

# The Retiree **ADVOCATE**

The Monthly Publication of  
**PSARA EDUCATION FUND**  
“Uniting Generations for a Secure Future”

Vol XXXIII, No 7

July 2017

**SPECIAL TO PSARA!**  
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## **Unite for Tax Justice: Pack City Hall on July 5**

*By Katie Wilson*

In Washington State the poor are taxed at rates up to seven times higher than the rich. No other state has such an upside-down tax system. This isn't simply unfair, it's irresponsible. Since we're failing to tax the people with the money, our state and local governments don't have sufficient revenue to fund basic education, mental health, emergency shelter, and affordable housing, let alone cope with the federal budget cuts proposed by Trump.

We can't keep relying on property tax levies and sales tax increases. That's why the Trump-Proof Seattle Coalition came together at the beginning of this year to build a movement for tax justice, starting right here in Seattle. Many hundreds of people packed Town Halls in every district of the city, and thousands signed petitions calling on our elected officials to pass a tax on the wealthiest Seattle households.

Six months later, the Seattle City Council is finally considering a progressive income tax! This two percent tax on income in excess of \$250,000 per year for single filers or \$500,000 for joint filers is expected to raise over \$125 million per year. This revenue could be used to address the Homelessness State of Emergency; increase the city's stock of affordable housing; fund transit, education, and green jobs; and/or replace regressive property and sales taxes.

PSARA is a strong advocate for this progressive tax. In 1932, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled that a progressive income tax violated the

## **President of *Social Security Works* to Speak on July 20 in Seattle**

Nancy Altman, the President of D.C.-based Social Security Works and Chair of the Strengthen Social Security coalition and campaign, will speak in Seattle on July 20 at noon prior to the PSARA Executive Board meeting. Nancy has up-to-date inside knowledge of what is happening in D.C. in relation to both the attacks on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid and the effort to build the campaign to expand these programs.



*Nancy Altman*

Nancy has a 40-year background in the areas of Social Security and private pensions and serves as one of our leading spokespeople in Washington, D.C. She is central to the fight to preserve and expand Social Security and Medicare.

She is the author of *The Battle for Social Security: From FDR's Vision to Bush's Gamble* (John Wiley & Sons, 2005), and co-author of *Social Security Works! Why Social Security Isn't Going Broke and How Expanding It Will Help Us All* (The New Press, 2015). She has shared her Social Security expertise on numerous television and radio shows, including PBS NewsHour, MSNBC, and FOX News. She has published op-eds in dozens of newspapers, including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*.

We are very fortunate that Nancy will be in Washington as a result of being asked to speak at the Washington State Labor Council annual convention in Vancouver, WA. She has agreed to come to Seattle and speak on July 20 at noon about what is happening in the other Washington concerning Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

This will be a unique opportunity to get a briefing about these programs, which are so vital to the lives of people of all generations. Please join the PSARA Executive Board on July 20 at noon at the Seattle office of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL/CIO, 321 16th Avenue S. As an added bonus, attendees will get to view the extraordinary mural that was recently installed on the Labor Council building.

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## The Retiree **ADVOCATE**

Published monthly by the PSARA Education Fund, 2800 First Ave., #262, Seattle, Washington, 98121. Phone (206) 448-9646.

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## PSARA'S SUMMER MEETING AND POLIOCK a Huge Success!

Photos by Garet Munger

Our featured speaker, Attorney General Bob Ferguson, enjoys himself talking with PSARA members. Ferguson talked about his efforts to crack down on consumer fraud targeting seniors, as well as his lawsuits aimed at the Trump administration's Muslim Ban.



Teresa Mosqueda, Political Director of the Washington State Labor Council, reports on the work of the Health Care is a Human Right coalition.



PSARA members share a good laugh during one of the meeting's lighter moments.



### Even More Good News from the Summer Meeting

The PSARA Fundraising Committee held our first ever Silent Auction at the June General Membership meeting. Thanks to our generous donors, we raised \$1,432! Items included Mariners tickets, sailing on Lake Union, art work from local artists, wine, photos from Garet our wonderful PSARA photographer, and other equally delightful items. We plan on another silent auction at our December meeting. In the meantime, let Karen Richter ([kerichter100@gmail.com](mailto:kerichter100@gmail.com)) know what you'd like to see included in the December silent auction.

# Special to PSARA: TrumpCare and the Trump Budget

By U.S. Representative Pramila Jayapal

Compared to only 50 years ago, Americans have added 8 years to the average lifespan. We understand more about longevity and the science of our bodies than ever before, and our population of 46 million people aged 65 and older is set to double over the next 40 years.

This growing senior population invested heart, soul, and many finances into leaving the world a better place than when they first entered into it. Now they are leaving the workforce, creating space for younger generations to come in, connecting with family, and pursuing other passions that will contribute to our communities in new ways.

The explicit contract we had with seniors was this: you invest into our systems of health, economics, environment, and betterment now, and we'll ensure that you are taken care of when you retire. Today, however, Donald Trump and some lawmakers are renegeing on that contract.

Between TrumpCare and the Trump budget, Republicans intend to cut Medicaid by almost \$1.5 trillion. This nearly halves the program that provides care to 74 million Americans, including more than 4.6 million seniors. Six hundred thousand Washingtonians who gained coverage through Medicaid expansion now stand to lose that essential care.

It is clear that cuts to Medicaid would have grave results across the country, including in Washington State. A constituent named Scott wrote to my office to tell me Medicaid was there for him during the "most stressful time" in his life. He and his wife worked for years until she was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's, and Scott put his career on hold to be her primary caretaker. With no steady income and therefore no insurance, Scott was able to receive Medicaid, remain covered, and focus full-time on his wife's needs.

This budget targets vulnerable populations in our society and leaves

them defenseless. Contrary to promises that he would not touch Social Security, Trump's budget slashes \$72 billion from the program in the form of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). SSI pays monthly benefits to about eight million seniors and low-income people with disabilities, and SSDI compensates people unable to work due to a medical condition. The budget jeopardizes the health and well-being of blind people, cancer patients, low-income retirees, and those just trying to get by.

Trump's vision of a "great America" also includes a \$1.2 billion cut to the Centers for Disease Control, a \$1 billion slash to the National Cancer Institute, and a \$575 million hit to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. The budget proposal also strips \$6 billion from the National Institutes of Health, taking away nearly a quarter of the overall dollars for an organization that serves to solve the largest medical questions we have.

In addition to threatening the progress of medicine, research, and wellness, the budget performs an all-out assault on programs that help children, low-income residents, the environment, and older Americans. With home costs in Seattle skyrocketing, people with fixed incomes cannot afford to lose out. Yet, this budget reduces federal funds in Community Development Block Grants like Meals on Wheels and in HOME Investment Partnerships that produce housing stock to aid low-income residents. From 2012 to 2015, Meals on Wheels usage in King County rose 38 percent to 2,700 and, last year alone, our state received \$18.9 million in HOME funding.

Trump's budget delivers sweeping cuts to the EPA, dramatically affecting health and the future of the planet we leave for the next generations. It slashes funding for public education and loan forgiveness programs, while allotting billions for a border wall and overinflated defense systems.



*Pramila Jayapal*

We should be proud to invest in those who have invested in our country and proud to support programs that allow people to live full and dignified lives. Double-crossing on the deals we made with seniors is just wrong. It's also wrong to avoid investing in those who come next. We need to give future generations a fighting chance to access opportunity—the same opportunity that allowed retirees to contribute and do so much.

Seniors have immense power to stop this immoral budget. In the last election, people aged 50 and older made up nearly half of those who voted—50- to 64-year-olds comprised 30 percent of the electorate, and those 65 and older made up 15 percent. As part of a population that routinely hits the polls at disproportionately high rates, seniors have the political power to steer the conversation.

Now more than ever, we need your voice to speak loudly against unjust and short-sighted legislation. Let's work together to organize our communities to speak out, keep the pressure on, and point the right way forward. I'm not backing down from this fight, and I hope you won't either.

*Rep. Pramila Jayapal represents the 7th Congressional District, is Vice Ranking Member of the House Budget Committee, First Vice Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and a PSARA member.*

# A CO-OP Farm and Off to Habana

By Robby Stern

**P**resident Trump has imposed new restrictions on U.S. travel and business with Cuba. I think of the people I met last December in Cuba, and their determination, dignity, and hope for a better life for their small, poor country. I was inspired by their example. Besides the naked politics of trying to firm up his base in the right-wing Cuban community in Florida, Trump and his wealthy advisors are also trying to limit the ability of the people in the U.S. to learn that a socialist alternative really can have a positive impact for a large majority of the people. It is possible, even in a poor country like Cuba, to offer ALL the people health care, housing, food, and free higher education, but only if you achieve a fairer distribution of the wealth. Trump's action has inspired me to want to go back to Cuba and spend some tourist dollars helping to make the lives of the Cuban people a little better.

## Back to Our Trip

Before departing from Santiago de Cuba, we visited a cooperative farm in a rural area just outside of Santiago. Cuba has established two types of agricultural cooperatives. The cooperative we visited included approximately 140 farmers who got their land after the revolution when it was confiscated from large landowners and distributed to the *campesinos*.

The *campesinos* have organized, with the assistance of the government into a cooperative to share resources like farm machinery, purchasing of supplies, distribution, and a newly-built greenhouse where seeds are germinated. Each farmer runs their own farm and is compensated for what they produce. They create economies of scale through cooperation and collective governance of the co-op. They elect a board that manages the co-op, and for major decisions they have an assembly of all the farmers.

The second type of cooperative involves government ownership of the land, management by the *campesinos* who work the land, and equal distribution of the income generated to all the members of the cooperative.

With both types of agricultural coop-

eratives, the government contracts with the co-op for a very large percentage of what is produced and the government sets the prices for the produce, in this contract arrangement with the cooperatives. The Cuban cooperative models originated in the agricultural sector but have now spread to other sectors of the economy. They are seen as a counterbalance to the individual (as opposed to communal) ideology that may spring from the legalization of small businesses which have been allowed to dramatically increase in number in the Cuban economy.

We gathered with farmers from the cooperative, many of whom were women. We asked many questions about how they functioned, the ways decisions were made, and how they were handling the economic pressure created by the U.S. embargo, including the challenge to keep their old farm machinery running. One of the farmers proudly showed us pictures of how he rebuilt one of the tractors that was shared by the farmers and the innovations he built into the tractor.

They explained to us the decision-making process of the cooperative. Their pride in their accomplishments were both obvious and inspiring.

They had set out for us and asked us to partake of an amazing table of fruits and fruit juices that they grow and produce. Before we shared in this wonderful cornucopia, Jeff Johnson and Cindy Domingo spoke on behalf of our delegation, explaining to these wonderful, hard-working farmers how inspiring they are. We promised to do what we can to end the U.S. embargo so that they can sell their produce in the U.S.

We toured the farm, but our walking around was cut short by an attack on our feet and ankles by biting, stinging ants. We did not get a chance to ask our hosts how they protect themselves against



*On the cooperative farm*

these relentless little insects.

We bid farewell with warm hugs. That evening we celebrated Cindy's 63rd birthday with a cake and Cuban rum!

## Off to Habana

We boarded a Russian passenger jet in Santiago for the hour-long flight to Habana. The travel experience was okay except for a very uncomfortable seat on the plane due to a spring that had broken in the seat and was sticking into my back.

When we arrived in Habana, we had a new bus driver, Nafal. We were to learn more about this admirable man in the next few days.

We began with a bus tour of Habana, a city of two million, where 50 percent of all income in Cuba is earned. We stopped at the Plaza de la Revolucion, a very expansive, rather austere open space with a large monument to Jose Marti and gigantic banners on buildings surrounding the open space, with pictures of Fidel, Che, and Camilo Cienfuegos Gorriaran (a member of the Granma expedition and a top guerilla commander). The Plaza is a national monument and major gathering place with sufficient open area for thousands and thousands of people.

Habana is divided into districts that are much larger than neighborhoods, and within the districts are neighborhoods.

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# FO' REAL: TURTLE ISLAND

By Bob Shimabukuro

"America," my father often said, "has the worst history ever."

I was torn, because he also said, "Listen to your teachers." And listening to my teachers, America didn't seem so bad.

A conversation in an American History high school class discussion surprised me.

Re plantations: I heard "I think it just depended on the Master; if you had a good Master, life was good; if you had a bad Master, it was bad" go unchallenged.

Re labor unions: It was the same. "The owner should have the right to do what he wants. It's his business. If they don't want to work, they can quit." (I guess that's the difference between an "employee" and a "slave." An employee can quit, while a slave can't?)

I hated to be the only one commenting on the side of the laborers, and I sometimes would pop up and say something, and everyone would stop.... then go on with their comments.

My teacher, Mr. H., came to me after such a class. "Bob, you know that poor people don't make revolutions; they don't have time. The middle class makes revolutions."

A quick conversation at a meeting over a year ago:

Older White woman: "I don't think we should be using language that would drive people away from working with us on any given issue. We need to work with everyone that agrees with us on the issue at hand, whether they're racist or not."

Younger Brown woman: "I certainly don't want to work with any racists."

Older Black woman: "You just rejected a whole lot of people you don't want to work with. Who are you going to work with?"

The worst history ever? At least the last 500 years, for sure.

Americans are the least educated in the world. We've been taught a false narrative from the beginning. The fake news didn't start with the current fake in the White House. The fake news started with "Columbus sailed the ocean blue" heroically, because everyone thought the world was flat. Columbus knew the world was round. Sailors knew the world was round. He was just a full-time bully, murderer, and pretty much worse guy than Trump could ever be...(hmmm, well, maybe not). And because of what we were taught, the rest is "history," ...well maybe.

When we talk about the future, we need to recognize that (1) our consumer-based world economy is broken, and (2) the environmental crisis that we find ourselves in offers opportunities for systemic changes needed to ensure that ALL people can share equally in the resources available. We also need to heed the words of Naomi Klein, who said to a 2014 audience at the King County Labor Council: "People who have been on the front line of our toxic economy should be the first in line for any benefits of the New Economy. ... The first beneficiaries should be the indigenous."

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

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



Bob Shimabukuro

## Sharing Power

So can we just stop talking about diversity? Diversity is just a sideshow to not doing anything. We need to insure that the non-majority White population accepts that power must be shared and the 500-year fake narrative/history of White supremacy be abolished.

Slogans like "Make America Great Again," "Nothing's Wrong With America," and "We Need to Rebuild a Strong Middle Class" are insulting to those who have faced exclusion, incarceration, torture, and genocide.

In Bob's perfect world, we would build and strengthen the long-ignored class which has been doing the heavy lifting for millennia. If you've followed "Fo' Real" columns, you know who I'm referring to: Women of Color.

Take a Deep, Deep Breath, then Keep Moving!

Bob Shimabukuro is a member of PSARA's Executive Board and Associate Editor of the *Retiree Advocate*.

# A Taxing Article

By Michael Righi

All over the news lately – soda taxes, property taxes, a carbon tax, income tax, and capital gains tax proposals. We are not in a position to start from scratch to design a decent tax system. We have to deal with the mess that history and anti-tax provocateurs have left for us. But we need some principles and ideas we can agree upon. So let's get into it.

A key issue is who pays a tax. By "pays," I mean actually pays. The retailer may send on sales tax money to the government, but the consumer actually pays, since the amount of the tax is included in the price of whatever is taxed. The same applies to property taxes – these are paid by homeowners, yes, but in the case of rental properties some of the tax is passed on to renters. All this is called the "incidence" of the tax, according to economists -- who actually bears the cost.

Back to the question, Who pays: poor, middle class, or rich? This determines whether a tax is progressive or not. If a high-income family pays a higher percentage of their income in taxes, that tax is progressive. (Be careful here. If a family with \$100,000 pays \$5,000 in taxes while a family with \$20,000 pays \$2,000, that is not "progressive," it is regressive, because the poorer folks are paying 10% while the richer are paying only 5%.)

Throughout U.S. history progressive taxes have been judged to be fairer (except perhaps by many of the wealthy themselves). A dollar means a whole lot more to a poor person than to someone who is rich.

As most of us know, income inequality has been worsening over the past few decades. Nearly all of income increases over the last decade have gone to the already rich. Who really benefits from much of the spending our taxes finance – the courts, the police, the infrastructure, government research, military spending, corporate welfare programs? Some of it trickles down to us, but the wealthy are majority beneficiaries.

What about the tax that funds Social Security? Is this a progressive tax? It's

the same percentage for everyone, right? Except that above \$127,200, the tax ends; higher incomes are taxed at 0%. Which is why PSARA advocates for "scrapping the cap"! But recognize that even if the income cap was indeed scrapped, the tax would still be regressive because only wages are taxed. Dividends and capital gains, which of course accrue mainly to the rich, are not taxed at all.

And here in Washington? We rely on sales taxes, which are mightily regressive. Yes, everyone pays the same rate, but stuff that is taxed makes up a much larger proportion of what poor and working people spend their money on. Overall, including property and B&O taxes, poor families pay 16.8% of their income in taxes, while the richest 1% pay 2.4%. We have the most regressive tax system in the country.

## Taxes for Sinners

Taxes are often justified as "sin" taxes – alcohol and tobacco taxes, for example. The point is to discourage use. These are being updated recently by adding taxes on sugary soda and on junk food. You can see that these will be regressive – how much Coke would Bill Gates have to drink as a percentage of his income? But as Got Green (a food justice organization in South Seattle) argues, if soda tax funds are used to enhance access to healthy food for South End residents, then OK.

What we also need to discourage, of course, is climate emissions through the burning of fossil fuels. So a carbon tax would help with that, but not by itself, since it, too, is a regressive tax. So, absolutely, we would advocate for a carbon tax as long as the revenue is used to build union green-jobs programs and provide funds for communities that have long been bearing the brunt of industrial pollution.

## Public Goods

Besides being progressive and focused, taxes need to raise enough revenue to fund a humane society. We need a fire



Michael Righi

department and a sewage system and ports and roads. But we also need, in the 21st Century, health care for everyone, fast and reliable public transit systems, a new energy system, and -- excuse me if this sounds utopian -- jobs for everyone, provided by governments if necessary. There surely is enough work that needs doing.

Here in Washington we have a school system judged to be failing. Our richest 1%, or 10%, can opt out of public systems, distance themselves from the rest of us. But we all need good schools -- for us, our kids, and grandkids -- and they need to be as well-funded as Lakeside and Bush and Country Day. Inequality is not only measured by income.

It turns out that states like Washington with a regressive tax system raise significantly less revenue to fund social needs. You have to tax where the money is. But we don't. In Seattle, King County, and Washington State there has been one proposal after another to squeeze more from low and middle-income working families. The needs – homelessness, the arts, transit, education – are real. But the tax system needs a serious re-do to make it progressive and fair.

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

## To Stop Climate Change, Stop the Flow of Dollars

By Alec Cannon

Given President Donald Trump's intentions to dismantle all efforts to tackle climate change, it is vital that we respond by doubling down on policies that protect our shared climate. One clear way to do this is to divest our pension funds from fossil fuels. This is the purpose of a campaign I'm working on with City of Seattle employees and retirees.

It would not be a particularly revolutionary move for the City of Seattle to divest its \$2.5 billion pension fund from fossil fuels: The Mayor of Seattle, the City Council, and at least 400 employees and retirees have already joined the call for divestment of the pension fund. Over the last six years more than \$5.44 trillion worth of investment capital has committed to some form of divestment from fossil fuels. Institutions committed to divestment include the World Council of Churches, the state of California and Washington, D.C., pension funds, and the entire nation of Ireland.

The strategic arguments for divestment were made clear by former UN Climate Chief Christiana Figueres when

she wrote that: "The investments that we are going to make globally over the next five years ... will determine the quality of life for future generations, simple as that." The moral arguments are equally clear. Fossil fuel corporations' business models are incompatible with curtailing catastrophic climate change, and therefore it is immoral to profit from such corporations.

But what's more, divesting is not only the right thing to do—morally and strategically—it is the financially prudent thing to do. A recent financial report authored by Gang Chen, former North American Director of derivative trading at UBS, shows that the Seattle pension fund has lost \$65 million by remaining invested in fossil fuels over the last 10 years. These losses are concurrent with wider market trends: earlier this year Exxon-Mobil was forced to write off over \$2 billion worth of assets, while study after study after study has now shown that fossil fuel-free portfolios often outperform those that include fossil fuels.

This trend is only set to continue. Dr. Bruce Flory, an economist and City of Seattle pension fund member, recently described what will happen to the valuation of fossil fuel companies as the world takes action on climate: "The stock value of fossil fuel companies reflects expectations of their future profits, which are based on their known reserves and the assumption that those reserves will be fully exploited. But the survival of human society depends on most of those reserves being left in the ground. When this fact becomes clear to the market, the value of fossil fuel stocks will crash. Smart investors will have already divested."

Dr. Flory is one of hundreds of city employees and retirees who have signed a petition calling on the city to divest from fossil fuels. If you are a City of Seattle retiree, you can learn more and join Dr. Flory in calling for divestment by signing the petition at: [www.northwestdivest.org](http://www.northwestdivest.org)

*Alec Cannon is a PSARA member and a member of 350.org*

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## Concert to Lift Spirits and Benefit PSARA

By Amy Davis



Lou Truskoff  
(Photo: Garet Munger)

On Sunday, August 13, 6:30–8:30 p.m., PSARA will host a fund-raising concert featuring PSARA member Lou Truskoff.

Lou is a founding member of the Seattle Labor Chorus. He has been singing and learning songs all his life and says it is his greatest joy. His repertoire includes many songs of labor and social and economic justice. There will be ample opportunity to sing along. If you enjoyed Lou's singing at last month's membership meeting, this is the event for you.

The concert will be held in a lovely room at the Bay Vista Tower, 2821- 2nd Ave., Seattle (the building behind the Seattle Labor Temple). Light snacks and cold drinks will be provided.

Please RSVP by email to [organizer@psara.org](mailto:organizer@psara.org) (preferred), or call the PSARA office, (206) 448-9646, to reserve a spot. If registering by phone, please leave a phone number where you can be reached and a good time to call. We will send you a confirmation along with free parking and building access information. The building is easily accessible by bus. You can make a donation at the door; checks should be made payable to PSARA.

We hope you can join Lou and other PSARA members for an evening of spirited and uplifting music and singing. We look forward to seeing you there!

Thanks to Tony Lee and Angie Bartels for generously providing the beautiful family room at the Bay Vista Tower condominiums.

## JEFF SESSIONS TO PACIFIC ISLANDERS. YOUR LIVES ARE WORTHLESS

By Bill Bigelow, reprinted from *Common Dreams*

Speaking on a conservative talk radio show recently, Attorney General Jeff Sessions denounced a decision issued by Derrick K. Watson, a federal judge in Hawaii, blocking Trump's Muslim travel ban: "I really am amazed that a judge sitting on an island in the Pacific can issue an order that stops the President of the United States from what appears to be clearly his statutory and constitutional power."

In one sentence, Sessions turned "island" and "Pacific" into swear words, and expelled Hawaii from the United States. Presumably, for Sessions, had the judge been sitting someplace in the real world, someplace that matters, like St. Louis or Dallas, that might have been home to a more credible challenge to Trump's travel ban. But an island in the Pacific? Con-temptuous.

Sessions' sneering remark must feel familiar to so many Pacific Islanders whose lands and lives have been the playthings of imperial powers—especially the United States. It reveals an attitude which, in the shadow of the climate crisis, has genocidal implications.

I spent time recently with Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, a remarkable spoken word artist from the Marshall Islands, located in the Pacific Ocean about halfway between Hawaii and Australia. The Portland Public Schools Climate Justice Committee had hired Kathy to perform her poetry and lead writing workshops with students and staff in Portland, Oregon, middle schools and high schools.

Jetñil-Kijiner began most of her presentations with a poem that described an incident when she was a 15-year-old high school student, then living in Hawaii. She had entered a history project competition, designing a poster-board presentation on nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands. From 1946 to 1958 the United States tested 67 nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands. As *Washington Post* writer Dan Zak noted in his article, "A Ground Zero Forgotten," if these weapons' "combined explosive power was parceled evenly over that 12-year period, it would equal 1.6 Hiroshima-size explosions per day."

In her poem "History Project," Jetñil-Kijiner recalls herself as a curious high



"Pacific Climate Warriors," representatives from a dozen Pacific Island nations, staged a full-day blockade of the Newcastle Coal Port in Australia in 2014. (Photo: Reuters)

schooler, and describes what she learned about how these explosions poisoned people in the Marshall Islands:

I read first-hand accounts of what we call  
jelly babies  
tiny beings with no bones  
skin—red tomatoes  
the miscarriages gone unspoken  
the broken translations

I never told my husband  
I thought it was my fault  
I thought

there must be something  
wrong  
inside me

Kathy lost the high school History Project competition. When she performed her piece for Portland students, she acknowledged the poem's sad and sudden end: "And I lost." She noted that this conclusion underscores the enormity of loss in the Marshalls—no one will ever be able to live on radioactive Bikini Atoll; the carcinogenic legacy in the Marshalls is one of the worst in the world—and in her workshops, Jetñil-Kijiner asked students to reflect on the connection between nuclear testing and climate change. Students were astute: They both concern the loss of land, of culture, of voices. As Jetñil-Kijiner summed up, "We know about losing islands. We come to the climate change issue with this background."

Sessions' flip dismissal of islands in the Pacific holds up a mirror to the Trump ad-

ministration's dismissal of climate change, which promises a future of rising oceans, devastating superstorms, and drought, with life-changing consequences for people in the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Niue, the Ryukyu Islands, and too many others to name. In fact, for many, this is not the future, this is the present. It's why people in frontline communities demand a global commitment to policies that keep the climate from warming more than 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial times. Anything less ambitious is a cultural death warrant. Instead, Trump celebrates coal-burning, nominates a climate denial champion to head the Environmental Protection Agency, and threatens to pull out of the Paris Climate Accord.

For Portland students, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner performed her poem, "Tell Them," about what she wants the world to know about the Marshall Islands, especially the threat of climate change:

tell them  
we only have one road ...  
tell them about the water  
how we have seen it rising  
flooding across our cemeteries  
gushing over the sea walls  
and crashing against our homes  
tell them what it's like

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# Trump's Unacceptable Budget

An Interview with Brick Kawabata of Seattle Community Law Center

By Mike Andrew

**I**f Donald Trump's Fiscal Year 2018 Budget is passed, the lives of millions of Social Security recipients would be drastically altered," Brick Kawabata warns. "We must work to protect seniors, children, and people with disabilities from the harsh and unforgiving policy proposals contained in this budget."

Kawabata is a policy intern at the Seattle Community Law Center (SCLC), an organization that provides legal advocacy for low-income and homeless people with disabilities. According to Kawabata, his research shows that the proposed budget would create even greater barriers for the populations SCLC serves.

"It is an unacceptable first draft," Kawabata continued, "and we recommend that Congress start from scratch. Social Security is in danger, and there is work to be done."

Among other problems, "the proposed budget attempts to cleave SSI and SSDI from other SSA programs, reduce funding, and restrict access to low-income Americans," Kawabata explains.

SSI (Supplemental Security Income) is a federal program that provides money to seniors, blind, or disabled people to pay for basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter. SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) provides money to permanently disabled workers.

In the name of "motivating individuals to return to the workforce" – read "forcing old, blind, and disabled people to take whatever low-paying jobs they can get" – the Trump budget would gut these necessary programs.

"The Budget proposes several new programs, initiatives, and administrative changes that would decrease spending by \$756 million in 2018, and \$72.5 billion from 2018 through 2027 by cutting Social Security," Kawabata says.

According to Kawabata's research, the Trump budget would "reform" Social Security by:

- Calling upon Congress to establish a panel to make it harder to qualify or remain eligible for Social Security for people with disabilities, claiming a reduction in spending on SSI and SSDI by five percent.

- Testing "time-limited benefits" for Social Security beneficiaries.
- Mandating that additional steps must be taken through vocational rehabilitation by people who are applying for benefits due to lower-back pain and arthritis before their application for Social Security disability is approved.

In addition, the Budget proposes:

- Reducing the retroactive benefits payable to SSDI recipients from 12 to 6 months of past-due benefits.

- Reducing the amount of SSI available for families with multiple SSI recipients. The first SSI beneficiary in a household would receive the maximum federal benefit rate, but each successive recipient in the household would receive a successively smaller benefit.

- Making Social Security unavailable to people who are receiving unemployment benefits.

But wait. There's more, according to Kawabata.

"Despite the fact that 95 percent of federal government payments are properly made, the Budget puts a large focus on using resources to reduce improper Social Security payments," he says. "The proposed Budget claims that it would save approximately \$139 billion from 2018 through 2027."

To collect as much of this fictitious "overpayment" as possible, the Social Security Administration would implement the following policies:



- Expanding collection tools and holding third-parties liable for overpayments.
- Using Customs and Border Protection Entry/Exit Data to target improper payments.

- Increasing the minimum monthly overpayment collection amount.
- Excluding SSA debts from discharge in bankruptcy proceedings.
- Allowing the SSA to use private commercial databases for verification of real property ownership data.

All of these so-called "reforms" would only "create new barriers for Social Security beneficiaries," Kawabata says.

What can PSARA members do to protect our right to access the Social Security system we paid into when we worked?

"You can help by contacting your congressional representatives and asking them to strike these cuts to Social Security from the Budget and work to strengthen Social Security," Kawabata replied.

PSARA has an ally in SCLC, Kawabata added.

"The Seattle Community Law Center represents people with disabilities who need help navigating problems with Social Security benefits in King County," he says. "We stand with PSARA in fighting for protecting and strengthening Social Security programs for all people through Social Security Works Washington."

## "Your Lives Are Worthless"

Continued from Page 7

to see the entire ocean level with the land  
tell them  
we are afraid ...  
but most importantly tell them  
we don't want to leave  
we've never wanted to leave  
and that we  
are nothing without our islands.

As Kathy told students, "Every reef has a story, a chant, a song." We are nothing without our islands.

The writer Wendell Berry once wrote that social elites "cannot take any place seriously because they must be ready at any moment, by the terms of power and wealth in the modern world, to destroy any place." In an unguarded moment on a conservative talk radio show, Jeff Sessions offered a perfect illustration of this insight.

Pacific Islands? No one who matters lives there. People there are invisible—at least to Sessions and his ilk.

That's the bad news. The good news is that Pacific Island poet-prophets like Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner are helping us wake up to the climate emergency. In "Dear Matafele Peinam," the poem Kathy addressed to her daughter, and performed at the UN Secretary General's Climate Summit in 2014—and to almost 1,000 students in 18 sessions last week in Portland—she blasts a warning about the catastrophe-in-the-making, but also trumpets the growing climate movement. "There are those who see us," she says:

we are  
canoes blocking coal ships  
we are  
the radiance of solar villages  
we are  
the rich clean soil of the farmer's past  
we are  
petitions blooming from teenage fingertips ...  
and there are thousands out on the street  
marching with signs  
hand in hand  
chanting for change now

*Bill Bigelow is the curriculum editor of Rethinking Schools, the co-director of the Zinn Education Project, and a PSARA member.*

By Tom Lux

While we hear daily how the administration in Washington, D.C., is trying to eliminate health care for millions of citizens, privatize Social Security, destroy Medicare and Medicaid, and escalate wars and start others, we do not hear about many of the other disastrous things they are planning and doing behind the scenes. Here is one.

Under this administration, enthusiasm appears to be growing for the controversial technology of solar geoengineering, which aims to spray sulphate particles into the atmosphere to reflect the sun's radiation back to space and decrease the temperature of Earth, according to Martin Lukacs in *The Guardian*. This from an administration that denies climate change! Those who don't believe in human-induced climate change may still support geoengineering as a method to deal with a warming planet without stopping the burning of fossil fuels.

A White House report on climate change research submitted in Congress in January called, for the first time ever, for research into geoengineering, states Lukacs.

David Schnare from the administration's EPA transition team has called for a multi-phase plan to fund research and conduct testing within 18 months, deploy massive stratospheric spraying in a few years, and then continue spraying for a century. Geoengineers argue that such methods would be an inexpensive way to reduce global warming, but scientists warn it could have catastrophic consequences for the Earth's weather systems.

Newt Gingrich has been a longtime supporter of geoengineering, and U.S. Secretary of State and former CEO of ExxonMobil, Rex Tillerson, has also supported geoengineering, describing climate change as an "engineering problem."

In addition, the research and possible experiment by Harvard engineers David Keith and Frank Keutsch may fly in the face of a moratorium on geo-



Tom Lux

engineering adopted in 2010 by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and reaffirmed in December. The United States is one of the few countries to fail to ratify the convention.

"Worryingly, geoengineering may emerge as this administration's preferred approach to global warming," according to Silvia Riberio, with technology watchdog ETC Group. "In their view, building a big beautiful wall of sulphate in the sky could be a perfect excuse to allow uncontrolled fossil fuel extraction. We need to be focused on radical emissions cuts, not dangerous and unjust technofixes."

Naomi Klein in her book *This Changes Everything* quotes Martin Bunzl, a Rutgers philosopher and climate change expert who feels there may be insurmountable ethical problems for geoengineering. In medicine, he writes, "You can test a vaccine on one person, putting that person at risk, without putting everyone else at risk." But with geoengineering, "You can't build a scale model of the atmosphere or tent off part of the atmosphere. As such, you are stuck going directly from a model to full-scale planetary-wide implementation." In short, Klein states, "you could not conduct meaningful tests of these technologies without enlisting billions of people as guinea pigs – for years. Which is why science historian James Fleming calls geoengineering schemes 'untested and untestable, and dangerous beyond belief.'"

*Tom Lux is PSARA's Treasurer and Co-chair of the PSARA Environmental Committee.*

All of us were immediately struck and amazed by the large number of very old and well-maintained American cars -- most from the 1950s. The people who own these vehicles are clearly very skilled and resourceful, as most of these vehicles were designed to deteriorate over time. The owners of the cars are small business people who earn their living by charging people, primarily tourists, to get around this large city. There is also public transportation, primarily buses, which the residents of Habana use, along with private cars that serve as cabs.

On our bus tour, we saw beautiful architecture that was unique and diverse. The deterioration of many of the buildings was quite visible. It was explained to us that the vast majority of government revenue (which is very limited) goes to healthcare, education, and providing housing and food. The embargo has taken a significant toll.

### Unite for Tax Justice

Continued from Page 1

language of the Washington State Constitution. The legal challenge that will follow passage of the Seattle tax ordinance will provide an opportunity for the WA State Supreme Court to finally overturn what was a very bad decision.

The ordinance will be discussed in the City Council's Affordable Housing, Neighborhoods & Finance Committee on Wednesday, July 5, at 9:00 a.m. The coalition is urging councilmembers to pass the legislation out of committee on the 5th so that it can move to full council for a final vote on Monday, July 10 at 2:00 p.m. Please join us on July 5 to show our councilmembers that their constituents expect them to lead the way to tax justice!

*Katie Wilson is a member of PSARA's Executive Board and General Secretary of the Transit Riders Union.*

## we want to hear from you Tell us about your health care needs

**A**re you on Medicare, but you need dental, hearing, or vision, services that aren't covered? Do you depend on Medicaid for long-term care? How about your parents, siblings, or other relatives?

PSARA wants to hear your stories.

As you know, PSARA advocates for expanded Medicare and Medicaid coverage so all generations can access all the medical care we need.

PSARA is also part of the Health Care is a Human Right (HCHR) coalition. HCHR is leading the fight in Washington State to protect the medical coverage we have -- but even more, to go beyond that and push for affordable and comprehensive coverage for all people.

HCHR wants to collect stories from real people with real medical needs in every Congressional District in this state, and PSARA is helping in that effort.

To tell us your story, contact PSARA organizer Mike Andrew at [organizer@psara.org](mailto:organizer@psara.org), or call the PSARA office, 206-448-9646. We'll follow up with you to get your story and see that it goes to your Congressperson.

As always, we depend on our members to move the work forward. Thank you.

### With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility



PSARA members joined many community groups outside Amazon's shareholder meeting on May 23. Our message was that Amazon has accumulated great economic power and must meet its responsibilities to working people and the broader community.

(Photo: Garet Munger)

### 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, July 5, Southwest Library, 9010 35th Ave SW, Seattle, 98126 (35th & Henderson). Topic: *Washington State Politics: East and West, Issues and Geography*. Brown bag lunch.

**PSARA Environmental Committee:** 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., Thursday, July 6, WA State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All welcome.

**PSARA Government Relations Committee:** 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Thursday, July 6, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First Ave. All welcome.

**PSARA Fundraising Committee:** 10 a.m., Thursday, July 13, PSARA office, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 262, 2800 First Ave. All welcome.

**Green Lake Discussion Group:** Noon - 1:30 p.m., Thursday, July 13, The Bridge at Village Cove, 6850 Woodlawn Ave NE, Suite B, Seattle. Please note the change in venue. Brown bag lunch. Topic: *A film about end-of-life choices with discussion facilitated by Dori Gillam*. For further information, contact Susan at [sjlevy.01@gmail.com](mailto:sjlevy.01@gmail.com)

**PSARA Diversity Committee:** 10:30 - 11:30 a.m., Thursday, July 20, WA State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All welcome.

**Nancy Altman, Washington, D.C.-based President of Social Security Works, Speaks:** Noon – 1 p.m., Thursday, July 20, Seattle office WA State Labor Council, 321 16 Avenue S., Seattle. All are welcome. See article on Page 1.

**PSARA Executive Board Meeting:** 1 p.m. - 3 p.m., Thursday, July 20, Seattle office WA State Labor Council, 321 16 Avenue S., Seattle. All are welcome.

**Concert to Lift Spirits and Raise Funds for PSARA Featuring Lou Truskoff:** 6:30-8:30 p.m., Sunday, August 13, Bay Vista Tower, 2821- 2nd Ave., Seattle. Free parking available. RSVP to reserve a spot to [organizer@psara.org](mailto:organizer@psara.org) or call the PSARA office 206-448-9646. See article Page 6.

