

Trump Nominees and Republican Congress Threaten Social Security

By Steve Kofahl

Our 45th President is best judged by his deeds, not by his words. There is no better example than what he said to assure us that he would not cut Social Security, contrasted with what he has already done since his inauguration to set up a broad attack. In recent decades in particular, the Republican Party has sought deep benefit cuts and a weakened program, and now they may have their opportunity. We have created a \$2.8 trillion reserve to pay for future benefits and services through taxes we paid on our earnings. We must resist any cuts, insist on “scraping the cap”, and press for expansion of this magnificent family insurance program.

The Social Security Act provides for a six-member Social Security Board of Trustees to hold the Trust Funds, to review and recommend changes in policies followed in managing them, and to report to Congress on Trust Fund status (annually, and immediately if the Funds are too small).

The Secretary of the Treasury is Managing Trustee and Chairman. The Social Security Commissioner, and the Health & Human Services and Labor Secretaries are the other automatic Trustees, by virtue of office. There are no nominees yet for Commissioner or Public Trustee, but Steve Mnuchin and Tom Price have been confirmed, and Alex Acosta may be soon, to fill the other automatic spots. Two Public Trustees, nominated by Trump and subject to Senate confirma-

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Moving Forward

By Susan Levy

PSARA is committed to working for a secure retirement for current and future retirees. We want to focus the discussion on strengthening and improving Social Security and Medicare. No cuts are needed or acceptable. Improvements are possible and worth fighting for. Following the PSARA-sponsored successful forum in Port Townsend, we have two more PSARA forums scheduled in March:

1. Central Area Senior Center. Wednesday, March 8, 2017, from 11:45-1:00. Attendees will get a \$4.00 lunch, an inspiring talk by our President on how to Protect, Strengthen, and Expand Social Security and Medicare for All Generations and an opportunity to meet and talk with many of our co-sponsors. A special treat will be a welcome from Dian Ferguson, Executive Director of the Senior Center and County Councilmember Larry Gossett. See details and how to RSVP in the Meetings and Events section on Page 12.

2. Bryn Mawr United Methodist Church. Saturday, March 25, from 11:45-1:00. PSARA is excited to present this forum in cooperation with the Bryn Mawr UMC. This is our first joint presentation with the faith community. You'll get a delicious \$3.00 lunch, our President, Robby Stern, talking about Social Security and Medicare, and an opportunity to meet and talk with many of our co-sponsors.

Details and how to RSVP are in the Meetings and Events Section, Page 12.

But this is not all. We have invitations from other groups to present in March, including the 34th Legislative District and the Pierce County Labor Council.

In addition, we are talking to more senior centers, unions, and community and political organizations about future programs. Our goal is to make sure as many people as possible know the importance of these social insurance programs and have a chance to join us in the fight to preserve and expand them.

Do you know of an organization (or a group of organizations) that might like to hear our presentation? If so, talk to them, and if they are interested, contact outreachvp@psara.org, Mike Andrew, PSARA organizer, organizer@psara.org, or call the PSARA office, (206) 448-9646.

Susan Levy is Co- Outreach Vice President for PSARA.

Editor's Note: Read a report on the Pt. Townsend forum on Page 6.



The lively group at PSARA's Pt. Townsend forum. (Photo: Garet Munger)

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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Forum on Jobs and Clean Energy



The February 4 forum on Jobs and Clean Energy, sponsored by PSARA, the BlueGreen Alliance, and the Martin Luther King County Labor Council's Climate Caucus. Story on Page 8. (Photo: Garet Munger)

Divesting from Wells Fargo: Bobby's Statement Before the Seattle City Council

I am the Vice President of Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action, a 1,300-member-strong organization that works to unite generations for a secure future.

I am urging the city to remove funds from Wells Fargo Bank and invest in socially responsible institutions.

Banks claim that they take our money and invest in the future. But banks, left to their own devices, will put funds where they make immediate profit, and this often does harm. This is the case with Wells Fargo. They are chasing fossil fuel profits while the climate heats, people die, and our grandchildren's future goes up in fumes, and they threaten precious water supplies.

Cities are social entities and should pay attention where they place funds. We have a responsibility to invest funds where they will promote healthy communities.

The current federal administration is preparing to drop regulations on banks, making no requirements that they be responsible. Seattle must lead the way in a different direction.

Thank you.



Bobby Righi in action. (Photo: Garet Munger)

March

By Robby Stern

The significance of this March for Dina and me is in stark juxtaposition to the events in our community, country, and world. I would guess that many of you are having parallel experiences, likely different in detail.

In March we are happily anticipating the birth of our first grandchild, I turn 73, and Dina and I celebrate our 37th wedding anniversary. It is a time we think about the future and what it will hold for our soon-to-be-born grandson, our children, ourselves, the people we know and care about, our country, and all of humanity and life on this planet.

One cannot help but be anxious. Here are just a few events among many that raise deep concerns: the occupation of the presidency by the Trump Administration and the domination of an increasingly right-wing Republican Party in the Congress and soon the Supreme Court; the brazen racism, sexism, and authoritarianism of silencing Sen. Elizabeth Warren in the debate over a racist being appointed as U.S. Attorney General; and the inhumane attacks on immigrants and refugees. The granting of an easement to build the Dakota Access Pipeline shows a complete disregard for the legitimate concerns of the Standing Rock Sioux Nation and the future of life on the planet. The Administration is asserting the dominant power of the President and vilifies the judges who find the administration's actions illegal. And we have a known neo-fascist, Steve Bannon, standing next to the President and serving as one of his top advisors.

A neighbor he told me he is part of a group of people of faith who are re-igniting the plan to turn their religious institutions into sanctuaries for immigrants. He said they are expecting that Washington will be a particular target for ICE raids because Washington is at the center of resistance to Trump's anti-immigrant campaign.



Robby and Dina (Photo: Garet Munger)

Simultaneously, on all levels, resistance is building, both organized and spontaneous. A PSARA member who paid a scheduled visit to Rep. Reichard's office listened to his staff talking about the unprecedented number of phone calls their office had been getting from constituents critical of what the President and the Congress were threatening to do. Town Hall meetings held by Republican representatives are being attended by hundreds of people very angry at the plans to cut health care and take other steps that will make their constituents' lives more difficult.

Senator Bernie Sanders and Oregon Representative Peter DeFazio have introduced the Social Security Expansion Act of 2017, S. 427 and H.R. 1114, which would combine a partial scrapping of the cap with benefit improvements, and a 6.2 percent tax on dividends and interest above \$250,000. We are asking our Congressional delegation to become co-sponsors and will list the Washington co-sponsors in the April *Advocate*. Already, Rep. Pramila Jayapal signed as one of 23 original co-sponsors.

PSARA just became a member of a new coalition, the Immigrant Solidarity Network, which is developing a multi tiered approach to defending our immigrant community. There will be more written about our efforts to act in solidarity with the work of this coalition in up-coming issues of the newsletter.

We are receiving multiple invitations to speak at community, labor, political, and religious forums about the fight to preserve and expand Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. The struggle to preserve and expand these critical programs is growing in Washington and nationally. Additionally, PSARA membership is growing as activists find organizations from which to wage resistance to the authoritarian corporate rulers who have seized control of our federal government.

At the state level, the largest number of PSARA members ever attended Senior Lobby Day to advocate for a progressive agenda and let their elected leaders know where we stand.

There is joy and a sense of fulfillment that comes from these fights and our resistance. Yes, some people with really bad ideas and beliefs have seized the reins of power in our federal government. They will do very bad things that will make the lives of many, many decent people more difficult and maybe worse than difficult. These authoritarian right-wingers and neo-fascists are and will continue to cause suffering as they serve the ideological and financial interests of the few at the expense of the many.

But we will resist and find joy in that resistance. We are determined to build a better world for that grandchild who is coming and for all the grandchildren here and yet to come, and for the children, and teenagers, and young adults, and older adults, and seniors. It will be anxiety-producing, but it will also be joyful as we celebrate the important stages in our individual lives and in the lives of our communities and the victories we will achieve.

Let's Call Their Big Lies, Big Lies

By Mark M. McDermott (Reprinted from *The Stand*)

We live in dangerous times and it is critical to understand the political and psychological warfare mounted against us in the new age of Trumpian "Alternative Facts." This warfare is not new. In 1928, Edward Bernays, the father of modern public relations and author of the historic book *Propaganda*, wrote:

"The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society... We are governed, our minds ruled, our tastes shaped, our ideas suggested, largely by men that we have never heard of."

The Nazis understood the power of propaganda and advanced Bernays' methods. Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, promoted the "Big Lie" theory.

"If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie."

Hermann Goering, Hitler's 2nd in command, tied the Big Lie to the Great Fear of untrustworthy enemies.

"It's the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it's a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked."

Relentless propaganda serves a deeper purpose as expressed by the great modern-day Russian dissident, Garry Kasparov:

"The point of modern propaganda isn't only to misinform or push an agenda. It is to exhaust your critical thinking, to annihilate truth."

The formula of mass propaganda to dominate a people is simple, elegant and very dangerous. It has five key steps:

1. Conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the people;
2. Endless telling of the "Big Lies";
3. Relentless fearmongering and denunciation of the "Enemies of the People" who are harming the "good" people;
4. Exhaust our capacity to think critically and to annihilate the truth; and
5. Do it quickly, always attack and never back down.

Relentless propaganda and scapegoating of "enemies of the German people" served Nazi Germany and its horrific crimes. To quote the great German churchman, Martin Niemoller:

"First they came for the communists, and I said nothing as I was not a communist; then they came for the socialists and I said nothing; then the trade unionists and I said nothing; then the homosexuals and I said nothing; then the Jews and I said nothing; and one day they came for me and there was no one to speak up for me."

History is clear. The failure of a people to relentlessly fight for the truth and stand strongly with the victims of the Big Lies was disastrous for the direct victims and millions who remained too silent and failed to act.

I am not claiming we are in a pre-Nazi Germany period but I am saying that the war on the truth today poses great risks for our nation and world. Trump and his allies are trying to intimidate and silence the courts, Congress, the press and the people in their drive for asserting their domination of our nation. We must speak up, recognize the propaganda war, and fight forward to defeat Trumpism and the "Big Lie" machine.

This history is directly relevant today. Let's assess an ongoing 18-month example of Trumpian "Big Lies" and their implications. On July 6, 2015, Donald



Mark McDermott

Trump said:

"What can be simpler or more accurately stated? The Mexican Government is forcing their most unwanted people into the United States. They are, in many cases, criminals, drug dealers, rapists, etc."

A day earlier he stated the following in response to an earlier attack on Mexican immigrants:

"I can never apologize for the truth. I don't mind apologizing for things. But I can't apologize for the truth."

The seeds of thought and feelings manipulation, the Big Lie, the Big Fear, and an enemy scapegoat had been sewn and would fester throughout the election.

Three weeks after the election, his Big Lie strategy re-emerged. On November 27, 2016, Trump said:

"In addition to winning the Electoral College in a landslide, I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally."

Hillary Clinton won the national popular vote by 2.8 million. No evidence was provided but the Big Lie and faceless enemies of our democracy emerge. If true, this claim would constitute a profound crisis for our democracy.

On December 16, 2016, the *New York Times* published a long article refut-

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Beyond \$15

By Jonathan Rosenblum

Sarah Mohamoud was a seven-year-old girl when she escaped the civil war in Somalia, hidden in the bed of a truck that lumbered across the Kenyan border.

Assadollah Valibeigi struggled to make a living as a taxi driver and merchant in the politically chaotic city of Tehran.

Mohamed Kadhim and his family fled bombings in Bagdad, only to land in Damascus as war engulfed the Syrian capital.

Today, all of these people would be unwelcome in the America of Donald Trump's fantasies. But fortunately, extremist xenophobia hasn't been our nation's official policy in the last 20 years, and Mohamoud, Valibeigi, and Kadhim all made it here.

Their varied, meandering, multi-year pathways merged in the city of SeaTac. And in 2013 they united with fellow workers, community members, and faith activists in the historic \$15 minimum wage win for Sea-Tac Airport workers.

The Sea-Tac experience points the way toward the great possibilities that exist in a reimagined labor movement.

My book, *Beyond \$15: Immigrant Workers, Faith Activists, and the Revival of the Labor Movement* (Beacon Press; on sale March 14) chronicles the stories of Mohamoud, Valibeigi, Kadhim, and the other workers and activists as they organized and wrested power from Alaska Airlines, the Port of Seattle, and other corporate and political elites. (PSARA members were deeply involved in the effort, too!)

As the campaign director for the Sea-Tac Airport workers campaign, I was privileged to have worked alongside

these and many other working-class heroes – people whose creativity, wisdom, and perseverance fell outside the spotlight but helped build a model of a new kind of labor movement.

For me, Sea-Tac pointed the way toward social movement unionism: A labor movement that embraces a bold vision of a moral economy in contrast to our current capitalist system, that engages all workers – the 99 percent – and not just a section of the working class, and that cultivates the ideas, creativity, and leadership of ordinary workers.

There's no question that the last year has been one of great political upheaval. The presidential campaign and its aftermath, from Bernie Sanders's remarkable insurgency to Trump's brutal and ugly win, laid bare the deep alienation and pain felt by broad swaths of working people, here and around the country. Now with Trump occupying the White House, we face danger from many directions, just as the union movement confronts a deep existential crisis.

For labor and social activists straining to figure out a way forward in today's reality of runaway corporate profits, mounting human impoverishment, and Trump's racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia, and sexism, the Sea-Tac experience points the way toward the great possibilities that exist in a reimagined labor movement.

A big part of the work ahead for activists entails bringing the vital lessons of past struggles into our present fights. I see *Beyond \$15* as a celebration of worker power and militancy, and my modest contribution to our collective discussion of figuring out a way forward in these turbulent times.

Jonathan Rosenblum is a PSARA member, a member of UAW Local 1981, and a long-time labor and community organizer.



Book Launch Party

Beyond \$15: Immigrant Workers, Faith Activists, and the Revival of the Labor Movement, by Jonathan Rosenblum

Thursday, March 16, 2017

6 – 8 pm

Washington State Labor Council,
AFL-CIO

321 16th Avenue South,
Seattle WA 98144

Join Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant, PSARA, the Washington State Labor Council AFL-CIO, the Church Council of Greater Seattle, Faith Action Network, OneAmerica, Casa Latina, the University of Washington Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, and others in celebrating the book release of *Beyond \$15*, the inside story of how Sea-Tac Airport workers and faith and community allies led the first successful fight for \$15, renewing the national labor movement.

North Olympic Peninsula Energized

By Bruce Cowan and Susan Levy

PSARA's recent planning process reiterated our desire to develop a strong statewide base to advocate to make retirement security real for all generations. We saw the need to expand our influence beyond the Central Puget Sound area and we have.

Late in January, nearly a hundred people gathered in Port Townsend to hear PSARA educator Mark McDermott make the case for expansion of Social Security and Medicare. People at the meeting included retirees, working seniors, working people, public officials, and others. Coming just days after the inauguration and the Womxn's March, enthusiasm for Mark's message was strong, and the crowd was energized.

Local Port Townsend PSARA members organized the meeting with help from Susan Levy and Mark McDermott of the PSARA Education Committee. People enjoyed connecting with Susan, Robby Stern, and other PSARA Board Members who made the trip. At the end of the evening, PSARA had dozens of new members and almost all attendees signed up for emails about future actions and events.

And with that, PSARA kicked off its North Olympic Peninsula PSARA Committee (NOP-PSARA), led by new PSARA Board Member Diane Jones, who was elected to the Board at the February meeting.

"PSARA is just what we need around here," said Diane. "Many seniors here are just getting by and they rely on these programs. Our local economy and health care system do too. People want to know how to make a difference, and we'll help them with that."

Diane serves as the Washington State Democratic Committeewoman from the 24th Legislative District. She has also served recently as statewide WAmend coordinator and Chair of the I-735 signature gathering campaign, Acting Chair of the Washington State Democrats Labor Caucus, and Vice Chair of the Jefferson County Democrats.



New PSARA Board member Diane Jones speaking to the Pt. Townsend forum. (Photo: Garet Munger)

One local retiree at the meeting had recently moved to Port Townsend with her mother to escape the high cost of living in Seattle. "She was lucky to find an affordable place to live," said Bruce Cowan, of the NOP-PSARA committee. "Housing is scarce and expensive here, even for people with good jobs. We will be working on the housing issue."

Retirees are an important part of the economy of Jefferson and Clallam Counties. They support local employment and businesses when they spend their retirement income (including Social Security) on goods and services. Jefferson County has the highest median age of all counties in the state. Neighboring Clallam County has a high median age and the highest proportion of people over 85.

The public hospital districts in the rural region rely on Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements for support. "In King County, perhaps two-thirds of people have private insurance," said Public Hospital District Commissioner Dr. Kees Kolff. "But here in Jefferson

County, half the people are on Medicare or Medicaid, and Jefferson Health-care gets more than 75 percent of its revenue from these programs, and we're the major provider of healthcare in the county."

The North Olympic Peninsula PSARA Committee plans to submit PSARA resolutions for strengthening and expanding Social Security and Medicare to local government agencies like the hospital commissions, city councils, and Boards of County Commissioners in Jefferson and Clallam Counties. They will make sure the voices of seniors are heard in other progressive causes. The committee also plans to hold informational meetings.

Hearing the PSARA message galvanized the roomful of people. They want to stand with PSARA in our fight for a just and secure retirement for all.

Bruce Cowan is a member of PSARA and a founding member of the North Olympic Peninsula PSARA Committee. Susan Levy is one of PSARA's Outreach Vice Presidents.

Can Seattle Pave the Way for a Progressive State Tax System?

By Katie Wilson

Every year we hear it again: Washington State wins the prize for the most regressive tax system in the nation. Washington is one of only seven states that have no taxes based on income. As a result, we depend heavily on sales, property, and excise taxes that hit working and poor people the hardest. People in the bottom 20% income bracket have to work for two full months to pay off their state and local taxes. For people in the top 1%, it's less than a week.

Because Washington State is basically a tax haven for the rich, our state is starved for revenue. We're already failing to fund basic services like education and health, let alone being prepared to cope with new challenges. This puts us in a bad place, given the slash-and-burn mentality of our new federal government.

Federal programs upon which thousands of Seattle residents depend are under attack, or are likely to be soon: the Affordable Care Act, Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and food stamps. And as we all know, Trump has threatened to cut federal funding to sanctuary cities like Seattle. That could mean a loss of \$85 million per year; Mayor Murray is already instructing city departments to prepare for that eventuality.

So what can we do about it?

A coalition of community, labor, environmental, and social justice organizations, including PSARA, is pushing for a progressive tax measure based on income in the city of Seattle this year. The funding mechanism most strongly under consideration is a 2.5% tax on unearned income (capital gains, interest, dividends), applying only to households with total income over \$250K. In Seattle it should generate around \$100M per year.

If we succeed in passing this measure, we expect it to be legally challenged, probably by the far-right Freedom Foundation. The aim is for the case to work its way up to the Wash-

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ACA Repeal? Republicans Running Scared

By Mike Andrew

Be ready to duck out the back door when your constituents challenge you about health care, Congressman Dave Reichert advised his Republican colleagues.

As a former sheriff, Reichert was called in by GOP leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers to coach the rest of the Republican caucus on dealing with voters protesting their plans to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA or Obamacare).

Many Republican members of Congress have given up meeting constituents altogether. Others are holding so-called "electronic town halls" that allow them to sit safely in their offices and communicate with their constituents only on *Skype*.

Out of Washington's four Republican Congress members, three have met with constituents about the ACA – Reichert himself (presumably he left the back door ajar just in case), Jaime Herrera Beutler, and Dan Newhouse.

PSARA members who participated in those meetings were armed with very effective fact sheets from the Health Care is a Human Right coalition (HCHR), of which PSARA is a member. The fact sheets show how many constituents are insured under the ACA, how many are on Medicare, and how much money the programs brings into each Congressional district. You can download the fact sheets from the HCHR website: healthcareisarightwa.com/

The widespread protests against repeal plus the complexities of providing health care for the 20 million people who got coverage under the ACA are derailing the GOP's plans for speedy action to get rid of the law. In fact, according to a recent headline in *Forbes* magazine, "Conservatives see Obamacare Repeal Slipping Away."

Although Speaker Paul Ryan outlined his health care "plan" on February 16, all he really offered was talking points, not a firm plan, still less a bill ready to be acted on. Nevertheless, some points are clear, and the outlook isn't pretty.

Ryan wants to upend Medicaid, a program that provides health care to more than 70 million Americans – not just the poor, but also middle-class people who have run out of money and need nursing home care. Under Ryan's plan, Medicaid would no longer be a federal program, but would be block-granted to the states, putting it on a fixed budget.

Medicare would be privatized, with recipients getting vouchers to buy insurance from private insurance companies.

ACA subsidies, which expand as incomes decline to give poorer people more help, would be replaced by fixed tax credits to help people purchase private insurance. The tax credits would increase with a person's age, but would not vary with a person's income.

New tax incentives would be created for working people to set up medical savings accounts, but that assumes that workers make enough to put some money away at the end of every pay period.

The Ryan plan would also allow consumers to buy insurance across state lines, an idea long promoted by Republicans, but that means that substandard plans could not be regulated by state insurance commissions.

Public resistance is key to defeating these disastrous changes in federal health-care laws. Especially if you live in one of the districts represented by Republican Congress members, download an HCHR fact sheet and call your representative today.



Climate Change, Climate Justice

By Marc Krasnowsky

February 4 was an important moment in PSARA's continued commitment to uniting the moral imperatives to honestly confront climate change and to advance the interests of working families and communities. All of our futures depend on how the switch to clean energy actually plays out.

On that Saturday, PSARA's Environmental Committee co-hosted a presentation of the new climate policy proposal from a widely inclusive alliance (to which PSARA belongs) of environmentalists, labor, communities of color, and others. This proposal is the basis of companion bills in the state House and Senate, and should legislators choose to enrich their tradition of ignoring the greatest threat to humanity's survival, will likely evolve into an initiative to voters.

At that afternoon event, the PSARA committee released its revised climate statement, "Climate Change, Climate Justice: Investing in Workers and Frontline Communities." The statement sets forth basic principles for a just transition to a clean energy economy, and commits PSARA to stances and actions that further those principles.

As such, the statement becomes a means for evaluating the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy (AJCE) policy proposal.

Briefly, the PSARA statement says:

- We must reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050 while "quickly creating millions of sustainable, living-wage jobs in a clean energy economy."
- Fossil fuels must be left in the ground, which means ending tar sands excavations and fracking for gas and oil, and opposing the transport of fossil fuels through neighborhoods and critical water sources.
- For low-income people, communities of color, and other communities disproportionately harmed both by pollution from fossil fuels and by intensifying income inequality, a just transition

includes compensation and good new jobs rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure and broadening education and health care for all.

- Workers at and communities dependent upon fossil-fuel or energy-intensive companies require assistance, as well. The affected communities should benefit from investment in clean energy and infrastructure; the jobs, meanwhile, must be living-wage jobs.
- Long- and hugely-subsidized polluters should help fund the transition to a clean energy economy, pay for worker transition and not wriggle out of pension obligations.

As presented by Stephanie Celt of the BlueGreen Alliance and Felipe Rodriguez Flores of the Latino Community Fund, the AJCE's policy certainly appears to reflect the spirit of PSARA's statement. It's important to note that this is not a cap-and-trade policy that allocates saleable permits to pollute. Rather, it prices pollution to pay for clean energy solutions and just transitions.

AJCE is offering a "performance-based" carbon tax starting at \$15 per ton of carbon dioxide (or CO2 equivalents) produced. The "performance" part relates to staying on-track to meeting the scientific reduction targets of 40 percent by 2035 and the aforementioned 80 percent by 2050. The tax is projected to rise 7 percent a year, but could be less depending on year-to-year progress toward the targets.

Air travel emissions aren't covered, and industries deemed particularly energy intensive or trade exposed, and thus likely to take their jobs and pollution out of state, would get a break and assistance. Most households won't notice any change in their utility bills, though the 15 percent tax would raise the cost of a gallon of gas by about 15 cents.

The tax is expected to bring in more than \$1 billion a year initially. The revenue will be invested in clean



Marc Krasnowsky (Photo: Garet Munger)

energy (including transit-oriented development), clean water, and healthy forests projects, and will fund equitable transitions (income, retraining, etc.) for affected workers and their communities. Creation of family-wage, local jobs will be a priority.

At least a quarter of investments will go to communities of color and other environmental justice communities particularly affected by past pollution. Low-income families will get tax rebates to defray increases in their energy costs.

The policy has gone before the legislature as HB 1646 and SB 5509. PSARA is supporting those bills and will continue to promote and perhaps improve the policy as it moves forward in various venues.

As event moderator Kristen Beifus, co-chair of PSARA's environmental committee, told the crowd, being an intergenerational organization "forces us to confront and take action on the imperative of climate change."

In addition to PSARA, the presentation was sponsored by the BlueGreen Alliance and the Martin Luther King County Labor Council's Climate Caucus.

Marc Krasnowsky is a member of PSARA's Environmental Committee.

Our Climate, Our Food, Part I

By Bobby and Michael Righi

Probably the first thing that comes to mind when we think about climate change is cars and planes spewing CO₂ into the atmosphere. Or coal-fired power plants, no doubt. But the numbers show another huge source -- industrial agriculture. The UN estimates that 30% of all global emissions result from our present food production system. The international peasants' organization, Via Campesina, thinks it may be closer to half!

What do we mean by "industrial" agriculture? Thousands of acres of land growing corn or wheat or soy or rice, with massive applications of pesticides and fertilizers, often using genetically modified seed. And then, next door, crowded feedlots, "concentrated animal feeding operations" or CAFO's, animals fed industrial grain and antibiotics, with adjoining sewage lagoons. Think of the fossil fuels needed to power all this, to produce the fertilizer and pesticides and fungicides, to run all the mechanized systems. The UN now estimates that meat production alone generates more greenhouse gas emissions than all world transport combined!

Meanwhile, contributing further to corporate agriculture's carbon footprint, forests and grasslands around the world are being burned or plowed up to grow soybeans or corn (sometimes for biofuels) or for palm oil plantations. If managed sustainably, these forests and grasslands could be crucial "carbon sinks" that absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere.

There is no question the present food system of factory farming, with its basis in corporate profit, where fewer and fewer people grow more and more commodity crops and a few corporations control our food supply, is a key driver of climate change. This is how it breaks down: 15 to 18% of total greenhouse gases come from the destruction of forests and grasslands to grow more industrial crops; agricultural machinery,

fertilizers, and CAFOs add 11 to 15 %; transportation of food -- often around the world and back adds 5 to 6% of total green house gasses;; refrigeration and running supermarkets cause 2 to 4% of the total; and then there is the 50% of food that goes to waste (!) and rots in landfills that adds another 3 to 4%.

This system produces plenty of food, but that does not mean the food is healthy. Nor does it get to everyone. There are hungry folks in the U.S. (or "hungry days" toward the end of the month), and a billion or so people worldwide who are undernourished. All of the commodity crops like corn are processed into food that lines the middle shelves of supermarkets. These aisles are the ones we should avoid because it is there you will find most of the processed foods full of added salt, corn syrup, and sugars -- foods promoting obesity and diabetes.

The industrial food system is unsustainable in other ways besides dumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and producing unhealthy food. Fertilizers drain off into rivers and oceans creating huge dead zones; soil fertility is degraded through the constant application of chemicals; superbugs and superweeds develop. Who pays all these costs? Certainly not agribusiness -- they not only do not pay, they are handsomely subsidized to keep on their destructive path by billions of dollars from their friends in Congress.

Who pays? We pay by eating processed foods and too much sugar and by subsidizing this system with our taxes. Farmworkers pay by working in clouds of cancer-causing chemicals. Frontline communities pay daily - being harmed by drought, flooding, and air pollution. Future generations will pay as soils are depleted and aquatic life is destroyed.



Bobby and Michael Righi

The polluters must be forced to pay. Industrial systems have to be replaced by sustainable systems.

Industrial food systems contribute to climate change, and climate change also impacts the world's ability to produce food. Droughts in California, Australia, throughout Africa, uncertain monsoon seasons in South Asia, changing weather patterns that move pests around from one ecosystem to another -- the news is full of dire results. All this is not solely the result of climate change, but climate plays a role, don't you think?

Is there a way out? Yes. Agroecology is the science of sustainable farming. There are small and medium farms all over the world where people experiment with producing healthy food, in a way that not only preserves the environment and makes farming more resilient in the face of climate change, but also could make a significant contribution to mitigating the carbon pollution already out there. Next month we will see what policies are needed to get us to resilient, sustainable, and healthy food systems.

Bobby Righi is Administrative Vice President for PSARA. Michael is a PSARA member and taught economics for 30 years.

Trump Nominees and Republican Congress Threaten Social Security

Continued from Page 1

tion, cannot be from the same political party. They serve four-year terms. This Board can be expected to beat the drums loudly for "reform," at least in their annual reports, spreading myths about Social Security's imminent demise and its impact on the national debt.

It gets worse. Congressman Mick Mulvaney, a founding member of the far-right House Freedom Caucus, has been nominated as Director of the Office of Management and Budget. He would help write the President's government-wide budget proposals, then take a meat axe to budgets requested to administer Federal agencies (including the Social Security Administration) before they are submitted to Congress. OMB also reviews proposed and existing government regulations. In May, 2009, this Tea Party favorite voted in the South Carolina State Senate for an amendment declaring Social Security unconstitutional. Two years later, he complained that House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan's 2011 proposal did not cut Social Security rapidly enough, and told MSNBC that Social Security is a Ponzi scheme. At his January 24 confirmation hearing, he fielded questions about his failure to pay Social Security taxes for a domestic employee, and said that he would urge Trump to raise the Social Security full retirement age above age 67.

We need to know that ALL costs of the Social Security system are paid for by our Social Security payroll tax and the revenue goes into the dedicated fund known as the Social Security Trust Fund.

Here is where it gets complicated. The Social Security system, with the important exception of the Agency administrative budget, (i.e. all the costs of operating the Social Security offices and the costs of delivering benefits), was considered "off-budget" from 1935-1968 (meaning benefits were not part of calculating the overall budget deficit or surplus because they are in a dedicated fund paid for by our payroll taxes).

Then, from 1969-1985, all costs related to Social Security, i.e. benefits and administrative costs, were considered "on-budget" after President Johnson adopted the recommendation of his Presidential Commission on Budget Concepts to present a "unified budget."

A change occurred from 1986-1990, and the costs were "on budget" only for the purpose of computing the deficit as part of the gradual implementation of the 1983 amendments to the Social Security Act raising revenue through a number of cuts to Social Security benefits (e.g. raising the retirement age, eliminating the college benefit for survivors, etc.)

Since 1990, due to Reagan's signature on a 1983 bill amending the Social Security Act, benefit payments have once again been "off budget" and protected from any across-the-board general budget cuts. Benefits paid out of the Social Security Trust Fund were not considered in calculating the deficit.

There is now grave concern that the President and his OMB Director, with the Congress, could again unify the budget, treating "discretionary" and "mandatory"

spending the same, thereby risking immediate Social Security benefit cuts to meet budget targets by across-the-board cuts.

Senate Budget Chairman Mike Enzi claims that "automatic" spending programs like Social Security threaten to bankrupt America, and in recent months has joined other Republicans in calling for a return to a "unified budget," which puts Social Security, Medicare, and other "mandatory" programs at risk.

The Social Security Administration's administrative budget can be slashed more easily, as it is and has always been "on-budget" and subject to "discretionary spending," thereby allowing sequestration and other across-the-board cuts. Deep front-line staff cuts and reduced office hours have already degraded service delivery and damaged public confidence. More cuts, or a continuing government-wide hiring freeze, would be devastating.

At the same time, a "unified budget" would be a simpler way for the enemies of Social Security to couple terrible administrative cuts with across-the-board cuts to benefits. We need to be vigilant and watch for these back-handed ways to do great damage to Social Security.

We should tell our elected representatives to oppose all benefit cuts, fix any Social Security funding issues by scrapping the cap, expand benefits, take SSA administrative spending off-budget, and keep the Trust Funds "off-budget."

Steve Kofahl is a PSARA Executive Board member and retired President of AFGE Local 3937, which represents workers in the Social Security system.

Can Seattle Pave the Way for a Progressive State Tax System?

Continued from Page 7

ington State Supreme Court, giving that court the chance to reverse two archaic 5-4 decisions from the 1930's that nixed progressive state income taxes passed during the Great Depression. These decisions classified income as property and therefore made taxes on income subject to our state constitution's restrictions on property tax, which set a ceiling of 1% and precluded progressive taxation. The hope is that today's progressive court will rule in our favor, although this process could take several years.

Seattle can be a pioneer in challenging our state's unfair tax system, tapping the excessive private income in our city to generate new progressive revenue that will help us withstand cuts and make Seattle a city where everyone can thrive – as well as opening this same possibility for other cities and statewide. Now is a time for bold action. Seattle can lead the way!

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



Katie Wilson (Photo: Garet Munger)

Let's Call Their Big Lies, Big Lies

Continued from Page 4

ing this "Big Lie." The *Times* reporters contacted all 50 states' election officials about voter fraud and reported:

"But inquiries to all 50 states (every one but Kansas responded) found no states that reported indications of widespread fraud. And while additional allegations could surface as states wind up postelection reviews, their conclusions are unlikely to change significantly."

On January 23, 2017, Trump launched a renewed "Big Lie" campaign on alleged massive voter fraud in a White House meeting with top Democratic and Republican leaders. He named undocumented immigrants as one of the great "Enemies of the People" and our democracy. They allegedly stole the election.

"As part of the conversation, Mr. Trump asserted that three to five million unauthorized immigrants voted for Mrs. Clinton."

The "Big Lie" grows as the evidence remains non-existent. The formerly faceless enemy of illegal voters has been replaced by the faces of dark-skinned undocumented immigrants.

Given the level of threat alleged by the "Big Lie," Trumpism requires new attacks. On January 26, 2017, Sean Spicer, Trump's press secretary, laid out the line of attack:

"We have to understand where the problem exists, how deep it is, and then suggest some remedies...It's a belief that he (Trump) has maintained for a while, a concern that he has about voter fraud. And that's based on information that's provided."

The National Association of Secretaries of State politely countered with the following:

"We are not aware of any evidence that supports the voter fraud claims of President Trump, but we are open to learning more about the administration's concerns."

In short, show us the evidence.

Trump was confronted by David Muir of ABC News who repeatedly demanded verifiable proof of Trump's claim of

millions of illegal voters stealing the popular vote. Trump's response:

"You know what is important. Millions of people agree with me when I say that."

In essence, belief in his unverified "Big Lie" is what is important. The truth is not important. This is the annihilation of truth coupled with attacks on our so-called enemies in an alleged defense of our country. They have no evidence yet they will persist in their attacks.

But they have an agenda intended to continue the relentless attacks on the right to vote of millions of Americans and to subvert our democracy. Vice President Pence has laid out the strategy for suppressing the right to vote by vowing:

"a full evaluation of the voting rolls in the country, the overall integrity of the voting system,...just because so many Americans share the concern that you have, that I have, the President certainly has, about people being registered in many states."

Pence's words are telling. No one has demonstrated voter fraud of any significance. But this is irrelevant. The Trump/Pence/Republican strategy will be to wage a years-long war to restrict

the right to vote for millions of Americans in a desperate attempt to deny the people fair elections. This war will focus on non-existent voter fraud with its real goal of undermining our right to vote and promoting voter suppression.

In 1980, Paul Weyrich, co-founder of the Koch brothers-funded-Heritage Foundation, captured the spirit of this new war:

"I don't want everybody to vote...our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down."

Trump's strategy of the "Big Lie" of voting fraud is clear. The big question for we, the people, is how do we expose the goals and methods of the "Big Lies" strategy and reclaim and strengthen our democracy. We must be strong, bold and direct. Their "Big Lies" must be challenged by calling them what they are, "Big Lies!"

Mark McDermott is a member of PSARA's Executive Board and serves on PSARA's Education Committee. As a labor educator he speaks in many locations across the country providing workshops on the struggle for economic and social justice as well as the PSARA workshop "Making Retirement Security Real for Everyone."

To Renew or Donate

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Meetings and Events

West Seattle Hot Topics for Seniors & Senior Wannabes: Noon–1:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 1, Southwest Library, 9010 35th Ave SW, Seattle, 98126 (35th & Henderson). Topic: *State and Local Taxes Explained & Explored*. Led by Economist and PSARA member Michael Righi. Brown bag lunch.

PSARA Environmental Committee: 10 a.m.–11:30 a.m., Thursday, March 2, WA State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All welcome.

PSARA Government Relations Committee: 1 p.m.–2:30 p.m., Thursday, March 2, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Ave, Rm. 226. All welcome.

PSARA Education Committee: 1 p.m.–3 p.m., Tuesday, March 7, PSARA office, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 First Ave., Rm. 234, Seattle. All welcome as we work to expand outreach for the PSARA workshop.

Lunch and Learn: 11:45 a.m.–1:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 8, Central Area Senior Center, 500 30th Ave. S, Seattle, 98144. Topic: *Protecting, Strengthening, and Expanding Social Security and Medicare for ALL Generations*, presented by Robby Stern. Welcome by MLK County Councilmember and PSARA member Larry Gossett. Lunch \$4 for first 100 registered. Curry chicken over brown rice, California vegetables, roll, and pineapple. RSVP outreachvp@psara.org or call 206-448-9646.

Green Lake Discussion Group: Noon–1:30 p.m., Thursday, March 9, Green Lake Branch, Seattle Public Library, 7364 E. Green Lake Dr. N, Seattle. 98115. Brown bag lunch. Topic: *Poetic Explorations* with Seattle poet Claudia Castro Luna, Poet in Residence with the Seattle Public Library. For further information contact Susan at sjlevy.01@gmail.com

PSARA Diversity Committee: 11 a.m.–12:00 p.m., Thursday, March 16, Seattle office Washington State Labor Council, 321 16th Avenue S, Seattle. All are welcome.

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

Lunch and Learn: 11:45 a.m.–1:30 p.m., Saturday, March 25, Bryn Mawr United Methodist Church, 8016 S 116th St., Seattle, 98178. Topic: *Protecting, Strengthening, and Expanding Social Security and Medicare for ALL Generations*, presented by Robby Stern. Lunch \$3 for the first 60 registered. Sub sandwich (turkey or ham), Caesar salad, chips, and cookies. RSVP to Bryn Mawr UMC at brynmawrumc@gmail.com or Susan at outreachvp@psara.org or 206-448-9646.

