-justice-stewards-2/>



To sign up here to be part of a signature gathering team, just put in your zip code to see what is already scheduled in your area: <https://act.jobscleanenergywa.com/event/clean-air-clean-energy-signature-gathering/search/>

**Take Action! We only have 12 weeks to gather signatures!**

On Thursday, April 19, PSARA members will get a chance to learn more about the Initiative from one of the main organizers and a spokesperson of the Alliance, Aiko Schaefer. Come to the Washington State Labor Council at 11a.m. to hear Aiko, and join other PSARA members in planning to be part of this historic movement. (See the notice on Page 1 of this issue of the *Advocate*.)

*Bobby Righi is PSARA's Membership Co-Vice President and our representative to the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy.*

# Social Security, the Struggle Continues

By Robby Stern

Since passing the huge tax-cutting legislation, Republican leadership and many rank and file Republican members of Congress are now voicing the need to address the “entitlement” programs because of the “deficit.” Evidently they think we don’t understand that they just voted to increase the deficit to benefit their wealthy backers. They now want to “fix” the deficit on our backs.

Let’s start with Social Security. (In next month’s *Advocate* we’ll talk about recent developments with Medicare and Medicaid.)

Social Security Retirement benefits are outside the reconciliation process and, therefore, require a 60-vote majority in the Senate to change. However, the 2018-2019 Trump budget called for a \$64 billion cut in the Social Security Disability Insurance program, attacking the most vulnerable among us. This proposed cut has not moved forward as yet.

The administrative budget of the Social Security Administration, however, is part of the budget/spending process, and can be cut or increased with a simple majority vote in the Senate and House.

President Trump’s budget proposal included significant cuts to domestic agencies like the Social Security Administration (SSA) at a time when the number of Social Security recipients is increasing dramatically.

The SSA has already suffered very large cuts to their operating budget which have led to closure of field offices such as the International District office and the Belltown office in Seattle. In response to the budget reductions, the agency is making a concerted effort to push newly eligible people to online applications.

We’ve been told by knowledgeable and committed staff within the SSA that the potential complexity of the application process means new beneficiaries take a risk of not getting all

the benefits to which they are entitled when they apply online.

Fortunately, the budget deal that was struck in the Congress in February, 2018, included significant increases in domestic spending, at the insistence of the Democrats whose votes were needed to pass the budget deal. For the first time in years, it is anticipated that there will be an actual increase in the SSA budget through September of 2019. The final numbers will not be known until around March 23, when the actual spending bill must pass the Congress.

On another front, Senator Rubio and Ivanka Trump are proposing a paid family leave program that is nefariously tied to the Social Security program. Their proposal would let people collect Social Security benefits early to pay for time off when they’ve had a baby. In turn, these parents would have their Social Security benefits delayed when they are eligible to retire.

Conservatives have long wanted to treat Social Security as if everyone has their own individual retirement account rather than as a social insurance program. The Trump/Rubio plan advances the concept that the Social Security Trust Fund is composed of individual accounts that can be tapped for family leave. This plan furthers the conservative goal of privatization by treating individual retirement dates differently rather than establishing collective retirement dates based on year and month of birth.

On March 8, Speaker Ryan proposed in a speech he gave at the Home Depot Support Center in Atlanta that yet another commission be created to “fix” Social Security. Once again, those of us who track Speaker Ryan’s history know that “fix” to him means cuts and privatization.

If Republicans maintain control of Congress in the 2018 election, there is a great likelihood that significant damage will be done to Social Security.

There have also been bills introduced on the expansion side.

Along with his Social Security expansion bill that calls for scrapping the cap and expanding benefits, Senator Bernie Sanders also introduced legislation that would remove the SSA budget from the appropriations process, making it much less vulnerable to cuts. Representative John Larsen, ranking minority leader on the House Ways and Means Committee, introduced similar legislation in the House. There have been additional expansion bills introduced in the House and Senate that will set a context for debate and action if the Democrats take control of Congress in the 2018 election.

In March, 2018, Senator Patty Murray introduced the Stronger Safety Net Act (SSN Act), which makes some progressive changes to Social Security benefits, although it fails to deal in an adequate way with the income cap. The legislation does the following:

1. It enhances benefits for divorced spouses. Under current law, a divorced spouse can receive benefits under the former spouse’s earnings if they were married for 10 years. Beginning in 2019, the SSN Act would allow those with less than 10 years of marriage to be eligible for benefits under the former spouse’s earnings. The benefits for those married less than 10 years would be based on the number of years of marriage, so someone married for 9 years would receive 90 percent on down to 10 percent for 1 year of marriage. The same formula applies to survivor benefits for divorced spouses.

2. It enhances benefits for surviving spouses. For surviving spouses where both the spouses have Social Security insured status as retired workers, the surviving spouse would receive a benefit equal to 75 percent of the sum of the survivor’s benefit and the deceased

*Continued on Page 11*

# Introducing the Indigenous Rights Education Project

By Kris Melroe

Can you guess what the second largest worldwide organized crime is? It's human trafficking. Human trafficking is defined as the forcing, by fraud or coercion, of people into sexual acts or work (labor). Trafficking generates approximately 150.2 billion dollars per year.

On March 3 and 4, Indigenous Rights Educational Project held its first event, a panel presentation that addressed human trafficking, especially the plight of missing and murdered Native women. Native women are the most at-risk group in the US for being trafficked for sexual purposes. Out of the 32,263 women reported missing in 2016, 9,989 were Native women or about 32%. Juxtapose that statistic against the entire Native population, which comprises only 1.7% of the US population.

Native women were honored as the givers of life before the European conquest. In fact, there wasn't even a word for rape, and in most societies assault on women was considered a capital offense.

Native Americans are at risk for human trafficking for a number of reasons:

- First, as the US systematically took over the land, Native Americans were forced onto reservations. To maintain control, hundreds of "Forts" were established. Forts housed armies of men, isolated from their families for long periods of time. Have you thought about what probably happened in the forts? In fact, every fort housed brothels. Native women were the easiest group to be forced by fraud and coercion to work in the brothels.

- Second, their culture, language, and family systems were attacked. Children were torn from their families and forced into boarding schools where they were not allowed to speak their language or practice their culture. Parents had no contact for long periods of time because the schools were off the reservations, and it was illegal for the parents to keep their children at home. Boarding schools were large

dorms with no privacy. Multiple generations were cut off from their extended families and severely traumatized in this model. Children were "parented" by white staff and often traumatized and bullied by peers. Every aspect of life was codified at the federal level, from the length of hair to the time they ate. Numerous accounts describe the horrors of this experience.

- Third, unemployment rates on most reservations are extremely high. Indian Country News found 15 reservations with unemployment rates at 80% or higher. Extreme poverty doesn't leave people with many options.

These factors contribute to what is known as "intergenerational trauma" or "historical trauma," thus making Native women the perfect population for trafficking.

The panel of indigenous women who spoke recounted stories about their own lives, which included many of the factors mentioned above. The personal stories of these women were heart-breaking and all too real. One woman told of her mother's disappearance. Her mother had been involved with drugs, so the police wouldn't take her seriously. It was a struggle to get the police to even take a report because they said it was not their jurisdictional issue since she was an Indian. Another panelist talked about her family's dysfunctional dynamic and how that was connected to her sexual abuse at a very young age. She didn't know what was normal. One of her own family members sexually trafficked her for money.

Unfortunately, up-to-date databases are not available, so it's difficult to obtain data about what is really happening in Indian country. Also, federal or local officials do not track assaults on Native women's on or off the reserva-



*Kris Melroe introduces the panel at the March 3 event.*

tions? Who takes these women's stories seriously? Most women do not bother to report anything because local police see this as part and parcel of "drunk Indians." When federal officers are involved, they follow up on only 37% of the crimes. Very little of that percentage actually ends up with an arrest, let alone convictions.

The Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women's groups are working hard to change this tragedy. They are:

- Creating a common database for our state and nation.
- Working on jurisdictional issues nationally.
- Trying to pass legislation, such as Washington State House Bills 2360 and 2361, neither of which passed in the 2018 legislative session.
- Increasing the consequences for the buyers and not just the victims.
- Developing services for victims.
- Providing support to families trying to find missing women.

Please stay tuned for more updates and educational panels on issues in Indian country. If you would like to be on our email list for legislative issues that need your phone or email, let us know.

Contact information: 206-941-2111  
Facebook: Indigenous Rights Educational Project.

*Kris Melroe is a PSARA member.*

# New Seasons Brings in Hired Guns to Intimidate Workers

By Mike Andrew

A hundred years ago companies that wanted to keep their workers from organizing would hire Pinkertons to murder the leaders and beat up the rank and file.

Nowadays corporations are much more sophisticated, but no less determined to keep their workers in line at whatever cost.

New Seasons Markets, for example, has hired a notorious union-busting consulting firm – Cruz and Associates – to deal with worker organizing and community opposition to their expansion into the Seattle-area market.

New Seasons is a Portland-based grocery chain owned since 2010 by a venture capital outfit called Endeavour Capital. They are currently expanding into Western Washington, with one store open in Mercer Island, one more nearing completion in Ballard, and a contract to place a store at 23rd and Union in Seattle's Central District.

According to New Seasons workers, once Endeavour acquired the company working conditions deteriorated. When workers complain they are targeted by management for intimidation, harassment, and eventual firing. Workers recently filed three unfair labor practice complaints based on these conditions.

Cruz and Associates is a so-called labor relations firm specializing in "Union Avoidance" and "Preserving a Union-Free Work Place." Cruz and Associates has a track record of consulting for companies that have been charged with illegally intimidating and retaliat-

ing against workers organizing for their rights.

New Seasons said it hired the firm to conduct "voluntary information sessions" to "objectively inform" its workers. Translated into standard English, this means "captive audience meetings."

New Seasons is only one of their latest clients. Others include the Trump International Hotel Las Vegas (2016) and American Apparel (2015).

The Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas paid Cruz and Associates more than half a million dollars for services when housekeepers and other workers were organizing with the Culinary Workers Union. One of the Cruz "consultants" set up meetings where he reportedly threatened employees.

"They told us the union only wants our money, that if we supported the union we'd lose our jobs, that the company would put our names on a blacklist and no other hotels in Las Vegas would hire us," Marisela Olvera, a Trump Las Vegas employee, told a reporter at Think Progress.

The NLRB issued three separate unfair labor practice complaints against Trump Las Vegas, charging Trump management with firing and threatening



PSARA Executive Board member Robby Stern pickets the New Seasons Market in Mercer Island. (Photo courtesy of UFCW 21)

to fire union supporters, suspending employees, interrogating and intimidating employees, and more. The hotel ultimately settled with at least two workers – one of whom was fired for organizing and another who was denied a promotion.

After workers voted to join the union, the Trump Hotel, with Cruz and Associates still on its payroll, sought to overturn the election and refused to bargain with the union. The NLRB ruled that the hotel broke the law and ordered them to begin negotiations.

New Seasons workers ask on their Facebook page "Why is the 'friendliest store in town' using the same union-busting firm Donald Trump used to stop his workers from organizing?"

Good question.

PSARA members stood up for the right to organize and form unions at Harborview Medical Center, February 26, the day the US Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the Janus case.

If the court decides against public sector unions, as is expected, all progressive-thinking people will have to rally round to protect our rights and the organizations that have brought us a measure of political and economic power.



# Takers, Not Makers

By Michael Righi

Trump called it the Tax Cut and Jobs Act (the tax cut passed with great fanfare by Republicans early this year). A more accurate name: the "Tax Cut for Shareholders Act." Besides cutting personal income tax rates more for the very rich than for the rest of us, the legislation cut the corporate profits tax from 35% to 21%.

Actually, the average rate that corporations paid before the tax cut was 21% (they employ lots of tax lawyers). Besides, they manage to book a lot of profit overseas, in low-tax jurisdictions. Many huge corporations pay little or no corporate profits tax to the federal government. For example, Boeing has paid an average rate of 5.4% over the last eight years. Amazon paid 10.8%.

But isn't it a good idea to cut taxes on firms, so that they can go out and build our economy and create jobs? Yes, it might be, if that is what they actually did with the money. Alas, it isn't so.

Over the past 10 years, major corporations have devoted 94% of their profits to two activities: raising dividends and buying back their own stock. Since the passage of the tax cut, over \$200 billion has gone into stock buybacks, twice as much as in this period last year.

Corporate public relations departments have been trumpeting (!) the bonuses and wage increases they have been handing out. Boeing, not to pick on them, set aside \$300 million for employee charitable contribution matches and "upgrading employee facilities." Meanwhile, Boeing announced a \$4 billion stock repurchase and a 20% dividend increase. Only 3.4% of Fortune 500 companies have announced an actual wage increase.

Why do companies buy their own shares? For one thing, 77% of CEO pay comes from grants of stock and stock options. By buying shares, they drive

up stock prices and executive pay, including pay from previous years. CEOs now make close to 300 times what the average worker makes.

For another thing, the pernicious ideology of "maximizing shareholder value" has taken over the corporate boardroom. Wealthy shareholders (84% of all stock is owned by the wealthiest 10% of us) become wealthier. So-called "activist" (not our idea of what that word means) billionaire-owned hedge funds get higher returns -- extra money they can use to play in derivatives and other risky financial markets. Or buy another yacht.

Allowing corporations to buy their own stock was clearly identified as stock manipulation in the 1930s and outlawed. Those regulations were changed in the 1980s, under Reagan, by the Securities and Exchange Commission. Why should the government be involved in financial markets, after all?

The real damage to the economy of all this manipulation is what our corporations are NOT doing. The corporation as a legal entity was set up to build a dynamic economy -- to build new factories, to train workers, to develop new technologies. But now, since the tax cut, as just one example, Pfizer is using \$10 billion for stock buybacks and dividend increases and at the same time totally halting research into Parkinson's and Alzheimer's drugs, laying off 300 workers.

The net effect of using profit to fund stock purchases and dividends is that the rich are stripping value from the economy -- from value-creating activity to their own bulging pockets. It is the wealthy who are the takers, not Social Security recipients. Corporations are being looted and stock values are being manipulated.



Michael Righi

Who actually "creates value" anyway? Only shareholders? Not workers? Communities who build infrastructure and fund schools? Governments who do the basic research that jump-starts new products? Conservative economic theory says that only shareholders have a justifiable claim on corporate profits. This is a fundamental distortion of what we all know.

And yet this justification is used to cut taxes so that money can be returned to "investors." Investors, really? Shareholders are traders, not investors. Investment means (or should mean) research and development, supporting worker training and education, and finding solutions to problems such as climate change.

Regulations can be changed back. Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Tammy Baldwin, and others are raising the issue in Congress. We should be letting them and our own representatives know that we know what is going on and support action. Stock buybacks can and should be banned.

*Michael Righi is a retired economics professor and a PSARA member.*

# In Memory of Rick Erickson (1944-2018)

By Sharon Harris

**R**ick Erickson was an activist member of PSARA's Executive Board for more than a decade. He will be missed. Below is the obituary written by his partner, Sharon Harris.

**E**dward Oscar "Rick" Erickson passed away Saturday, February 17, after a four-year fight with multiple myeloma.

A great father, partner, and friend, Rick will be missed by all those around him.

Rick was born on July 26, 1944, in Akron, Ohio, to Levona and Edward Erickson. Rick grew up in Akron with his older sister, Tanya Marie Erickson (Maggos), before attending college first at Ohio State University and later at Kent State University. At Kent State he became active in the anti-war movement, finding himself in a leadership role in the school's chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Yes, he was part of the Kent State group of students shot on May 4, 1970. He knew all those who died. After several confrontations over his activism with the school's administration as well as local law enforcement, Rick was forced to leave Kent State without finishing his degree in philosophy.

After a period of wanderlust, Rick settled down in Seattle, in 1971. Finding work in the produce industry, Rick worked for the original PCC before moving on to manage the produce department of several QFCs in Seattle (including those at Interbay, Wallingford, and University Village).

Rick was active in the leadership of UFCW local 1105 (now UFCW 21) throughout the 1980s, serving as a steward and as an elected Executive Board member. While cherishing his interactions with local independent farmers in his early years in the industry,

Rick was decidedly less enthusiastic about the changes to sourcing that occurred after a series of mergers/acquisitions brought QFC into the portfolio of national grocery chain Kroger.

Rick retired in 2005, after over 30 years of service. After retirement, Rick took on a role as retiree coordinator for UFCW 21. He also represented UFCW 21 as an Executive Board member of Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA). He served on the Attorney General's Advisory Committee to the Public Counsel until his cancer diagnosis.

Rick is survived by his two children: Tanya Jean Cram, currently living in Cashmere, Washington, and Reid Erickson, currently living in Seattle. He coached both kids in a variety of sports in their youth and rarely missed a soccer, softball, baseball, or basketball game.

In addition to his two children, Rick is survived by his partner, Sharon Harris, whom he met in 2004. Sharon and Rick enjoyed traveling, discussion groups (coffee and politics), and spending time with their family. Both were active in the fight to preserve Medicare and Social Security, creating a socially engaged dynamic duo. Rick's family grew during his time with Sharon, as he formed a familial relationship with Sharon's sons, Matt and Michael Harris and Curtis Stevens, and their respective families.



*Rick Erickson (right) with Bette Reed at PSARA's 2012 winter meeting.*

*(Photo: Garet Munger)*

Rick will also be remembered as Grandpa by Haley and Copper Cram, Isabelle and Evan Harris, Gabe and Phoenix Stevens, as well as Jack and Charlie Erickson, and as "my person" by his cat, Riley.

A Memorial Service will be held on April 14, 2018, at 12 noon at the Edmonds Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 8109 224th Street SW, Edmonds, WA 98026.

Also, if the FBI reads this, you may close his file. Solidarity Forever!

Please show your support for the organizations below in Rick's memory: PSARA (Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action) Social Security Works Economic Opportunity Institute UFCW 21

*Sharon Harris is Rick's partner and a PSARA member.*

# Fo' Real (from PSARA Race/Gender Equity Committee)

By Bob Shimabukuro, with an article by Timothy Kenney reprinted from *The International Examiner*

**T**his is another story of American arrogance and total disregard that is hard to believe. And much of the plutonium for the "testing" was created in the state of Washington.

The Washington State Legislature has passed State Bill 5683, which will provide premium assistance and coverage of out-of-pocket costs to Washingtonians from Compact of Free Association (COFA) nations who are income-eligible for Medicaid. SB 5683 passed the Washington State Legislature with strong bipartisan support. Senator Rebecca Saldaña and Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos steered the bill through the Legislature.

As we go to press, all it needs is the Governor's signature. If he hasn't signed the bill when you read this, give him a buzz. ---Bob Shimabukuro

## Nuclear trauma still fresh for Seattle's Marshallese community on 64th anniversary of Bikini Atoll tests

By Timothy Kenney

The roughly 100 people gathered in the Burke Museum auditorium fell into a stunned silence as the movie projector went dark and the lights flickered on. For some in the room, this was the first time they had ever seen the devastating legacy of the Castle Bravo nuclear test on Bikini Atoll, but for most, March 1 was a solemn reminder of the irreparable harm the Marshallese community suffered at the hands of the United States Navy.

In 1954, the Navy dropped the largest nuclear bomb ever detonated on land in Bikini Atoll, one of the Marshall Islands in the southeast Pacific, an explosion 1,000 times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. This was just the peak of U.S. nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands that lasted between 1946 and 1962, turning some of the islands and atolls into one

of the most radioactive places on earth. People living on Bikini Atoll were relocated before the tests to a nearby island, being led to believe by U.S. officers that they could return home shortly after the tests. One government video from just before the test said, "They are a nomadic group and are well pleased that the Yanks are going to add some variety to their lives." Many of these people never made it back to Bikini Atoll and those who did were unknowingly exposed to fatally high levels of radiation.

But the anniversary event was also a source of hope, with organizers honoring five Marshallese advocates for their work in Olympia to increase healthcare benefits for Pacific Islanders affected by the nuclear legacy of these tests. In response to their organizing, the Washington Legislature recently passed a bill that would provide healthcare benefits for Marshallese residents living in Washington.

Marshallese citizens in the U.S. aren't eligible for public healthcare programs, so this bill would allow people from countries belonging to the Compact of Free Association (COFA) to receive health insurance. For COFA citizens legally living in Washington at or below 133 percent of the federal poverty level, the Health Care Authority will cover all premiums and out-of-pocket costs. The bill is currently on Governor Jay Inslee's desk and is expected to be signed into law.

"These are not helpless victims," said Holly Barker, a UW anthropology lecturer and advocate for Marshallese rights. "These women are fighting for healthcare and their rights down in Olympia."

According to *The Spokesman-Review*, Sen. Bob Hasegawa called the radioactive exposure "one of the most egregious examples of where we really need to step up," adding that Washington has a moral obligation to this community, who were used as "human guinea pigs."



Tarkilañ Hilai (left) speaks in her native language about her memories of living on Rongelap Atoll during the nuclear testing, while Emma Joran (right) translates for the audience.

(Photo: Timothy Kenney)

One of the award presenters, Malaelupe Samifua, is a U.S.-born Pacific Islander who worked in the Marshall Islands teaching high school. He believes that American schools try to suppress the real story of Bikini Atoll by only focusing on the bomb testing and none of the deadly consequences.

"The U.S. government definitely has something to do with that," Samifua said. "There's a silencing of this narrative and it's wrong, especially since the U.S. benefited from it so much."

The most deadly consequences of the Bravo bomb didn't happen on Bikini Atoll, they occurred on the nearby Rongelap Atoll when a cloud of radioactive fallout from the bomb washed over the island. Over 300 people lived there at the time, including Tarkilañ Hilai who spoke at the Burke anniversary event. U.S. officials said the exposure was an accident, blaming an incorrect forecast of wind direction, but a recent

Continued on Page 11

## Challenge to PSARA Members

*Continued from Page 1*

matched, and we together would take an important step in the effort to create more financial security for the work of the PSARA Education Fund.

Please make a GiveBig donation to support this newsletter and our educational work. We plan to continue being a leader in educating and advocating for the preservation and expansion of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

We also want to build a growing crescendo of support for funding long-term care services, either through the state-based Long-Term Care Trust Fund or by creating a long-term care benefit in Medicare.

We will be educating and promoting these goals and other policies that allow all people to live their senior years with dignity and respect. In addition, you will help further our organization's commitment and strengthen our voice as we continue our work for racial and gender equity and economic and climate justice.

The PSARA Education Fund contributes significantly to the struggle for a decent, humane, and economically just community for all people. We have received national recognition for the work we do. Please help us continue that work by contributing during the days leading up to GiveBIG Day or on May 9, GiveBig day.

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## Aiko Schaefer...

*Continued from Page 1*

"Historically, communities of color have not been engaged by mainstream environmentalists and policy makers on environmental issues. It's changing, because it has to. In King County, 37 percent of our population are people of color, and in 20 years those individuals will be the majority. If we are to be effective at addressing climate change, we must do more to put these communities in the center of this conversation."

Aiko is amazing and we are so happy that she has agreed to speak. Be sure to come.

*This presentation is sponsored by the PSARA Race and Gender Equity Committee and the PSARA Climate and Environmental Justice Committee.*

## Let's Talk About Disabilities

*By Andrea Sawczuk*

**A**s seniors, many of us have disabilities. We all know people who have them. Some of these people are very close to us and we feel their pain – often more than we feel our own pain. Disabilities may keep us from doing what we love – or cause us to do them differently. They make us vulnerable, dependent, and sometimes isolated. Aging gracefully in the face of disability is a challenge. Aging without a disability is unlikely. Yes, we all know disabilities.

What many of us do not know is how our state is addressing disabilities. The 2018 legislative session was rich with initiatives focused on seniors, with a number focused on seniors with disabilities. Many of these have successfully passed through both the House and the Senate. Although those bills related to aging that were addressed in this legislative session are of equal interest and importance to us, our focus in this discussion will be on four bills more directly related to disabilities. If you are interested in details on these bills, you can search by bill number at <http://leg.wa.gov/>

### **Hearing Aids Covered Under Medicaid & Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) Program (Bill #5179):**

Perhaps this is the bill most relevant to seniors – and some senior-wanna-bes – as it affects more than two million people. It passed both chambers with large majorities and is due to take effect January 1, 2019. With the passage of this bill, a person who is hearing impaired and on Medicaid or PEBB will receive professional health care services, receive a hearing aid at no cost, and be eligible for a new hearing aid with the same professional services every five years. How exciting is this!

**Improved Housing Stability for Seniors & People With Disabilities (Bill #2667):** By removing barriers to housing assistance, this bill promises to stabilize housing for those who are eligible. The promise of housing stability unlikely to be realized by this bill, but it is a beginning. Through this bill, the eligibility requirements, primarily related to income caps, have been improved – although not sufficiently. The real coup with this bill is the requirement that the Department of Social and Health Services communicate with the Department of Commerce, which manages an important housing assistance program, by relaying the names of all eligible individuals on a regular basis. Apparently, this has not been the practice and has required a unique legislative action for it to happen – amazing!

**Patients' Access to Investigational Drugs (Bill #5035):** Passage of this bill is another one of those 'no-brainers,' as it provides terminally ill patients and their physicians with access to and treatment by investigational drugs that could extend the patients' life. This bill is quite remarkable because it bypasses the FDA's (Federal Drug Administration's) regulatory and legal pathway for the testing of drugs in human clinical trials. Although this bill is not specific to disabilities, anyone needing to take advantage of investigational drugs due to terminal illness is, by definition, medically disabled, so it really does belong in our review of the 2018 legislative bills focused on disabilities.

### **Establishing the Mental Health Field Response Teams Program (Bill #2892):**

Through passage of this bill, the state expects to acquire data on the effectiveness of using mental health professionals as part of the law enforcement team that responds to encounters involving persons with mental health issues. The program will be executed through state grants to local law enforcement entities with the understanding that data collection and reporting guidelines will be addressed. Although this effort falls far short of what is needed to help people with mental health issues, it is a clear entrée into providing support, and, if successful, the program will likely be adopted as routine protocol.

*Andrea Sawczuk is a PSARA Executive Board member and Co-Chair of PSARA's Southend Committee.*

# Fo' Real

Continued from Page 9

investigation into declassified government records shows officers may have known Rongelap was in the fallout zone.

"This is an injustice that hasn't been answered for," one UW student said during a group discussion following the film Nuclear Savage by Adam Horowitz. "People don't care, it just makes me so angry."

In what is now referred to as Project 4.1, the U.S. conducted extensive medical evaluation of Marshallese people exposed to radiation to gather biological information on how best to treat patients in the event of a nuclear war. The U.S. Navy waited two full days before evacuating the Rongelap community after the Bravo Bomb detonated, during which time men, women, and children were exposed to dangerously high levels of radiation.

It is unknown if the U.S. government intentionally exposed the Rongelap community to radiation – they continue to deny it and call the exposure an accident – but declassified records show the Marshallese suffered greatly from the exposure. The community still has much higher rates of cancer, women on the island experienced miscarriages, and children were born with disabilities much more often.

Even 64 years later, the physical and emotional wounds of nuclear fallout are still fresh for Seattle's Marshallese and Pacific Islander community. Many could barely speak after the film ended, burying their heads into each other's shoulders. But this event showed the resilience of this community and their incredible capacity to overcome.

"I have the highest respect for Marshallese women," one UW student said. "They have the strength to forgive."

*This article, written by Timothy Kenney, was originally run in the International Examiner in its March 7, 2018, issue.*

# Social Security, the Struggle Continues

Continued from Page 4

spouse's benefit. Under current law, the surviving spouse has to choose either their own benefit or their dead spouse's benefit. That frequently leads to a 50 percent cut in income for the surviving spouse.

3. It extends benefit eligibility for the children of workers who have retired, have a disability, or are deceased. This provision will apply to children who are in high school, college, or vocational school. Under current law, minor children under the age of 18 and high school students under 19 are entitled to benefits if they are the child of a worker who has retired, has a disability, or is deceased. Starting in 2019, the SSN Act extends benefits for full-time students to the age of 23.

4. The SSN Act would apply a 2 percent payroll tax on earnings over \$400,000, with the threshold wage indexed after 2019, thus creating a permanent donut hole.

While the benefit enhancements would be a step forward, the funding formula is disappointing. It is anticipated that the SSN Act will not move forward in 2018. We appreciate Senator Murray for proposing improvements to Social Security benefits, but a much bolder approach on the revenue side is needed.

So far, our advocacy has not been successful in getting our Washington Senators to publicly support scrapping the cap, which would set the stage for a significant expansion of benefits. We have had greater success on the Democratic side in the House, where Representative Jayapal, Smith, and Larsen support scrapping the cap and Representatives Kilmer, Heck, and DelBene have co-sponsored legislation that would more slowly scrap the cap.

Social Security advocates in Washington, DC, say that it's very important to remain on the offensive. We will continue to advocate for more revenue for Social Security so the much-needed expansion becomes financially viable. We will also actively fight against cuts and privatization.

*Robby Stern is a member of PSARA's Executive Board and Chair of Social Security Works Washington.*

## To Renew or Donate

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

- Basic contribution: \$20
- Limited income/living lightly: \$15 or whatever you can afford
- Supporting: \$50  New contributor
- Sponsoring: \$100 or more  Renewing contributor

Name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

# Meetings and Events

**West Seattle Hot Topics for Seniors & Senior Wannabes:** Noon – 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 4, Southwest Library, 9010 35th Ave. SW, Seattle, (35th & Henderson). Topic: *Implications of the Tax Change*. Brown bag lunch. All welcome.

**PSARA Climate & Environmental Justice Committee:** 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., Thursday, April 5, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All welcome.

**PSARA Government Relations Committee:** 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m., Thursday, April 5, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S. All welcome.

**PSARA Fundraising Committee:** 10:30 a.m. - Noon, Monday, April 9, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S. All welcome.

**PSARA Education Committee:** 2 p.m., Tuesday, April 10, Washington State

Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All welcome.

**Green Lake Discussion Group:** Noon - 1:30 p.m., Thursday, April 12, Green Lake Branch, Seattle Public Library, 7364 E Green Lake Dr. N, Seattle. Topic: *Income Inequality and What to Do About It*. Brown bag lunch. All welcome.

**PSARA Southend Committee:** 12:30 p.m., Thursday, April 12, Burien Library, 400 SW 152nd St., Burien. Join us for lunch before the meeting at Elliott Bay Brewhouse & Pub, 255 SW 152nd St., Burien. Please arrive for lunch by 11:15 a.m. This month: *Refugee and Immigrant Conditions in South King County with Annette Holland, King County Library System*. All welcome as we plan PSARA events in South King County.

**Presentation on I-1631 by Aiko Schaefer:** 11 a.m. – Noon, Thursday, April 19, Washington State Labor Council office,

321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. See the Article on Page 1. All welcome.

**PSARA Executive Board Meeting:** 12:30 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, April 19, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All are welcome.



**Seattle Black Panther Party 50th Anniversary Celebration:** April 26-28. For more information visit their website at [seattlebpp50.com](http://seattlebpp50.com)

