

## PSARA to Seattle: Defund Police, Invest in Communities

*Editor's Note: PSARA sent the following letter, drafted by our Race and Gender Equity (RaGE) Committee, to Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan and the Seattle City Council.*

Dear Mayor Durkan and Seattle City Council Members,

For more than a quarter century, Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) has been active in fighting for older Americans, their children, and their families. We engage in a variety of activities and educational work, and among them is our opposition to systemic racism and violence embedded in the institutions of our country, including the police and law enforcement. Most recently we held a vigil at Green Lake to show our anger and disgust that police still wield the power to snuff out lives without consequence, and to show our support for Black Lives Matter. We strongly believe that this time is different. All the people, young and old, we see taking to the streets in revolt are saying enough is enough.

When we say the names of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and Rayshard Brooks we are outraged! And in our state we remember and honor the lives of our Black neighbors and community members: Charleena Lyles, Manuel Ellis, Che Taylor, Mi'Chance Dunlap-Gittens and many others who were also murdered



### Webinar: The Link Between Racial Justice, COVID-19, and the Green New Deal

Presented by Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action--Whidbey Committee  
Wednesday, August 12, noon – 1:30 pm

*Coronavirus and climate change take the heaviest toll on Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities. We will not solve these crises if we do not challenge white supremacy in all of its forms. Join us for a presentation and discussion about these connections. We will explore the Green New Deal Resolution to understand how and why it provides a way forward to a better future we all want.*

Presenters:

Chloe Yeo – Sunrise Seattle  
Bobby Righi – Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA)  
Jeff Johnson – Labor Network for Sustainability

Co-Sponsors: United Student Leaders (Whidbey Island High School Students), Whidbey Environmental Action Network, Island County Democrats, Whidbey Island Progressives, Whidbey Island Democratic Club, Goosefoot Community Fund, Whidbey Island Social Justice Solidarity Net [That] Works, South Whidbey Tilth, Drewslist, UUCWI Social Environmental Justice Council, PSARA Education Fund, Whidbey Institute, Whidbey Island Greening Congregations Collaborative

To attend email [organizer@psara.org](mailto:organizer@psara.org) and you will be sent a link to register.

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## PSARA to Seattle: Defund Police, Invest in Communities

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by the police. Saying their names and remembering them will not bring them justice nor to the Black community. Consequently, in Solidarity with Black Lives Matter we are demanding that the City:

- 1) Defund the Seattle Police Department by at least 50%
- 2) Reallocate those funds to community-led health and safety systems
- 3) Release protestors arrested during this uprising without charges, and
- 4) Support the King County Equity Now demands for giving spaces and land back to Black-led community organizations.

We would appreciate an immediate response from you and will follow up in one week if we don't hear from you.

Sincerely,

Pam Lux, PSARA President

Mike Andrew, PSARA Executive Director

*All City Council members acknowledged PSARA's letter, and Council member Dan Strauss (6th District) sent us a detailed reply, which is printed on Page 10. PSARA heard nothing from the Mayor.*

## Save the Date!

**1:00 p.m., Thursday, August 20**  
**PSARA Membership Meeting**

**With guest speaker Katie Wilson, General Secretary of the Transit Riders Union and member of PSARA's Executive Board**

*Zoom link will be emailed to PSARA members.*

## Special Southend Committee Meeting

**1:00 p.m., Thursday, August 13**

### Health Care for All:

### Why We Need It Now More Than Ever

If you missed this important webinar last month, now's your chance to catch up on the latest info. COVID-19 has dramatically demonstrated why we need health care coverage for all residents of the US.

Presenters: David Loud, Co-Chair of Health Care is a Human Right coalition, and member of PSARA's Executive Board; Steve Bauck, PSARA's Outreach Co-VP.

*Zoom link will be emailed to PSARA members.*

# Young People and Social Security: Part 2

By Linda Peterson

**T**his is Part 2 of a 2-part article. Part 1 explained why preserving and expanding Social Security is especially important for younger generations. Part 2 explores the implications that various reform proposals have for younger generations, and why we need to fight for the future.

To review Part 1, Social Security is likely to be even more important for millennials than for the current generation of retirees. We are experiencing the decline in traditional pensions and the inadequacy of 401(k) plans. This is coupled with a near impossibility to save enough in the face of stagnating wages, a staggering burden of education debt, and increasingly high costs of housing, health care, and child care.

At the same time, the Social Security system faces a future shortfall as the Trust Fund surplus is spent down. Unless Congress takes steps to fix it, after about 2035 future benefits will be reduced by about twenty percent. Payouts will have to be limited to the amount of payroll tax revenue coming in. Part 1 ended by asking what Congress will do to preserve Social Security for future generations? Will the interests of millennials be sacrificed on the altar of fiscal austerity, or will their interests be protected?

Broadly speaking, there are only two routes Congress can take to fix the looming imbalance: either reduce benefits paid out, or beef up the funding coming in.

A bill in the House, the Social Security 2100 Act, would beef up the funding coming in and even allow for an increase in current and future benefits through the rest of this century. It would do this by (eventually) phasing out the cap on income subject to the payroll tax, as well as phasing in a small increase in the tax (a nickel on every hundred dollars). Nearly 90% of the Democrats in the House have signed on to this bill including all of Washington's



Linda Peterson

Democratic Representatives. The bill is clearly in the interests of future as well as current retirees. PSARA strongly supports this bill.

The Senate Social Security 2100 Act, S269, does not yet have the co-sponsorship of Washington's two US Senators. Please contact them and ask them to co-sponsor S269, the Social Security 2100 Act. Sen. Sanders has sponsored a "scrap the cap" bill and Sen. Elizabeth Warren campaigned on beefing up the Trust Fund further by adding taxes on unearned income (such as shareholder wealth).

The Senate, dominated by Republicans, talks about "reining in entitlements." They have proposed cutting benefits in the past, though they have not proposed specific changes recently (it's an election year, after all). It's likely nothing will happen as long as the House remains Democratic and the Senate remains Republican, though the Republicans and some conservative Democrats are supporting Sen. Rom-

ney's proposed TRUST Act, which would set up a bipartisan task force to find a compromise which would then be fast tracked through Congress.

Bipartisan compromise is such a fine sounding phrase. Unfortunately it usually means sacrificing somebody's interest, and when it comes to the Social Security system, millennials and younger generations need to be very, very wary. It's their interests that will be on the chopping block. Politicians will not want to rile up seniors, who always vote, so they are unlikely to propose any benefit cuts to current retirees or those just about to retire (with the possible exception of stingier cost-of-living increases, which cause benefits to erode over time).

The bipartisan 1983 amendments are a case in point. While the amendment's changes did stabilize the fund, they did so through reducing benefits rather than changing the cap. And while the amendments reduced benefits for both current and future retirees (by cutting the cost-of-living increase and making Social Security benefits subject to federal taxation), by far the biggest reduction was imposed on the younger generations, the future retirees. In 1983, most of the baby boomers were young adults, and probably not paying much attention, so it was their interests that were on the chopping block. The amendments raised the definition of "full retirement age," gradually phasing it from 65 to 67 for those born in 1960 or later (notice it is still in the process of being phased in: those born in 1960 are just now only reaching the age of 60).

Raising the definition of full retirement age can seem like a logical and good bipartisan compromise, but the result is actually a 13% benefit cut for those born after 1960.

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# The Numbers of Fear, Part I: COVID-19

By Garry Owens

Millions around the globe suffer from a deadly disease. Countless people will be infected and affected by it every day.

But it's not the disease you might be thinking of. This disease is called "racism," and it could be one of the longest-living maladies existing in the history of so-called civilization.

History has taught us that this disease has caused the demise of people of color in unquantifiable numbers, and the current COVID-19 pandemic bears that out.

The legacy of racism creates a continuation of the "less-than" treatment that people of color around the globe share as a historical legacy of despair. In this issue, I'll explain how that works out in the current COVID-19 pandemic. Next month, I'll go further back in history and show how disease has often been a weapon against people of color.

The esteemed APM Research Laboratory has documented that there was a particular affinity of the COVID-19 virus to people of color. In an article titled "The Color of Coronavirus: COVID-19 Deaths by Race and Ethnicity in the US," they report that the novel coronavirus creates a new global peril and joins the historical list of lethal diseases that have plagued our history.

The crisis of COVID-19 in Black and other communities of color has been documented in numerous medical publications, but not as much in the popular media. The disparities provide information that is not reported in local news outlets. They cite the disparities and challenges that face the Black and other communities.

The CDC cites that Blacks are over-represented in hospitalized patients. Many African Americans are dying because of hypertension and diabetes, which cause complications connected with COVID-19.

The APM Research Lab compiled data from Washington, DC, and 40 states. Their analysis outlines the dispa-



Garry Owens

rate impact of COVID-19, and the deep inequities by race, most dramatically for Black Americans.

The analysis is profound. "The latest overall COVID-19 mortality rate (for Blacks) is 2.4 times as high as the rate for whites and 2.0 times as the rate for Asians and Latinxs."

Let's look at the numbers:

- 1 in 1,850 Blacks have died (54.6 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 4,000 Latinxs have died (24.9 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 4,200 Asians have died (24.3 deaths per 100,000)
- 1 in 4,000 Whites have died (22.7 deaths per 100,000)

The data for the Indigenous population is limited and uneven. However, in New Mexico the Indigenous mortality rate is eight times higher than that of whites.

If they died of COVID-19 at the same rate as White Americans, about 13,000 Black Americans, 1,300 Latinx Americans, and 300 Asian Americans would still be alive.

In addition, the data asserts an alarming statistic about how the novel coronavirus impacts the national Black community. The data reveals that African Americans represent 12.9 percent of the US population and 25 percent of the COVID-19 deaths.

In Washington State Black people are dying at rates roughly proportional to their population. In addition, Washington State has the sixth highest rate in the nation of COVID-19 deaths.

This gulf in health statistics for Blacks has existed for decades. The triple risk for Blacks as far as cause of death now includes coronavirus, police violence, and racism. Meanwhile nations and populations that have the resources have a better chance to survive.

Epidemiologists have stated that there are serious health disparities for people who cannot afford to stay in a safe place, and that includes distance from others, clean water to wash hands, and a mask to cover your mouth and nose.

Privileged populations can, possibly, afford the special resources and protection to lower their risk of exposure that Third World inhabitants cannot. These are most likely to be people of color and lower-income individuals. Many large or blended families will not have the financial resources to stave off possible contamination.

Traditionally, in the richest country on the globe, the middle class and above worry less about a lack of resources that will protect their families. These families may be protected unless they live in places that are prone to weather-induced calamities which can compromise their health and safety regardless of income or location.

Global health indices continue to reflect that survival is easier in locations that are sustainable, offer less damage to the environment and life-sustaining resources, where there is respect for non-human species, and there are government processes that allow common people to choose leaders of their choice.

Our current situation is at a danger point that lingers in every corner of the planet, and our actions lay the foundation for our future -- good or bad.

*Garry Owens is a member of PSARA's Executive Board.*

# Raise Revenues, Invest in People

By Marilyn Watkins, reprinted from the South Seattle Emerald

As tax revenues fall with people out of work and whole industries shuttered, Washington's state and local governments are laying off staff, reducing pay, and slashing services that are helping people weather the COVID-19 storm. Cutting important services now will cause immediate suffering, prolong the recession, and deepen racial and economic inequity.

We need our state legislators and other elected officials to have the courage to raise new taxes on wealthy individuals and corporations, then reinvest that money in health care, secure housing, child care, educational opportunity, and income support for people and small businesses who are struggling for survival.

The June 17 state revenue forecast predicts the state will collect \$4.5 billion less than expected in the current 2-year budget cycle that ends June 30, 2021, and face a similar loss for the 2021-23 budget. With only about \$2 billion in reserves, Gov. Jay Inslee has already cancelled a scheduled pay increase and required most state employees to take unpaid days off. He's also ordered all state agencies to find ways to cut their budgets by 15 percent, and is likely to call the State Legislature back for a special session this summer to make those reductions.

Now eliminating funding for militarized police, mass incarceration, and other forms of racist oppression would improve health and economic security for millions of state residents -- but that's not what's on the chopping block. Here are some of the programs state agencies have identified for possible cuts:

**Dental care** for 204,000 adults, maternity care for 36,000 women, and medical interpreters helping 96,000 people on Medicaid;

**Long-term care** for seniors and disabled people, home visiting for new parents, and TANF grants for families in deep poverty;

**Child care** and other support for highly vulnerable children; and

**College financial aid** for 10,700 students.

A decade ago during the last recession, our legislature made exactly these kinds of cuts, along with reductions in mental health services. Those decisions caused real suffering and helped ensure that most of the benefits of renewed economic growth went to a privileged few. As a result, working families were already struggling to cover the basics when COVID-19 came along.

The social distancing and stay-at-home orders necessary to slow the spread of coronavirus resulted in half a million jobs lost in Washington this March and April -- not counting all the gig workers, independent business owners, and others who don't show up in official statistics. In May, the private sector gained back 72,000 jobs, but the state and local governments cut another 20,000 jobs -- that's 20,000 families who lost much of their income



Marilyn Watkins

and won't be helping our economy get back on track.

Meanwhile, much of the federal economic relief Congress initially provided is drying up. Those stimulus checks were a one-shot deal. Most small business loans/grants only cover eight weeks. The extra \$600 per week in unemployment insurance (if you can get it) ends in late July. And people with-

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## Protect Long-Term Care: Raise Revenue, Don't Cut Programs

By Pam Lux and Ruth Egger

COVID-19 has done more than just keep us at home. It has had a dramatic impact on the state budget and has reduced tax revenue, and increased medical costs, and put thousands of people on unemployment, struggling to feed their families. Things will not be back to "normal" soon. Even as the economy opens seniors and people with disabilities are going to be experiencing more cuts.

Governor Inslee asked the state agencies to look at what a 15 percent reduction to their budgets will do. What it will do is cut over 20,000 people off of services and supports. Current proposals cut long-term care support for one in three current recipients, or 20,000 seniors and people with disabilities. People depend on this care for daily living, and their conditions will worsen without it.

Our long-term care system is already under strain given the pandemic's brutal impact on the state. We cannot meet the needs of the most vulnerable Washingtonians if we shred the long-term care safety net when we need it the most. This would put our most vulnerable populations at even higher risk.

The state needs to look at new sources of revenue, not cutting services. Capital gains, taxing the wealthiest people in the world, and removing tax exemptions from large corporations are ways to achieve this goal and preserve services.

Contact your legislators and tell them to raise revenue, not cut programs.

*Pam Lux is PSARA's President and Ruth Egger is a member of PSARA's Executive Board. They represent PSARA on the Long-Term Care Coalition.*

# Some News You May Not Have Seen

By Robby Stern

## UFCW Death Toll in One Hundred Days

United Food & Commercial Workers Union President, Marc Perrone, announced on June 30 that 238 frontline workers died over the last 100 days because of Covid-19. President Perrone stated, "With our country now 100 days into the Covid-19 pandemic, America's frontline workers still face many of the same dangers they faced on day one." He went on to say, "In grocery stores, meatpacking plants, and healthcare facilities, our country's frontline workers are getting sick and dying. It's high times for America's CEOs and elected leaders to pull their heads out of the sand and take the strong action needed to protect these brave workers and the communities they serve."

The UFCW, the largest private sector union in the US, found, based on reports from local union organizations:

- Across the country, the UFCW has accounted for 82 deaths and 11,507 infected or exposed workers among their members in the grocery industry.

- Among their members in the meatpacking industry, there have been at least 65 deaths and 14,214 workers infected or exposed. May, so far, has been the deadliest month with 38 deaths.

- In UFCW represented food processing facilities there have been at least 28 deaths and 3,474 workers infected or exposed.

- In health care facilities with UFCW representation (the union represents approximately 60,000 health care workers) there have been at least 21 worker deaths and 11,478 workers infected or exposed. Again, the biggest spike in cases was in May.

President Perrone criticized the "current patchwork" of safety measures and regulations and the reality that millions of workers are "still unprotected and vulnerable." He criticized companies like Amazon, Walmart, and Kroger for refusing to reveal how many of their workers have died or been exposed to Covid-19.

He announced three initiatives by the UFCW to address the impact on frontline workers.

1. "Reinstate hazard pay and establish a \$15 per hour wage for all frontline workers.

2. "Establish a public mask mandate in all 50 states.

3. "Create a new national public registry to track Covid-19 infections in frontline workers which would require companies with more than 1,000 employees to submit monthly reports on their worker deaths, infections, and exposure."

My comment: Trump, his corporate allies, and his legion of followers continue to demonstrate their willingness to sacrifice working people, particularly people of color and low-wage workers. And now, school-age kids and their educators are targets. Their goals are both political and financial (keep their profits flowing).

## Stock Purchases by Andrew Saul, Commissioner of Social Security?

A June 25 article in *Salon* by Roger Sollenberger reveals that Commissioner Andrew Saul seems to have "anticipated" the coming pandemic when he bought the stocks of several companies that stood to gain from Covid-19. The stocks were, among others, Abbott Laboratories, United Health, and Eurofin, a foreign company that manufactures personal protective equipment.

The article states, "It appears that Saul...is among the few senior executive branch officials who have not yet submitted annual financial disclosure forms this year (usually due by May 15) making it difficult to understand his most recent market transactions."

Saul, who was a classmate of Donald Trump at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, was appointed by Trump to a six-year term as the Commissioner of Social Security. PSARA and Social Security Works WA



Robby Stern

had major concerns over his appointment. We voiced our opposition to our two US Senators, calling out Saul's previous connection to the Manhattan Institute, a right-wing think tank that lobbies for cuts to Social Security benefits.

According to the *Salon* article, Saul added to his Abbott Laboratories stockholdings in January, February, and March of 2020. The March 16 purchase was the same day the Social Security Administration (SSA) announced it was closing its offices and two days before the Food and Drug Administration approved Abbott's coronavirus test. The investments in the other companies likely to profit from Covid-19 followed a similar pattern.

Hopefully there will be an investigation, and if insider trading can be established, Saul could be removed from his position as Commissioner of Social Security.

Additionally, the recent Supreme Court decision in *Seila Law v. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, No. 19-7*, allowing the President to fire the director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau provides a new president the authority to remove the Commissioner of the Social Security Administration. Andrew Saul is bad news.

*Robby Stern is President of the PSARA Education Fund.*

# Can We Afford the Green New Deal?

By Jeff Johnson

Of course, we can. In fact, we can't afford not to build the Green/Black/Brown/Red New Deal.

As the global health pandemic has exposed the fault lines of capitalism, the movement for Black Lives has exposed the racism upon which our country was built and operates. What has become crystal clear is that addressing systemic inequality and climate disaster are intertwined crises the solution to which lies in re-envisioning the goals of our economy and the meaning of equity and the common good.

While right-wing pundits were only too happy to slap a \$51-\$93 trillion price tag on the Green New Deal last fall, you and I know that it is a fool's errand to put a price on a set of policies and programs whose parameters and details are yet to be hashed out.

Hopefully, led by the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community along with labor, seniors, youth, and other progressive organizations, this work lies ahead of us.

But we can put a price on reducing carbon emissions to net zero. Good friend and brilliant economist Robert Pollin, University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Co-Director of PERI (Political Economy Research Institute), calculates with an investment of 2% of GDP annually we can reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The cost of this is \$18 trillion spread out over 30 years. The cost is scalable. Spend more and reach the goal sooner.

For this article let's see how we can reach this dollar total, including an idea forwarded by Gerald Epstein, Co-Director of PERI, involving the Federal Reserve Bank.

First off \$18 trillion over 30 years is \$600 billion a year. This is about 15% of our annual federal budget. While I am not necessarily suggesting that we divert 15% of the federal budget each year, surely we could divert a substantial portion of our annual \$720 billion military budget to protecting the lives



Jeff Johnson

and security of the American people. If we diverted 20% of the military budget to security from climate disaster, we would have \$144 billion a year.

**Tax the rich.** According to the Tax Foundation, Representative Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez's proposal to tax income over \$10 million at a 70% rate would net about \$30 billion a year.

**As Bernie would say, "the banks."** Within three years of the signing of the Paris Climate Accord the world's largest 33 banks had financed an additional \$1.9 trillion in fossil fuel projects around the world. If one-quarter of this amount annualized were invested per year in saving the planet rather than continued fossil fuel investments we would have about \$158 billion a year. Setting the context, in 2018 US based banks had over \$23 trillion in assets.

**Making our pension funds work to save and create jobs.** We have about \$25 trillion in workers' savings invested mostly in corporate America between our private and public pension funds. If we diverted 25% of this portfolio to investing in saving the planet over a thirty-year period of time, we would have \$208 billion a year to invest.

For those doing the math we are now at \$540 billion or 90% of our annual target of \$600 billion.

Where does the remaining \$60 billion a year come from?

Since the Great Recession of 2008-2009 the Federal Reserve Bank has, under section 13(3) of the Federal Reserve Act, supported liquidity to the financial markets, including money market funds, corporate bonds, commercial paper, junk bonds, and private equity firms, to the tune of \$6 trillion. Over the past three months through the CARES Act the federal government has committed \$3 trillion in grants and loans to businesses and individuals.

Maybe Congress could pass the "We Really, Really Do Care About the Planet and Its People Act" to gin up the remaining \$60 billion a year.

Short of that, Gerald Epstein, Co-Director of PERI, has an interesting idea. On April 9, 2020, the Federal Reserve Bank announced the creation of the Municipal Liquid Facility. This allows the FED for the first time to purchase up to \$500 billion worth of state and local bonds.

Epstein posits an interesting argument for funding public education through capital budgets rather than through current expenditure budgets, usually constrained by balanced budget requirements. Instead he suggests referring to education expenditures using traditional economic terminology, i.e. investing in "human capital." See the full report on PERI website.

For our purposes the Federal Reserve Bank could, with rule changes and the go ahead from the executive branch, purchase state or regional Green New Deal Bonds setting whatever maturity and interest rate they choose.

Money is not the impediment to investing in the Green/Black/Brown/Red New Deal.

*Jeff Johnson is a retired President of the Washington State Labor Council and a member of PSARA's Executive Board.*

# Workers Demand Change; Amazon Buys a Sign

By Bobby Righi

What happens when the richest man in the world suddenly makes a promise to fight climate change? A soft green glow from a neon "Climate Pledge" washes over a sports arena in Seattle. What better example is there of "greenwashing?"

Jeff Bezos has worked to stay one step ahead of Amazon workers as they demand he takes steps to address the tons of greenhouse gasses his company spews into the atmosphere. He bought the naming rights to Key Arena.

Last September 20, thousands of Amazon tech workers around the world walked out in solidarity with the Global Climate Strike. Months before, in April 2019, tech workers, organized as Amazon Workers for Climate Justice (AWCJ), sent a letter to Jeff Bezos demanding three things: that the company commit to zero emissions by 2030, that Amazon Web Services (AWS) stop working with fossil fuel companies, and that Amazon stop supporting climate deniers. Over 8,300 Amazon workers signed it.

On September 19, the day before the Global Climate Strike, Jeff Bezos went to the National Press Club in Washington, DC, to announce his "Climate Pledge" to make Amazon net zero carbon by 2040. Details about his plan were not clear. What is abundantly clear is that this was a result of the AWCJ organizing and demanding action on climate change.

Earlier, in May 2019, after telling workers he had no plans to do anything about climate change, he learned that the workers who are also shareholders planned to bring a climate resolution to the shareholders meeting that month. AWCJ workers learned that AWS was helping big oil and gas companies like Exxon and Saudi ARAMCO identify new fossil fuel reserves and extract oil and gas faster. The workers took their resolution to the shareholders meeting of May 2019, including the demand that Amazon stop supporting big oil.

Then in February 2020 Bezos publicized his \$10 billion "Bezos Earth

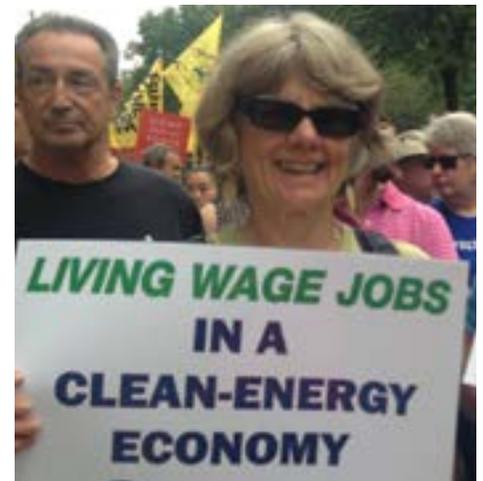
Fund" just before the planned walkout of thousands of Amazon workers for the global climate strike. He did not acknowledge any role of the Amazon workers in influencing him. Though \$10 billion is a lot, it is less than a third of what he has made just since the COVID-19 crisis began, and less than seven percent of his total wealth.

This is philanthro-capitalism: extremely wealthy people setting up funds with all of the excess profits that they should be paying taxes on. Rather than the population at large helping to decide on how the money is spent, the 1% get to make all of the decisions. Bezos says he will fund creative (and profitable?) solutions to climate change.

Solutions to climate change are already known: Stop burning fossil fuels and repair the damage to communities that have been ravaged by pollution and fires and storms. Help poor countries move to clean energy infrastructure. The Amazon workers responded to Bezos's grandstanding with the following statement: "We applaud Jeff Bezos' philanthropy, but one hand cannot give what the other is taking away."

The people of Planet Earth need to know: When is Amazon going to stop helping oil and gas companies ravage our earth with still more oil and gas wells? When is Amazon going to stop funding climate-denying think tanks like the Competitive Enterprise Institute and climate-delaying policy? When will Amazon take responsibility for the lungs of children near its warehouses by moving from diesels to all-electric trucking?

Since March when the COVID-19 lockdown began, Bezos's personal wealth has increased by \$36.2 billion dollars to \$149 billion! Amazon has not been generous to the warehouse workers and will not disclose the numbers of workers who have tested positive in their facilities. As of now, eight warehouse workers have died from the



Bobby Righi

virus and thousands made ill. Workers organized to demand protections and hazard pay (\$2 per hour extra). Two workers, one in Queens, NY, and one in Minnesota were fired for leading walkouts and speaking up.

In early April, Bezos showed his true colors when two Seattle Amazon tech workers active in AWCJ were fired after making plans to support warehouse workers and pledging financial support to them. Some 1,500 tech workers had signed to help. Nothing is more frightening to CEOs than strong workers' solidarity. One of the Amazon workers said, "Our work organizing within Amazon has taught me that the real power in corporations lies with the workers." It is important to keep these words in mind as we fight for climate justice.

We will unite climate activists and workers to fight together for programs in the Green New Deal resolution: Paying a living wage to the people who care for others, repairing rampant wealth inequality, providing health care, housing, and education to all, and a universal job guarantee, just to give a partial list. How to pay for it? The billionaires are getting richer by the minute and their money needs to be put to work for the common good.

Bobby Righi is Co-Chair of PSARA's Climate and Environmental Justice Committee.

# Black Lives: Wealth and Reparations

By Michael Righi

George Floyd was murdered by the police on a street in a neighborhood in Minneapolis that had been “redlined” by the federal government in the post World War II era. The neighborhood was deemed “Grade D – hazardous,” since it was “majority colored, with lots of poor Jews.”

That meant it was near impossible to get an FHA loan, the New Deal government program that was subsidizing the accumulation of housing wealth in “Grade A neighborhoods.” That is, white ones. (From 1934 to 1962, 98% of FHA loans went to whites). The federal government is the guarantor of white privilege.

Over time white communities were able to use tax revenue from increasing home values to build schools and parks. This revenue also funded policing in the Black opportunity deserts left behind by government policy.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a long and well-documented history of discrimination against Black farmers. They could not get access to the credit or crop insurance necessary to sustain their farms, let alone expand them. In 1910, 14 percent of US farmers were Black; in 2012, it was only 1.6 percent. Black farmers lost 80 percent of their land from 1910 to 2007. The federal government is the guarantor of white privilege.

## The Racial Wealth Gap

What families own is key to their well-being in this economy. Wealth (assets such as housing and savings, minus debt) is a backstop in times of medical or job crisis, can provide income, and enables education and inheritance for children. Lack of wealth has been a defining feature of Black life since slavery.

A Yale poll showed that we imagine Black household wealth today to be 90% of white wealth. It's not. It's more like 10%, with median Black family wealth at \$16,000, compared to \$162,000 for whites. Over one-third of



Michael Righi

Black households have no (or negative) wealth to draw on.

Wealth has gone down for Black households since the 2008 financial crisis, as they had been particularly targeted by subprime lenders (“reverse redlining”), then foreclosed without government help as the Obama administration rushed to bail out the banks and their owners. Wealth disparity is rooted deeply in structural government policy.

We are, of course, during the COVID crisis, seeing the same pattern of racist “recovery,” as workers, disproportionately of color, are being economically forced back into their essential jobs. Meanwhile, the wealth of US billionaires has climbed by \$500 billion over the last several months. White millionaires now own over 80% of all wealth.

In 1862, during the Civil War, Lincoln and Congress passed the Compensated Emancipation Act, abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia. Who was compensated? The enslavers, up to \$300 for each slave person freed.

Slave labor on cotton plantations had made both the South and the financial cities of the North wealthy. But, once war and Reconstruction after the war ended, former slaves were forced back to sharecropping labor. What alternative did they have? No land, no compensation, no pensions -- all of

these were demanded by Black abolitionists.

## Reparations Now!

Historical injustices have created today's structural racism and racial wealth gap. Injustice requires repair. Reparations to our Black sisters and brothers are due.

Yes, we need Medicare for All, guaranteed incomes for all when the unemployment rate is high, a federal jobs guarantee, and social housing. But that does not repair the wealth gap, the accumulated racism of a century and a half. We cannot just “move on.”

Black organizations, academics, leaders, and activists are calling for reparations. HR 40 was introduced in Congress in 1989 by John Conyers to set up a commission on reparations and foster a national dialogue. It has basically been ignored. It is now cosponsored by 135 Democratic representatives. What about the rest of them?

Some are proposing payments to descendants of slaves, others are proposing programs that help Black communities close the wealth gap. One idea is that every law passed by Congress be evaluated for its impact on racial wealth disparity. Another idea is to cancel all Black student and farm debt. Whatever the approach, let us be clear that, if the federal government can throw trillions of dollars at corporations during COVID, we can certainly work to repair the damage of our history.

Reparations will involve monetary remedies, no doubt. We need to transform the energy of demonstrations in hundreds of cities and towns across the country against police murders into real, structural change, actual funded repair. This is a battle about US history, how we interpret it, and whose voices are listened to. That needs repair as well. What are we waiting for?

*Michael Righi is a retired economics professor and a member of the Retiree Advocate Editorial Board.*

# Seattle City Council Member Dan Strauss Replies to PSARA

Thank you for your email regarding the continued use of force by Seattle Police against nonviolent protestors. We have received thousands of emails and hours of voicemail on this topic, which is why I am sending you and others this message. This message may not address your specific concerns, so if you are a District 6 resident and you would like to speak with me directly about this or any topic - please sign up [with my office] so that we can coordinate a time to meet.

Last week, my council colleagues and I were successful at ending the ineffective curfew. Nonviolent protests continued throughout the week and into the weekend.

\* On Friday we received assurances from the Mayor that tear gas would not be used and de-escalation techniques would be used as the response to nonviolent assembly of Seattle residents.

\* On Saturday when chemical agents, flashbangs, and pepper spray were used on nonviolent residents I went to the Police line on 11th and Pine with other elected leaders to de-escalate tensions. Our efforts were effective and chemical agents were not deployed for the remainder of the night.

\* On Sunday during the day we were again assured the Seattle Police Department's focus would be de-escalation. Sunday night I witnessed a nonviolent, yet tense encroachment of the police line met with nearly two and a half hours of gas, grenades, spray, and rubber bullets deployed on Seattle residents. These military grade weapons were used after the Mayor assured Seattle a proportional use of force would be used in the worst-case scenario. I do not believe two and a half hours of military grade weapons deployed on Seattle residents as a response to a nonviolent assembly exercising first amendment rights is a proportional use of force.

\* On Monday morning I made remarks at Council Briefing about what occurred over the weekend. [Refer to

the video of the June 28 Council briefing. Strauss begins speaking at minute 57:25.]

The use of force over the last ten days has eroded public trust and changed our city's collective agreement on police response. What we are seeing is a shift in public perception, and it is now our job to update policies to reflect this change of what is understood to be acceptable use of force during peaceful or nonviolent assemblies of people exercising their 1st amendment rights.

Our oversight bodies of the Community Police Commission, Office of Police Accountability, and Office of Inspector General are currently reviewing more than 15,000 complaints submitted over the last ten days and I look forward to receiving their official recommendations detailing when policy was followed and when it was not. It is clear that we need to act, and we must center the voices of those most impacted.

We must listen to our Black community, we must believe our Black community, and we must fund the strategies black and brown led groups identify, in order to create lasting change to our

systems. I understand our Black community is not monolithic and there are many voices we need to listen to. I am committed to listening and doing the hard work of dismantling racist systems.

We have so much work to do. Until we have a better system in place, I will continue to support the offices of Police Accountability, Inspector General, our Community Police Commission and I will refuse to fund the militarization – at any level – of our police force. We need to simultaneously strengthen our accountability offices and de-militarize our police force.

My position as a white male and as an elected official makes me even more responsible when it comes to fixing what is broken. When white people are silent in moments like these, it is an act of aggression because silence allows injustices to persist unchecked. I will continue to use my voice and my power to make change – now. #BlackLivesMatter.

Thank you for your email and never hesitate to reach out.

—Dan

## John Lewis 1940-2020

**“We are involved now in a serious revolution. This nation is still a place of cheap political leaders who build their careers on immoral compromises and ally themselves with open forms of political, economic, and social exploitation. What political leader here can stand up and say, 'My party is the party of principles?’”**

**John Lewis, *March: Book Two***



## Young People and Social Security

Continued from Page 3

How is raising the retirement age a benefit cut? Due to the way benefits are calculated, every one-year raise in the definition of "full retirement age" is equivalent to an approximate 6.5% reduction in benefits, regardless of the year one actually retires. Think of it as a reset of the graph. What people used to get at 65, you don't get till you're 67. What they used to get at 67, you don't get till you're 69, etc. Regardless of the year you actually retire, you get less than what you would have gotten before the change.

And recently Republicans have proposed raising it once again, to 69 this time (Romney in 2016, for example).

We cannot let this happen again. Millennials, and the generation Z that follows them, will likely be even more dependent on Social Security in retirement than generation X and boomers. We must make the wealthy pay their fair share, not balance the program on the backs of the younger generation.

Millennials need to know that PSARA is in this fight, uniting generations for a secure future. PSARA advocates for:

- \* Scrapping the cap and taking any other steps, such as taxing unearned income, in order to stabilize the fund far into the future;

- \* Increasing benefits for all current and future recipients, and especially for the lowest-income earners. PSARA strongly opposes any benefit cuts that would impact future generations whether through raising the retirement age or allowing benefits to erode through inadequate cost-of-living adjustments;

- \* Restoring college benefits for surviving and dependent children (this valuable benefit was eliminated in 1981);

- \* Creating a caretaker credit.

*Linda Peterson is Chair of PSARA's Education Committee.*

## Raise Revenue, Invest in People

Continued from Page 5

out federally recognized immigration status didn't get any of that aid. Democrats in the US House back in the other Washington already passed extensions of those programs and at least a partial bailout for state and local government budgets, but the Republicans who control the US Senate and the current occupant of the White House are trying to pretend COVID-19 has vanished and we can all just return to the way things were.

Our State Legislature should use a special session to raise taxes on the wealthiest corporations and high-income individuals rather than further immiserating people and driving our state into deeper recession. Despite Washington's progressive reputation and the relatively strong labor standards we've won here, our state has some of the most extreme income inequality in the country. Some of the wealthiest people on the planet live in the Seattle area, along with hundreds of thousands of highly paid professional and tech workers. Their comfy lifestyles are made possible by the millions of low- to moderate-wage workers in child care, restaurants, food production, personal services, retail, and so on -- who are being priced out of Seattle and other urban centers.

And Washington has the worst tax system in the country, overtaxing low-income households and letting the well-to-do get by without contributing.

Over the past few years, legislators have introduced several progressive revenue bills they could enact now. These include Sen. Joe Nguyen's (D-West Seattle) bill to tax corporations that choose to pay high salaries, the capital gains tax on households with large stock portfolios, and increasing the tax on multi-million dollar estates. If they were really bold, they could scrap our regressive tax system altogether and institute a progressive income tax -- like most other states have (Idaho, Wisconsin, and South Carolina, for example).

We need those funds reinvested in housing, health care, income support, and community empowerment, not left in the pockets of the comfortably wealthy. Our elected representatives are bombarded with messages telling them to cut, cut, cut. They need to hear from us, too.

*Marilyn Watkins is Policy Director of the Economic Opportunity Institute and a member of PSARA.*

### To Renew or Donate

PSARA Education Fund

321 16th Avenue S, Seattle WA 98144

- 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

Once again, all PSARA events will be held online. For the zoom links, email [organizer@psara.org](mailto:organizer@psara.org)

### **PSARA Climate and Environmental**

**Justice Committee:** 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., Thursday, August 6.

**PSARA Government Relations Committee:** Noon – 1:30 p.m., Thursday, August 6.

**PSARA Fundraising Committee:** 11:00 a.m. - Noon, Monday, August 10.

**PSARA Education Committee:** 2 p.m., Tuesday, August 11.

**Webinar: The Link Between Racial Justice, COVID-19, and the Green New Deal:** Noon - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, August 12. See Page 1 for details.

**PSARA Southend Committee:** 1:00 – 2:30 p.m., Thursday, August 13. Topic: Health Care for All, Why We Need it Now More Than Ever. Presented by David Loud and Steve Bauck.

**PSARA Race and Gender Equity Committee:** 11 a.m.–12:00 p.m., Thursday, August 20.

**PSARA Membership Meeting:** 1:00 p.m., Thursday, August 20.

## Summer Taylor, Rest In Power

Summer Taylor was killed in the early morning of July 4, at a Black Femme March for Black Lives on I-5. They were only 24. A driver plowed into the demonstrators as they were dancing the Cupid Shuffle on the roadway.

Summer knew the risks they were running by participating in a street action while Proud Boys roamed Seattle and police were out of control.

“To say I'm scared ... to be going out and protesting this weekend is an understatement,” they wrote in a July 3 Facebook post.

“Still, we need to protect Black women. So I think I'll get in the streets to live stream again tonight.”