

## **Nancy Altman: Expanding Social Security Is Wise Policy and Great Politics**

By Marc Krasnowsky

Advocating expanded Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid is a winning strategy for political candidates. And grassroots folks must ensure that current and prospective leaders seize an historic opportunity by embracing those issues.

So says Nancy Altman, president of Washington, D.C.-based Social Security Works. Fresh off a speech at the Washington State Labor Council Convention in Vancouver, WA, Altman stopped in Seattle on July 20 to address about 75 people at a Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action event preceding PSARA’s monthly Executive Board meeting.

In an hour of presentation and questions/answers, Altman touched on the political history of Social Security and universal health care, current attacks and misinformation campaigns, the actual facts about costs and solvency, the goals for program expansion and inclusion, and some intermediate steps to bring us closer to those goals.

The bottom line, she said, is that “Social Security works, Medicaid works, and Medicare works. If we persist, we will win.” And persistence is key, she stressed, since the other side isn’t going to halt its attacks.

### **A little history**

Conservative forces have worked to stall, repeal, and roll back fundamental social services for ages. Altman noted that universal (“single payer”) health care almost happened several times – during the Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harry Truman presidencies, for example – but couldn’t scale the political hurdles.

*Continued on Page 10*



*Nancy Altman (seated at right) listens as PSARA member Norma Kelsey gives a moving account of how Social Security and Medicaid helped her family. (Photo: Garet Munger)*

---

---

## **You Still Have Time to RSVP for the PSARA Benefit Concert on August 13**

There is still time to RSVP for our benefit concert featuring PSARA member Lou Truskoff, to be held on Sunday, August 13, 6:30–8:30 p.m. 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 the June 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). We will provide cold drinks and some delicious snacks, including home-baked goodies by PSARA member Dina Burstein, fresh fruit, cheese and crackers, and other assorted munchies.

**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 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. Seating is limited, so be sure to RSVP soon. We look forward to seeing you there!

## The Retiree **ADVOCATE**

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

### Officers of PSARA Education Fund:

President: **Robby Stern**, [president@psara.org](mailto:president@psara.org)

Vice President: **Sally Davis**

Secretary-Treasurer: **Garet Munger**

Advocate Editor: **Mike Andrew**, [organizer@psara.org](mailto:organizer@psara.org)

Associate Editor: **Bob Shimabukuro**

Photographer: **Garet Munger**

Printing: **Trade Printery**

### PSARA Directory:

President: **Robby Stern**

Administrative Vice President:

**Bobby Righi**, [adminvp@psara.org](mailto:adminvp@psara.org)

Membership Vice President: **Jessica Bonebright**, [membershipvp@psara.org](mailto:membershipvp@psara.org)

Outreach Vice Presidents:

**Vivian O. Lee & Susan Levy**,

[outreachvp@psara.org](mailto:outreachvp@psara.org)

Secretary: **Frieda K. Takamura**, [secretary@psara.org](mailto:secretary@psara.org)

Treasurer: **Tom Lux**, [treasurer@psara.org](mailto:treasurer@psara.org)

Diversity Committee Chair: **Frank Irigon**, [diversitycommittee@psara.org](mailto:diversitycommittee@psara.org)

Education Committee Co-chairs: **Steve Bauck & Bob Swanson**,

[educationcommittee@psara.org](mailto:educationcommittee@psara.org)

Environmental Committee Co-chairs:

**Kristen Beifus & Tom Lux**,

[envirocommittee@psara.org](mailto:envirocommittee@psara.org)

Government Relations Committee Co-chairs:

**Chuck Richards & Tim Burns**,

[govrelations@psara.org](mailto:govrelations@psara.org)

Our web page: [www.psara.org](http://www.psara.org)

Web Master: **Reed Wacker**, [info@psara.org](mailto:info@psara.org)

Board Members: Mauricio Ayon, Steve Bauck, Kristen Beifus, Maureen Bo, Tim Burns, Jim Grayson, Frank Irigon, Diane Jones, Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney, Steve Kofahl, Tom Lux, Mark McDermott, Mac McIntosh, Xochitl Maykovich, Bonny Oborn, Mildred Ollee, Garry Owens, Chuck Richards, Karen Richter, Bob Shimabukuro, Ronnie Shure, Sarajane Siegfriedt, Bob Swanson, Aganita Varkentine, Michael Warren, Imogene Williams, and Katie Wilson.

Visit our website for up to date information or to renew:

[www.psara.org](http://www.psara.org)

or visit PSARA on Facebook

## PSARA Does Pride 2017

Photos by Garet Munger



June 25, 2017:

The PSARA crew lines up for the Pride Parade (above).

PSARA President Robby Stern discussing an important point with Seattle City Council candidate and labor leader Teresa Mosqueda.

## Green Lake Hot Topics Welcomes Back Rebecca Albani

Green Lake Hot Topics Discussion Group has a special guest, art historian Rebecca Albani, who will be speaking and showing slides on GREAT ART by ELDERLY ARTISTS, from Michelangelo to De Kooning.

Albani has been lecturing on art history throughout the Puget Sound Region. She is the widely known and respected art historian for the Frye Museum's lecture series on art history.

This special event will take place at The Bridge at Village Cove, 6850 Woodlawn Ave. NE, Suite B, in Seattle on Thursday, August 10, from noon to 1:30 p.m.

Last year she joined us for a great session on women in art. We are delighted that she is coming back this year with a further exploration of art and aging. It will be a great event. Bring your lunch and questions. For further information, please contact Susan at [sjlevy.01@gmail.com](mailto:sjlevy.01@gmail.com).

# The Cuban Labor Movement

By Robby Stern

In our first full day in Habana we began at the building that houses the Cuban Federation of Labor. Our host was the Cuban representative for North America, Anibal Melo, a former college professor. He offered very interesting and provocative information on the Cuban labor movement.

Ninety-four percent of workers in Cuba belong to the union in their particular sector of work. Eighty-four percent of Cuban workers are in the public sector and are affiliated by areas of work, e.g. health care, education, construction, etc. There are 16 separate public sector unions. Union members pay 1 percent of their wages in union dues and somewhat surprisingly (to me), union membership is voluntary. There are very strong incentives for union membership, including non-job-related benefits such as access to certain vacation resorts and other lifestyle perks. Well over 3 million Cuban workers are union members, and that does not include small farmers (a very large sector of the work force), who have their own organization not affiliated with the Cuban Federation of Labor.

According to Anibal, each union has a large bottom-up decision-making

structure. Obviously, one would have to be in Cuba for a longer period of time to confirm the reality of the decision-making process. We do know that Cuban workers and their unions have very strong legislative protection. Workers have the right to a job, volunteer union membership, and a grievance procedure in which worker representatives compose the majority of a panel that decides the validity of a grievance. Cuban workers also receive one month paid vacation per year.

According to our host, higher wages are tied to greater efficiency, so union members try to figure out more efficient ways to do their work. We asked but were never able to get a clear answer to our question regarding the rate of unemployment and how the Cuban economy deals with unemployed workers.

The unions receive no direct funds from the government, although the 1 percent union dues comes from the wages, in most cases paid by the government. The professor was quite long-winded, so we were never able to ask a question about what happens when workers are injured on or off the job.

The United States government refuses to grant visas to Cuban labor leaders so that there could be interaction between Cuban labor leaders and workers in the U.S. In 2002, the National Lawyers Guild sent a delegation to Cuba to investigate workers' rights. Their report is available online. To quote from the



Logo of the Cuban Federation of Labor

report on page 2:

"Cuba's labor relations and trade unions cannot begin to be understood by an outsider without taking into account two interrelated realities. The first is that Cuba's model of development and workplace relations is socialist. We found that many of the assumptions which compose the fabric of our social and economic lives in the capitalist United States -- including the primacy of the profit motive as a key factor in making corporate decisions that affect workers' lives--simply do not apply in Cuba, and are therefore not helpful in analyzing Cuba's reality."

In listening to Anibal explain the model of unionism and worker rights in Cuba, it was confounding to understand how our two worlds could be so different. The Cuban model offers a lot to learn for union members and leaders in the U.S. Unfortunately, the U.S. government does not appear to want that dialogue to occur.

## A Visit With Seniors

Next we visited a multi-service center that serves seniors, adults, and children in old Habana. It is a large, beautiful converted convent. The facility, funded by the government, was rich with stories about how seniors live in Habana when they choose to access publicly funded facilities and services.



The multi-service center in Habana

Continued on Page 11

# From All Sides Now

By David Springer

I've seen health care as a private pay enrollee, a provider, and currently a government-sponsored Medicare insurance utilizer. The barriers increasingly imposed by multiple insurance companies; the alphabet list of plan options; and most importantly, increasing personal financial burdens make the system untenable. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) has improved access for 22 million Americans, and that is not to be ignored. But any plan involving the notion of profit is impossible to maintain. Health care is a human right not to be bought and sold like cars or beach house getaways.

HR 676 currently proposed by Rep. John Conyers and supported by 113 House members is Medicare for All. The plan will save money, improve access, and control costs. Currently, 94 percent of providers accept traditional Medicare. Major provider organizations support single payer. Doctors are overwhelmed by the time consumed in making the referrals and completing the paper work required by insurance companies. Many of my fellow physicians are abandoning their life's work because of overwhelming administrative burdens. Medicare for All will improve choices of providers.

Insurance companies are currently spending close to 30 percent of their income on overhead costs for CEOs and middle managers as well as advertising to corner more of the market – a waste of \$350 billion. Medicare spends only 2 percent on overhead. These savings alone could sustain a single-payer system such as we currently have for Medicare and Veterans Affairs. No wonder financial giants such as Warren Buffet have come out supporting a single-payer model.

Health care for all increases our bargaining power to bring down the increasing cost of prescription drugs and procedures. We could bargain as one, much as our Veterans Administration is doing, to lower drug prices. The cost of medical procedures could be curtailed with the elimination of regional price differences. We could save \$200 billion by eliminating unnecessary tests and expensive procedures.

We need to end the death spiral created by limiting health care. An estimated 26,000 people die annually in the U.S. for lack of access to health care.

We cannot lose sight of the gains made under the ACA, with Medicaid expanded and community health systems strengthened. The current



David Springer, retired pediatrician

plans to eliminate coverage for 22 million people – or more – will destroy the health infrastructure we've managed to improve. Medicaid provides a safety net for millions of seniors who are financially eligible, so they can live out our days in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities. We cannot wait while the building burns down to insure we are all protected from financial ruin. Save the ACA, but work toward improvements with Medicare for ALL.

David Springer is a PSARA member and represents PSARA in the Health Care is a Human Right coalition.

---

---

## We Want to Hear Your Stories

**Are you on Medicare but need dental, vision, or hearing care?**

**Do you depend on Medicaid for long-term care? Does a friend or neighbor? A relative?**

**Have Medicare or Medicaid made a difference to you or your family?**

**If so, we want to hear your stories and share them with the Health Care is a Human Right (HCHR) coalition. We need to be able to explain to our Congressional representatives exactly what these vital programs mean in the lives of their constituents.**

**If you have a story to tell, please contact us at [organizer@psara.org](mailto:organizer@psara.org) or 206-261-8110.**

# Toward a Deeper Understanding of Race and Climate

*In recent years, environment and climate change activists have started recognizing the importance of what were considered “non-traditional” allies – workers; communities of color; low-income people; and others in direct physical and economic harm’s way from fossil fuel extraction and infrastructure, environmental degradation, and climate catastrophe.*

*Washington State voters may see a climate initiative in 2018 fashioned by the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy, which PSARA belongs to and supports. AJCE is a broadly diverse coalition representing – and to a large extent led by – all those “non-traditionals,” especially communities of color.*

## To Combat Climate Change, Combat White Supremacy

By Bobby Righi



Let’s talk about white supremacy and climate change. How are they related? White supremacy is the mode of thinking that sees white people as the human norm and other people a deviation from this norm. Our culture – newspapers, movies, TV – presents and reinforces this view. It is part of school curricula, though rarely by

name. (See a very good article on this by Robin DiAngelo in the June 30, 2017, *Yes! Magazine*.)

What does that have to do with climate change? Climate change is driven by burning fossil fuels. Fossil fuels are so inherently dirty and toxic that they require sacrificial people and places: people whose lungs and bodies can be sacrificed to work in the coal mines, people whose lands and water can be sacrificed to open-pit mining and oil spills, people who can be forced to live near the power plants and refineries that burn these fuels and spew toxic byproducts.

North American fossil-fuel extraction happens in Appalachia, on lands given by treaty to First Nations; in offshore waters where people live on fishing; in “lightly inhabited” places such as Montana. The refineries and power plants are near communities of color, so Black and Latino people suffer markedly higher rates of respiratory illnesses and cancers to satisfy our collective addiction to fossil fuels.

Sacrificing entire geographies and peoples requires theoretical justification. White supremacy, which has been part of this country from the beginning, serves as a perfect theory, allowing people perceived as not white to be considered different or “other” and, thus, lesser. From that perspective, it doesn’t matter so much if children in communities of color have alarming rates of asthma or that young Black people are shot on an almost daily basis. Nor is it a great cause for concern that the overconsumption promoted by western, white-supremacist culture is causing whole island nations to be swallowed by the sea or that 2,353 migrants from Africa

*Continued on Page 11*

## For the Planet to Work, ALL People Must Share Resources Equally

By Bob Shimabukuro

Oh, now I know how to be successful in America. Americans want you to be assertive. To be successful, you need to think of yourself first. Not your community or family. Think of yourself first. Now I understand Americans better.



-- Overheard at the end of a workshop on self-empowerment for immigrants and refugees.

For hundreds of years, people of color and poor people have been struggling from the environmental and cultural destruction supported by the dominant society. An organized movement for environmental justice led by people of color had a peak of visibility in the 1990s. One reason its momentum stalled was the refusal of mainstream white-led environmental groups to support a movement led by people of color.

However, the environmental crisis we find ourselves in today offers opportunities for a systemic change to ensure that ALL people can share equally in the resources available. But it will require the dominant culture to understand the reality of structural racism to put together an agenda that truly works for ALL of us.

Naomi Klein’s statement -- “Those who are in the front line of our toxic economy should be the first in line for any benefits of the new economy” -- also has drawn fire from some environmentalists. Klein is referencing:

- (a) the indigenous populations
- (b) the poor, homeless, or those living in substandard housing
- (c) those without water/food (think Flint, Michigan; Navaho/Hopi; drought-caused famine in Africa).

All of these populations have been fighting (some for centuries) against a culture that knows no bounds, that takes and extracts, but never puts back. Within this context, these front-line fighters are resisting genocide and loss of their cultural homelands. Therefore, they need immediate help.

*Continued on Page 11*

# PSARA Position Paper on Homelessness

Our region has a homeless crisis. According to the report of the Washington State Department of Commerce 42,128 people were homeless in Washington State in January, 2016. Homelessness has many causes, and a variety of solutions, all of which include an appropriate form of housing.

- Many find themselves homeless due to job loss, domestic violence, divorce, children rejected by families, expensive medical emergencies, effects of military service, etc. Short term intervention can help many homeless people,
- Others are affected by social and economic issues, such as rising housing costs, institutional racism and sexism, LGBTQ discrimination, being formerly incarcerated, or not being paid enough, etc.,
- The largest number of people who are homeless are living with mental health problems, including substance abuse. King County's Homeless Management Information Services, known as Safe Harbors, stated that at least 35% of homeless are mentally ill. They are often also homeless for the longest periods of time.



## PSARA supports:

Funding for those in emergency situations to keep families in their communities and their social networks;

Social and economic reforms, such as more affordable housing, higher minimum wage laws, universal health care coverage, removal of barriers for the formerly incarcerated, and focus on racial disparities in regional policies;

Funding for housing and supportive treatment for those suffering from mental illnesses, including substance abuse;

Harm reduction strategies;

Subsidized housing for the elderly living solely or mainly on Social Security in high rent areas, such as ours;

Substantially increased investments in permanent very low income housing; and

All interventions must treat people and their property with dignity and respect.

# Do We Really Want Rich People Running the Country?

By Mike Andrew

**“The rich are different from you and me, Ernest,” F. Scott Fitzgerald told Hemingway.**

**“Yeah, they have money,” Hemingway replied.**

Are the rich really that different from you and me?

One person who thinks so is Donald Trump. Not only are the rich different from ordinary people, he thinks they're better qualified to run the country.

**“So, somebody said, 'Why did you appoint a rich person to be in charge of the economy?' ... I said, 'because that's the kind of thinking we want,'”** Trump told a June 22 rally in Iowa.

**“And you get the president — this is the president of Goldman Sachs. Smart. Having him represent us...these are people that are great, brilliant business minds. And that's what we need, that's what we have so the world doesn't take... We can't have the world taking advantage of us anymore.”**

Trump may be right about one thing. The rich are different, but not in a good way.

Several recent neuroscience studies suggest that rich people's brains work differently than those of other people, and in ways that are frankly worrisome.

In a 2015 study on empathy by Arizona State University neuroscientist Michael Varnum, the rich people tested rated themselves as more empathetic than the average study participant. Further testing showed that just the opposite was the case.

Varnum first asked study participants to rate themselves on empathy, then used brain-imaging technology to measure their actual neural responses to other people's distress.

The results “show that people who are higher in socioeconomic status have diminished neural responses to others' pain,” Varnum explained. “These findings suggest that empathy, at least some early component of it, is reduced among those who are higher in status.”

And unlike self-reports, brain imaging eliminates “social desirability bias,” where people try to give replies that make them look good or more empathic.

“If you're looking at pictures of people in pain or not in pain, it's pretty unlikely that you know how to enhance those brain responses,” Varnum said.

In another study, from 2016, Varnum and colleagues found evidence that people from lower social classes have a more sensitive mirror neuron system — which is thought to simulate the things you see others experience. In other words, poorer people are more capable of feeling what their friends and neighbors feel than rich people are.

“Our cognitive systems, the degree to which they're attuned to other people in the environment, is affected by our own social class,” Varnum said.

Another study, published in October, 2016, in *Psychological Science*, shows that attention breaks down along class lines. A research team led by NYU doctoral candidate Pia Dietze measured participants' attunement to people or things in three different experiments.

In the first, they stopped 61 people on New York City streets and asked them to put on a Google Glass device and walk around one block for about a minute, looking at whatever captured their gaze. Higher-class participants had measurably shorter “social gazes,” or the amount of time spent looking at individual people.

In a second experiment, a total of 158 undergrads were recruited to look at 41 photographs of different cities. Here, working-class participants had a 25 percent longer “dwell time,” the time spent looking at a particular scene, than their upper-middle-class peers.

In a third experiment, almost 400 participants recruited online had to determine if icons depicting people



or objects changed in the course of milliseconds. Consistent with the other results, working-class people were faster in catching changes in faces than upper-middle-class participants.

Together, the results show “social class cultures can influence social attention (attention towards humans) in a deep and pervasive manner,” Dietze says.

Apparently, rich people's brains make them careless of other people and their pain. But why?

It may be that growing up poor means that you have to rely on others more, and therefore you have to be attuned to their feelings.

Varnum says that these studies speak to a broader notion of how higher-status people are more focused on their own goals and desires. They also ignore other people a little more, because they can afford to.

“If you have more power and status, you may not have to care as much about what people are thinking and feeling; and also, if you're in a resource-scarce environment, where things are a little more unpredictable and maybe a little more dangerous, it would be very adaptive to pay attention to others, how they're feeling and what they're going to do,” he explained.

# Eighty Dead: A Legacy of Thatcherism

By Mike Andrew

On June 14, Grenfell Tower, a public housing project in Kensington, West London, was destroyed by fire. As many as 80 people died in the blaze, with some still unaccounted for. Most of the residents were poor immigrants, or sons and daughters of immigrants, from former British colonies.

According to Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, residents had been advised to stay in their units rather than flee to the street, because firefighters assumed that the building's structure could contain the fire within the unit where it started. Sadly, this was not what happened. In fact, the fire spread rapidly and soon engulfed the whole highrise.

The fire engulfed Grenfell Tower so quickly and so completely because the metal "skin" of the building was aluminum rather than zinc, which is fire-resistant.

And the cladding was aluminum instead of zinc because aluminum is cheaper. According to documents published by the *Times of London*, the Kensington Borough Council saved £300,000 (\$390,000) by ordering the aluminum siding.

When firefighters arrived at Grenfell Tower on June 14, they had no way of knowing that the metal siding was not fire-resistant, so they mistakenly told people to shelter in place rather than evacuate.



*The community turns out to demand justice.  
(Photo: NSBC News)*

Grenfell Tower was not the only building where cost-cutting jeopardized public safety. Tests conducted on building material from all over Britain have revealed that 149 samples have failed fire safety tests — a 100 percent failure rate.

For the 223 survivors, the fire was only the beginning of their troubles. As of July 19, only £800,000 (about \$1.04 million) out of at least £20 million (\$26 million) earmarked to help survivors had actually reached them.

In the wake of the fire, Kensington Borough Council Chair Nick Paget-Brown and two other local officials — all members of the governing Conservative Party — resigned in disgrace.

When Sir Martin Moore-Brick, a judge appointed to head the investigation into the fire, met with former residents, they jeered him, shouting "Where is the money?" and "You're not one of us!"

Many of those who spoke asked the judge to widen the scope of his inquiry to look into "years of neglect" and "cultural gentrification" of the area.

One woman demanded Moore-Brick resign, saying that the chair of the investigation "needs to be of an ethnic background, 100 percent."

"There's no way that it can be any other way because only that type of person can be empathetic and actually read into the intellectual conversations of the heart and read the situation that's going on and what people are talking about," she said.



*The burned-out hulk of Grenfell Tower looms over Kensington. (Photo: The Independent)*

British newspapers mourned the "tragic accident," but it was no accident. In fact, the fire was completely predictable, because it was a legacy of Thatcherism — or as we say in American English, Reaganism.

Like her pal Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister 1979-1990) wanted to cut taxes for her rich constituents. To cover the tax cuts without blowing up Britain's debt, she cut social spending, privatized government-owned industries, and fired government workers.

To justify cutting the social safety net, she stigmatized immigrants and other poor people who lived in public housing and relied on public assistance. At best they were unproductive, she said. At worst they were criminals preying on the native-born British. Her government was wise to stop coddling them.

During the Thatcher era, and continuing afterwards, the British government adopted a "cheaper is better" approach to public works projects. After all, why spend good money on fire-resistant building materials when flammable ones look just the same and are cheaper?

Even if the worst happens, you'll only burn up Labour voters. Tories don't live in public housing projects.

Sound familiar? Of course it does.



# A Budget Slouches from Olympia

By Michael Righi

A budget presumably represents what a community considers its challenges to be and incorporates ideas on how to meet the challenges. So, what would most of us think are our most pressing problems? Well, the climate crisis for sure, right? And, definitely, escalating inequality. Hardly anyone would disagree that Washington's education system has fallen behind what our kids need.

If those are the issues, then the state budget recently passed by the legislature (the capital spending part of the budget is still not resolved) is an inadequate jumble. Yes, there are increases in funding for education, but no money to lower class sizes. Raises for state employees will be paid, and many are heaving sighs of relief that basic services have not been cut as had been feared. But please, where is there a vision of a fair and sustainable future?

OK, maybe we are not in Kansas, Dorothy, where the governor has gone on a tax-cutting and spending-slashing spree, damaging the state's economy (and yet, even Kansas has an income tax!). Austerity – the lowest possible taxes and a minimalist government – has long been conservatives' answer to any and all economic problems. Check out the web pages of ALEC (the American Legislative Exchange Council): tax relief, tax limitation, and deregulation, to restore "competitiveness." That's what states should be about, according to ALEC.

But Washington is not the forward-looking beacon we might think it is or wish it to be. The worldwide push for austerity has had an effect here as well. Forty years ago, the state's budget was equal to 6.6 percent of total personal income, meaning that is how much of our resources were going to pay for the public goods and services we rely on.

Now that figure is only 4.6 percent! If the percentage had merely stayed

the same, the state would have nearly \$8 billion more to meet our new challenges. Which means austerity lite is being practiced here as well. That number should be rising, not falling, to enhance public education and make higher education more accessible, to create a carbon-free economy, to create opportunities for all of our people, and to build systems of care for everyone. Where is the vision?

Back in the 1990's, before the 2008 financial crisis and before governments everywhere went for austerity, for every \$1,000 of income earned in Washington, \$53 was spent on K-12 education. Now that figure is \$35.

All state and local taxes combined took \$120 from every \$1,000 of income in 1995 and now \$90 is taken in taxes. Conservatives and Republicans of course count that a victory. That's tax relief, a shrinking of government.

Those numbers are averages and gloss over who is taxed. As you have heard by now, the state of Washington has the most upside-down tax system in the country. State and local taxes take 16.8 percent of the income of the poorest fifth of our population and from 2 percent to 6 percent of the income of the richest fifth.

So, what did our legislature do to help combat this inequality? Well, nothing but probably make it worse. To fund education they raised the state property tax rate, one of the taxes that fall hardest on low- and middle-income households (renters, and homeowners where valuations are skyrocketing). Many PSARA members will feel this tax hike and face some agonizing decisions as a result.

Yes, money has to be raised. But even in the political short run, where budgets have to be passed, a property tax could have a "safeguard rebate" for low- and middle-income homeowners. Or a capital gains tax (proposed by



Michael Righi

Governor Inslee) could tax speculative stock and other financial asset trading. In the long run, of course, we need a graduated income tax and a carbon tax on the use of fossil fuels.

A constant low-level fiscal crisis is just what ALEC and conservative austerity advocates want. They use that to push cutbacks in social and education programs, and use shoddy "research" to claim that tax increases hurt businesses. You know, those "job creators."

That keeps us fighting to stave off immoral cuts to programs and individually struggling to pay the taxes that weigh us down. And then we might be willing to even join a "tax revolt."

We have to look higher, get over the old, tired Reagan/Thatcher slogans about "government being the problem." We have to have a vision of a just transition to a secure, carbon-free, caring society. Including a fair tax arrangement where we all contribute according to how much we benefit and how much we have.

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

## Watching the Bay Go Away

By Bob Shimabukuro

*I'm sitting on the dock of the bay  
Watchin' the tide roll away, ooh  
I'm just sittin' on the dock of the bay  
Wastin' time*  
---Otis Redding, Stephen Lee Cropper

Watching Malaekahana waves  
roll in and out  
T'inking 'bout life, death,  
culture and genocide:  
About final days of Fumi Auntie  
& Sam and the Mariners;  
and the Polynesians  
of interest to UH(aawaii),  
the PAC 12 and the SEC.

Odda stuff too.

*Like American culture:*  
Discover, develop/take out,  
no need replenish, but "added value"  
needed;  
Buy low, sell high...anyt'ing.  
Use'em, den chrow 'em away.  
Make land & watah like one toilet,  
the sky like one dusty bowl  
nomo' boundaries.

*Like rising tides in Hawaii*  
Big trouble when saltwater  
get inside aquifers,  
Sometimes can see rising water  
in Waikiki & Hilo cover the beach.  
Scary. What to do?

Gotta help Mother Earth.  
NOW.

Catch a Breath, Keep on moving.

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

## Nancy Altman: Expanding Social Security Is Wise Policy and Great Politics

Continued from Page 1

Medicare, covering seniors and people with disabilities, was enacted in 1965 as part of Pres. Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" initiative. Then came Obamacare, a Republican-devised, market-based solution that has benefited many but falls far short of the Medicare for All ideal.

Medicare, and Social Security which FDR and Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins won in 1935, have been fiscal successes, with almost all dollars flowing to actual services instead of administration. Social Security will enjoy a \$55 million surplus this year, and its total reserves will surpass \$3 billion.

Reactionary politicians and their right-wing think tanks continue to fear-monger about system insolvency while current reserves would cover everyone's full benefits for 17 years (according to Social Security actuaries). Wall Street gamblers are salivating over the prospect of grabbing those reserves, which now must be held as government-insured Treasury Bonds that now provide annual interest amounting to about 8 percent of Social Security revenue.

At the same time, they stonewall attempts to improve Social Security benefits that are needed now more than ever, as workers' pension programs vanish. Altman reminded people that one-third of today's U.S. retirees have no other income than Social Security.

Just "scrapping the cap" that lets high earners avoid Social Security taxes on income above \$127,200 would allow full benefits to be paid for the next 40 years and also provide revenue for expanded benefits. Applying the tax to currently shielded unearned income and estates would allow an even further expansion.

### Let's make a deal?

Altman helped found Social Security Works in 2010 to combat misinformation about Social Security and Medicare. The programs were being cast as problems, when they're actually solutions.

The problem, Altman said, is income inequality, which is greater now than at any time since the 1920s. Back then, the solutions were the minimum wage, collective bargaining, and Social Security. "Now we should expand and increase all of them," she said.

To her dismay, even progressive politicians were buying "we can't afford it" arguments about social programs and seeking "bipartisan" solutions. "No cuts" to Social Security had become the left flank, when expansion was – and is – desperately needed.

"The Democrats lost their way," Altman said.

Now we've got a proposed Trump budget that cuts Social Security and a languishing Trumpcare plan "that would have destroyed Medicaid." Congressional Republicans keep proposing cuts deep enough to pierce right through Obamacare to Lyndon Johnson care. So far, public pressure has contained those efforts, though, as Altman said, "it's essential that we persist because they will persist."

Sen. Bernie Sanders – who revived the national health care issue during his presidential campaign – is working on a Medicare for All bill and garnering support. According to Altman, about 85 percent of Congressional Democrats are on record calling for expansion of/no cuts to Social Security.

"Now (those politicians) need to stump for it," she said.

One poll after another shows people of all political persuasions supporting Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. If Democrats run strongly on these issues, Altman insisted, they can get Republicans to vote for them.

"They have money on their side, but we have the facts on our side and the American people on our side," she said. "We have an opportunity now to start to push for critical reforms. We've got to have grassroots pressure for good policy.

"It's up to all of you."

*Marc Krasnowsky is a member of the PSARA Environmental Committee and serves as press liaison for PSARA.*

## The Cuban Labor Movement

Continued from Page 3

At this charming old facility, seniors are served meals and provided a multitude of activities, cultural events, and medical services. A fulltime nurse serves the facility and an optometry clinic that provides eye exams and glasses that are made very quickly on site. We also learned that dental and hearing are part of the health care system, although we did not see evidence of those services being offered at this particular center. Unlike U.S. Medicare, vision, hearing, and dental are provided to seniors free of charge as part of the larger Cuban health care system and health services.

We had a lot of time to chat with the seniors, one of whom was 102. The seniors were engaged in lively games of dominoes, doing some arts and crafts projects, and just sitting on a very good supply of comfortable rocking chairs in a beautiful covered outside area looking out on a garden.

On the second floor of the facility was a childcare center where the little kids were napping. We learned that the seniors and the little kids interact a lot during the day. We spent time talking with the Director, who had started as a worker in the facility. He seemed like a warm-hearted human being who loved and took pride in the multitude of services provided by the center.

That evening, many of our travel companions went to the week-long Cuban Jazz festival. Dina and I were pretty tired from the activities of the day and the long walk we had taken along the Malecon seawall. We walked over to a hotel that we learned had been Mafia owned and operated prior to the revolution, and then to the Cuban Nacional Hotel where we listened to music in a beautiful outdoor setting. We then walked back to our hotel and called it another rather extraordinary day.

## To Combat Climate Change, Combat White Supremacy

Continued from Page 5

and the Middle East have died in the Mediterranean just since January 1, 2017, or that drought caused and/or prolonged and worsened by climate change has created more than 3 million refugees in East Africa.

From Nigeria to Ecuador to the wars in the Middle East, death and destruction follow fossil fuel exploration and extraction. The doctrine of white supremacy eases the way for wiping out whole communities, for sacrificing them to the avarice of those who profit from fossil fuel use.

The areas of devastation are expanding. More lands and people are being queued up for sacrifice. And, as the fires spreading across the West and the Maryland-sized iceberg breaking off from Antarctica remind us, the world is heating up.

We have work to do to stave off disaster for most of the world's people. Climate change is not going to be stopped or slowed without taking on white supremacy in all of its ugly forms.

*Bobby Righi is PSARA's Administrative Vice President and a member of the PSARA Environmental Committee.*

## For the Planet to Work, ALL People Must Share Resources Equally

Continued from Page 5

Island countries in the Pacific are particularly important to me. They are part of my cultural heritage. And the way the people of these islands have been treated by their colonial masters is offensive. I learned at an early age about the United States and the nuclear test bombing of Bikini Atoll. It's even more disgusting to know that the Bikini, a skimpy women's bathing suit, was named after the Atoll being bombed (22-23 times) simply because it was in the news and the designer thought it to be "catchy"????

As Bill Bigelow noted in the previous *Advocate*, Trump's dismissal of climate change "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."

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

## 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, August 2, Southwest Library, 9010 35th Ave. SW, Seattle, 98126 (35th & Henderson). Topic: *Creative Aging* with Rebecca Crichton. Brown bag lunch.

**PSARA Environmental Committee:** 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., Thursday, August 3, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All welcome.

**PSARA Government Relations Committee:** 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Thursday, August 3, Seattle Labor Temple, Room 226, 2800 First Ave. All welcome.

**PSARA Fundraising Committee:** 11 a.m., Monday, August 7, PSARA office, Seattle Labor Temple, 2800 1st Ave., Room 262. All are welcome.

**PSARA Education Committee:** 1p.m. – 3 p.m., Tuesday, August 8. Call for location, 206-261-8110. We will discuss our work to expand outreach with the PSARA workshop, "Making Retirement Security Real for All Generations."

**Green Lake Discussion Group:** Noon - 1:30 p.m., Thursday, August 10, The Bridge at Village Cove, 6850 Woodlawn Ave. NE, Suite B, Seattle, 98115. Brown bag lunch. Topic: *Great Art by Elderly Artists; From Michelangelo to DeKooning* with Rebecca Albiani. For information contact Susan at [sjlevy.01@gmail.com](mailto:sjlevy.01@gmail.com)

**PSARA Fundraising Concert featuring PSARA member Lou Truskoff:** Sunday, August 13, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m., the Bay Vista, 2821 – 2nd Ave., Seattle, 98121. Advanced registration would be appreciated. Please email [organizer@psara.org](mailto:organizer@psara.org) (preferred) or call the PSARA office at (206) 448-9646 to register. If calling, please leave a phone number where you can be reached.

**PSARA Diversity Committee:** 11 a.m. – Noon, Thursday, August 17, Washington State Labor Council office, 321 16th Ave. S, Seattle. All are welcome.

**PSARA Executive Board Meeting:** 12:30 p.m. - 3 p.m., Thursday, August 17, Washington State Labor Council, 321 16th Avenue S, Seattle. All are welcome.

