

The Retiree **ADVOCATE**

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

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February 2021

**What Do We
Do Now?**
By *Cindy Domingo*
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Join Us for a Webinar, Tuesday, February 2, 5:00 p.m. PT

Disadvantaged: How Medicare Advantage Plans Fail Us and Would Sabotage Medicare for All

Please join us at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 2, and hear a panel of experts discuss the problems of private Medicare Advantage plans and the danger they pose to achieving Medicare for All.

PSARA has long been active in the “Health Care is a Human Right” coalition. We believe healthcare is a right for all people, not just retirees. As the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, the need for national universal health care has become painfully obvious and urgent. Ideas range from a fully public, single-payer system, such as an expanded and improved Medicare for All, to simply advocating for the inclusion of a “public option” in a hybrid system that would still be dominated by private insurance.

Are there lessons we can draw from our current Medicare system? It is already a hybrid of public and private. There are two alternative routes to coverage: via traditional Medicare (parts A and B) or via Medicare Advantage plans (part C) offered by private insurers. Private insurers have been aggressively marketing Medicare Advantage plans, and retirees are increasingly opting for them over traditional Medicare.

Our panel features Wendell Potter, a health insurance industry whistleblower; Diane Archer, a lifelong health care advocate; and Mark Dudzik, national coordinator for the Labor Campaign for Single Payer. They are all highly critical of the role of private insurers. Please join us to hear why they believe Medicare Advantage plans fail us, and why they would sabotage an expanded and improved Medicare for All.



Lou and Friends A Concert

Saturday, February 27, 4:00 p.m.

“A good song reminds us what we're fighting for.” – Pete Seeger

Please join PSARA for a singalong concert with four Northwest artists: Jean Geiger, Peter McKee, Tom Rawson, and Lou Truskoff. These musicians perform together at the Northwest Folklife Festival's Pete Seeger stage, where they've continued to delight audiences with the inspirational and high-spirited songs of folk icon Pete Seeger. Now they will bring Seeger's music and similar songs right into your home, in a benefit event for PSARA.

A little more about the performers:

Jean Geiger is a beloved host and producer of the popular radio show *Folk-sounds*, which airs weekly on KBCS 91.3 FM. She holds Pete Seeger as one of her heroes, and embraces any chance to sing his songs. Besides folk-revival songs, Jean sings chanteys and maritime music with *Strikes A Bell*, and plays guitar and banjo with the contra dance band *Sound Crossing*.

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Lou and Friends

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Tom Rawson is a folk singer, storyteller, songwriter, and Quaker peace activist from Orcas Island. Armed with longneck banjo and other weapons of mass delight, Tom is a master of warmth and wit who travels throughout the Northwest sharing his musical treasures. From gospel to contemporary, profound to downright silly, Tom will have you singing, clapping, and laughing right along.

Peter McKee is a banjo player and a founding member of "Seattle's Slowest Rising Folk Group," Clallam County, which performs together throughout Washington State. Since 2012 Peter has also been performing his one-man show "Pete: The Songs and Times of Pete Seeger." For the last six years, Peter has co-lead the Northwest Folklife Festival's annual "Pete Seeger sing-along" event, which he hopes will be able to resume in 2021.

Lou Truskoff is a founding member of the Seattle Labor Chorus. He has been singing songs and encouraging others to do the same for most of his life. Over the years, Lou and his guitar have brought music and spirit to countless demonstrations and picket lines. He is well known to PSARA members for his rousing singalongs, and was recognized at the PSARA winter meeting for his outstanding contributions to the organization through his music.

Please join Jean, Tom, Peter, and Lou as they bring the power of song into your home in the tradition of Pete Seeger. The event is a fund-raiser for PSARA. Proceeds will help us pursue our robust agenda for 2021 and beyond. Donations are voluntary, and everyone is invited, whether or not you can make a contribution.

The event will be held on February 27 at 4:00 p.m. at the renowned Zoom Theatre for the Performing Arts (also known as your home computer). Please watch your email inbox for the Zoom link. We look forward to seeing you there.

What We Need To Do

By Richard Grassl

Many of us have had the opportunity to visit Cuba and witness the remarkable results of the Cuban Revolution. Some of us spent 16 years in a loose coalition to help free the Cuban Five, who went underground in Miami, FL. to expose violent anti-communist extremists seeking to overthrow a legally constituted, sovereign, independent government in Cuba. There are some lessons to be learned from this struggle, including the value of solidarity, cooperation, and continuity of thought and action. These values helped to make the release of the Cuban Five a reality.

It has taken another four years to uproot a neoliberal, quasi-fascist, and undemocratic administration in Washington, DC. It took solidarity, cooperation, and continuity of thought and action to achieve this goal.

Joe Biden promised as his first goal to take leadership concerning the COVID-19 pandemic that Trump abandoned. The THRIVE resolution must be re-introduced systematically, piece by piece, in the new Congress. Organizations and their focus groups can coordinate their work to inspire and motivate their constituents and allies to pressure Congress to act.

Action will be possible if the unity displayed in the latest PSARA newsletter is expanded to include the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in society. We know the two-party system is unworkable. Yet, in the face of economic recession and depression, tackling climate change policy, eliminating racial disparity, and fixing a broken health care system point out the direction to "build back better."

To give these words meaning, let us stop pointing fingers, in order to allow progressive leadership from Elizabeth Warren, Pramila Jayapal, the Squad, Bernie Sanders, Stacey Abrams, and others to filter down to the American people. After all, 81 million voters cannot be wrong when we have the political will to do what is right.

Richard Grassl, is a retired Union carpenter, living in Pasco, He is a member of Carpenters Local #30 and a PSARA member.

PSARA Jumps Into 2021

Political Action Day, Friday, February 16

By Pam Lux

As 2021 starts I begin my second year as the PSARA president. Last year certainly presented a lot of challenges to all of us. For me it meant that I didn't meet many of you, so I'll begin with a brief introduction. I'm a retired Public School Employee (SEIU 1948) and spent my career in the Special Education area.

My husband, Tom, and I have spent most of our adult lives involved with social issues. Our children have been on picket lines and at rallies their whole lives, and now you will see our granddaughters at the same events. It's important that each generation understands the political issues facing us.

When I was preparing to retire, I attended the pre-retirement meeting offered by my school district. As I sat through it my eyes rolled back, and I was completely overwhelmed and unsure what plan (state, Advantage, standard Medicare) I should choose.

I finally picked one, but wasn't sure why. During that first year I got the flu and went for a prescription at my local Bartell's. Then I learned that I had failed to sign up for a drug plan. It hadn't seemed necessary since I was fortunate to not be on any regular medication. When I tried to sign up for a drug plan during the following open enrollment, I was informed, when I finally found a plan that would take me, I'd be paying a monthly penalty for the rest of my life.

Since then I have been educated into the pitfalls and Catch 22's of the whole system. Linda Peterson and her education committee have presented workshops on the retirement and Medicare systems. Wish I had known this earlier.

On February 2, PSARA is presenting an informative webinar titled "Disadvantaged: How the Medicare Advantage Plans Fail Us and Sabotage Medicare for All." We have a nationally-known panel scheduled to share their insights into what is happening now



Pam Lux

and where we need to go. Please try to attend.

2020 (my granddaughter called it a four letter word) brought so many social issues to the forefront and PSARA was, as usual involved: participating in rallies, educating our members, and forming coalitions to achieve our mission. The Climate and Environment Justice Committee has been working the Race and Gender Equity Committee (RAGE) hosting happy hours to discuss the impact of climate change and other social issues on communities of color. You should join us. I grab my cup of tea and listen, and WOW what I have learned. In 2020 the RAGE Committee organized a rally supporting BLM. The Committee is currently working on a PSARA position paper on reparations.

Our Fundraising Committee has scheduled an array of events for this year. Concerts, authors sharing their books, an original play, storytelling, and lots more. Check in the *Retiree Advocate* for the dates and times. I'll see you there.

I came into the presidency through the Government Relations Committee (GRC). I believe that we can make

changes in our government and our lives through political action. As the new legislative session begins, I remember how we lobby for our causes. As you saw in the *Advocate*, our legislative agenda is focused on NO CUTS to social services and raising progressive revenue.

Like me, you got up early, drove one-and-a-half to three hours to Olympia, looked for convenient parking, walked around the Hill, sat outside offices and waited for our appointment with our legislator only to find out they were unavailable and we would meet with an assistant. After our last appointment, usually late in the day, we then drove home at rush hour past Fort Lewis/McChord, through Tacoma, and of course sat on the freeway through Seattle. Once home we got a call that our issue would be heard at committee, and we'd do it all over again several times each session. When we are finally successful in getting our legislation passed -- five years for the Long-Term Care Trust Act -- we went back down for the signing of the bill. We will miss all that this year, or will we? The legislative session will be virtual this year.

To adapt to this, PSARA will have a Political Action Day from the comfort of your own home. On February 16 we are asking you to call or email you legislators. We will send you contact information, and a brief script to use. Legislators who received at least one phone call from a constituent asking them to support a certain bill were 11-12 percent more likely to support the legislation, an effect independent of the legislators' party or gender.

Please mark your calendar for this important advocacy opportunity.

I hope you all stay safe at home and continue to participate in the great PSARA events.

Pam Lux is PSARA's President.

COVID-19 is Not Race and Ethnicity Neutral

By Steve Bauck and Vanetta Molson

It has now been a year since the first US covid-19 case was discovered in Washington State. All our lives have been tremendously impacted by the pandemic, but we have all read that the impact has not been distributed evenly.

COVID-19 infections and deaths starkly reflect deep-seated structural inequalities that disproportionately impact black, indigenous, and people of color. In Washington State the age-adjusted rate of death per 100,000 stood in December at 34.1 for whites, 39.6 for Asians, 59.6 for Blacks, 103.2 for Native Americans and Alaska Natives, 124.1 for Latinx, and 227.2 for Pacific Islanders. These disparities are not surprising given our country's other pandemic of long-term structural racism, highlighted by the murder of George Floyd in May and the insurrection by racist mobs on January 6.

According to the 2018 annual survey by the Census Bureau, heading into the pandemic Blacks and Pacific Islanders were nearly twice as likely as whites to be without health insurance, and American Indians and Hispanics over three times as likely. Many millions more were underinsured.

While many workers have been able to work from home during the pandemic, essential workers who risk infection both on their commute and at work are disproportionately people of color. They have experienced higher rates of unemployment due to the pandemic leading not only to a loss of income, but often a loss of health insurance for those who had it.

African Americans, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Hispanics, and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders all have significantly higher rates than whites for two co-morbidity factors for COVID-19: obesity and diabetes. Both diseases are linked with lower income, lower environmental quality, and food insecurity, all of which disproportionately impact people of color. There is an even more direct correlation to the impact of racial inequity. Recent studies have found

that the stress on individuals who daily face the micro-aggressions of racism increases the risk of diabetes and obesity.

A more subtle form of racism impacting health status is implicit bias--unconscious beliefs about groups of people that shape our behavior even when we consciously have different beliefs. In recent years there have been a series of studies linking implicit bias in the medical field to disparities of treatment for racial and ethnic minorities. One study, for example, found that Black women were less likely than white women to receive radiotherapy after a breast cancer operation. Not only can implicit bias effect health care for individuals, but implicit bias erodes confidence in the health care system for those who experience it.

Universal single payer health insurance like Enhanced Medicare for All would greatly reduce racial inequities in health care. Everyone would have access to quality health care, including preventive care. Current proposals include specific provisions to monitor

and reduce racial inequity, including strategies to reduce implicit bias. Funding for hospitals would be changed to increase resources for hospitals in poor urban communities and rural areas.

As vital as universal single payer health insurance is, it alone will not solve the health inequities based on race and ethnicity. Issues of racial justice in health care are inextricably linked to issues of employment, education, the environment, housing, and our legal system. A report from the National Academy of Sciences stated the issue well in 2017:

"There are systemic root causes of health inequities in this country that... will require system-level changes to eliminate structural racism, reduce poverty, improve income equality, increase educational opportunity and fix the laws and policies that perpetuate structural inequalities. Until these root causes are addressed nationally, health equity will not be fully realized."

Steve Bauck and Vanetta Molson are PSARA's Outreach Co-Vice Presidents.

The Barbed Wire

By Barbara Flye



What Do We Do Now?

By Cindy Domingo

As I write this article about what we need to do now as social movements, Trump has just left the White House, and Joe Biden and Kamala Harris have just been sworn into office. However, I find it hard to wallow in celebration as I did twelve years ago when I was in Washington, DC to celebrate the swearing in of the first Black President, Barack Obama. The events of January 6 weigh heavy on my mind and soul as I reflect on how divided our country is over race. For me, our country will find it hard to move on if we do not address the issue of racism and white privilege. We must make significant headway towards seriously dealing with the legacy of slavery and racial capitalism and how it manifests itself in our society today. It is our paramount duty to understand both the development of the right-wing populist movement in the US and how it is rooted in racism.

No one could have imagined the backlash of electing former President Obama and the ability of Donald Trump to galvanize the white united front that had been part of US history for hundreds of years. The riots in Washington, DC and the overwhelming white male insurrectionists made their message clear that “we are the defenders of democracy” and that people of color and immigrants do not have the right to determine the outcome of elections or even have the right to vote. The Trump administration spent four years blaming the ills of capitalism on immigrants and people of color. January 6 represented the culmination of the racist, chauvinistic, xenophobic, misogynistic hysteria that Trump pushed day after day during his administration.

So, what do we need to do is the question. In a November Zoom webinar featuring labor activist and political analyst Bill Fletcher, Jr, he described the period that we are living in as the “cold civil war.” Fletcher went on to further



Cindy Domingo

elaborate that while we have experienced other periods like this one, this particular “cold civil war” has a particular intensity because of the armed wing of the right-wing populist movement, the degree of voter suppression targeting the African American communities and other communities of color, and the effectiveness of the message of voter fraud. We saw on January 6 the messages of this “cold civil war” and the violence that the white right-wing populist movement will take to carry forth their program.

We must respond in a broad front to dismantle the power of that movement because the “cold civil war” is being fought over whether our democracy will continue to survive.

We must push for a national dialogue on race with a critical analysis towards truth and reparations. Only then can we have reconciliation, and only then can we build a united front on the other pressing issues confronting us as a society.

Every issue that was covered in the January *Retiree Advocate* goes back to race and the disproportionate impact on people of color – be it the issue of climate crisis, economic injustice, health care, the impact of the pandemic, or Social Security and the safety net. But the other side of the coin of race which is white privilege must be taken up. Our white allies must acknowledge that racism benefits white people and, therefore, white allies play an important role in this dialogue. Likewise, communities of color are divided as seen by the growing numbers of sectors in the Latinx and Asian American populations who voted for Trump.

Today, I must think of the peoples’ struggles that give us hope. We can look to the incredible movements in Georgia, Nevada, Arizona, and Texas that are building movements across racial, ethnic, gender, and sectoral lines. People of color and organized labor played decisive roles in all these states. PSARA can play an important role in building an anti-racist movement in Washington State. As a progressive organization that has built power around many important issues, if PSARA became a consolidated anti-racist organization, putting forth on a consistent basis a coherent anti-racist perspective on the issues we work on, it could be enormously powerful and empowering and inspiring to the young people that we encounter.

Note: Bill Fletcher, Jr’s presentation on November 13, 2020, “Post-Election Reckoning” can be found on Pirate TV, on YouTube, or on LELO-Seattle’s Facebook page.

Cindy Domingo is a member of PSARA and the Chair of A Legacy of Equality Leadership and Organizing (LELO).

No More “Cap and Trade” Games

By Bobby Righi

Here we are at the beginning of a new year and a new administration. We are hopeful and breathing a big sigh of relief, but looking over our shoulders for what new monster might be appearing out of the murk of white supremacy, rampant inequality, and climate disasters we have been wandering in. We are facing crises everywhere we look, and to address these we need big, sweeping, visionary solutions.

But SB5126, introduced in the Washington Senate at the request of Governor Inslee and called the “Washington State Climate Commitment” is **not** big, sweeping, and visionary. It is a “cap and trade” bill and is way too little and way too late. It is an attempt to let “the market” solve the problem, but as we know from experience with health care, food, housing, and transportation, “the market” does not solve problems and usually makes things worse. We need regulation of greenhouse emissions – definite limits on what can be spewed into the air and water that we all depend on for life.

PSARA is opposed to cap and trade programs because these plans have not worked to lower greenhouse gas emissions. The state sets a cap on emissions, but it is usually set so that the limits are easy to meet. The state also issues emission permits that companies can buy or trade to emit more. In nearly all cases, these permits are priced too low. Some businesses get a free pass – free permits -- because they might leave the state otherwise. Companies can also “offset” their emissions by investing in forests or other carbon sinks. Emissions do not go down.

California has one of the world’s largest and oldest cap and trade programs, which is touted as a big success. But almost all the CO₂ savings came from the electricity sector, which cut its use of imported power from out-of-state coal plants – a one-time decrease. Carbon emissions from the oil and gas industry

actually rose 3.5 percent since cap and trade began. Refineries, including one owned by Marathon Petroleum and two owned by Chevron, are consistently the largest polluters in the state. Emissions from vehicles are also rising. People in neighborhoods near refineries and roads are facing more pollution and health risks from respiratory and cardiovascular disease.

Cap and trade is not stringent enough. Direct regulations on refineries and cars are crucial to reining in emissions. But oil and gas representatives are engaged in a worldwide effort to make market-based solutions the only way their emissions are regulated. In California, when the cap and trade bill was renewed in 2017, petroleum lobbyists inserted a provision that forbids local entities like cities and counties to limit emissions in their areas. Residents of Richmond, location of a big Chevron refinery, fought hard against this rule, but the lobbyists won.

Cap and trade is a way to make it look like something is happening to limit emissions, but it allows for lots of backdoor manipulation of the details, and that always comes out in favor of the fossil fuel giants. We have to join our allies Front and Centered and UFCW21 and insist that SB5126 be dropped or substantially changed. We don’t have time to play this game anymore.

PSARA will join with allies to support other bills, especially SB 5141, the HEAL Act, which creates an Environmental Justice Council composed of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color representatives to help our state agencies incorporate environmental justice at all levels. We should support HB1084 and SB5093, which promote energy efficiency in new and existing buildings and would help lower our fossil fuel emissions while creating huge savings on energy bills. We also support bills that update the Washington Growth



Bobby Righi

Management Act (GMA): HB1099, which adds climate goals to the GMA, HB 1220 supporting affordable housing, and HB1117, which includes plans for salmon recovery in the GMA.

Progressive forces have been rising out of the mess we are in: youth, Indigenous people, Black and Brown communities, progressive environmentalists, and unions organizing to develop plans and make demands of action by Biden. PSARA has joined with these forces to sign on to the Build Back Fossil Free campaign, which demands that Biden enact executive orders that would, among other things, protect and invest in communities hardest hit, and launch a Climate Mobilization to deliver jobs and opportunity. We have to keep pushing our new president to take bold steps to promote equality and justice for all and dissipate the murk we have been wandering around in.

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

Caste, a Book by Isabel Wilkerson

By Larry Gossett

Caste is the newest book by Isabel Wilkerson. It follows *The Warmth of Other Suns*, a book describing the often very dangerous migration of African Americans from the South to industrial cities in the north and western parts of the US.

Ms. Wilkerson received critical acclaim for her contributions to Black history, describing the discrimination, racism, and Jim Crow oppression that characterized the day-to-day existence of Black folks living under the cruel system of white supremacy in the South. *The Warmth of Other Suns* also discussed the discrimination in housing and jobs available to Black southerners and the conditions of the already over-crowded ghettos in which they were forced to live. When they got work it was unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Despite the jobs paying Black workers two and three times their wages down South, it was still one-third to one-half the pay of white co-workers. The quality of education the majority of Black children of these migrants received was deplorable, though better than what they had gotten down South.

Caste re-examines the Black communities' historical experience in the United States in a deeper way than Ms. Wilkerson has done thus far. It provides a more comprehensive understanding of how social divisions among people beginning in Colonial America were fundamentally based on white supremacy and continue to this day.

Ms. Wilkerson notes that elite settlers from England exploited the land and darker skinned people they discovered in North America. The ruling elite sought to divide people they wanted to control and plunder their labor as servants and slaves on the basis of color. To do this they needed an underlining rationale and foundation for doing it. The nature of caste in America is defined by Ms. Wilkerson:

"A caste system is an artificial construction, a fixed and artificial ranking of human status setup according to the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry, for the purpose of the superior group exploiting and dominating the lower ranked groups in the country."

The US social order is better understood when one realizes that it is a caste system begun by 250 years of slavery. The first Africans were brought to Jamestown on a Spanish slave ship in 1619. The "cargo" was 19 Africans whom they wanted to sell as slaves. Wealthy English-speaking planters purchased all 19. They planned to use the Africans as permanent servants and farm laborers. They needed to figure out how to characterize the African slaves as compared to their white indentured servants. The Spanish sailors had referred to their African captives as "Los Negroes" which meant "the Blacks." At a meeting of wealthy farmers in Virginia, it was decided they would start referring to the African slaves as "the Blacks," as a way of distinguishing them from Europeans, whom were considered "whites." That practice continued from that day forward, and additionally the "menacing native population" were characterized as "red people." That decision was put in a motion and passed, unanimously.

Between 1620 and about 1660, all new groups of Europeans became white people, part of the privileged group. By 1660, Colonial North America had passed new legal codes separating the colonialists into racial groupings based on status (e.g. land owners) and ancestry.

The history of the United States demonstrates the founders had no intention to create a country where "all men were created equal." The forefathers managed a system primar-

ily based on economic greed and the enslavement of over one million Black slaves. The wealth of Colonial and post-Revolutionary America was built on the backs of African workers, and it was alright to work them to death as slaves for 12 generations (246 years).

Ms. Wilkerson documents that black people, by the millions, migrated to northern cities, "the promised land," between 1917 and 1950. Blacks who migrated made more money, their kids attended schools a little better than the ones they had attended down South and the ghetto housing was a little better than in the South. However, they were not any closer to real liberation and freedom. They were considered the lower caste.

Take my Daddy by way of example. The last job he had in the spring of 1944 was picking cotton in East Texas. He quit cotton-picking on one May day, when he had worked all day from sun up to sun down. He was supposed to be paid a dollar and fifty cents and the boss man gave him one dollar. When he protested he was told by the boss man, "You better shut up boy, before I have your ass put in jail." Daddy knew that Black people had no rights that whites had to respect, so he shut up. He went straight home and told my mother to call her sister, who had already migrated to Seattle. "Tell her we are going to leave Texas ASAP and join her and her husband in Seattle." When they got to Seattle, Daddy got a job at Todd Shipyard making one dollar per hour. One week later, at King County Hospital, momma found out she was pregnant. That baby was a boy, and he was me.

Y'all know I do not see Seattle as no "promised land."

Larry Gossett is a PSARA Executive Board member and a former Martin Luther King County Council member.

Looking for the Answer to a Victory Punching a Hole Through the Darkness

By Magdaleno Leno Rose-Avila

2020-21 exposed the interior walls of what had been a strong red state that was easily in the pocket of the Republican Party. But something knocked down the doors, and we saw an electorate waiting to be freed. For years their voices would be silenced by racism and voter and economic oppression, but this community of color, sprinkled with good progressives, would not lose hope.

Although MLK and the Southern Christian Leadership were of Atlanta, it was not enough. But it was all an important building block on this stairway to some justice.

Every movement has faced defeat at the polls, in contract negotiations, in the media and yet we continued to find ways to live and, yes, thrive. There is an old Indigenous Mexican saying that says *they thought they could bury us but we were seeds*. Yes, and as seeds we would sprout again

Two years ago Stacey Abrams ran for the governorship of Georgia. This was after years when she and others had done grass roots organizing and voter registration. Her opposition was the current governor who was then the Secretary of State. He refused to recuse himself. What he did in effect was to suppress the vote so that Stacey could not be elected.

In many instances a losing candidate disappears into the political woodwork. But Abrams knew that this struggle for a FAIR FIGHT was bigger than her. And she and others went back to work educating and organizing the communities of color, the youth, and decent minded citizens. Stacey was beaten and bruised and could have quit. Instead, she became more determined to make the change needed to help all the citizens of Georgia.

Our daughter, who works for UPS in Georgia, pushed us to move there, and we did. We ended up in Stone Mountain which is in DeKalb County. We arrived in February of 2020. We had lived

in Atlanta from 1985-88 when I worked with Amnesty International. During my time there I worked the 13 southern bible/death penalty states, and got to work with Coretta Scott King, Reverend Joe Lowery, then Director of SCLC, Concerned Black Clergy, NAACP, and many progressive communities.

Since that time there has been a sea change in the demographics of Georgia. There were major increases of population in the Black and Latino communities. Also, there was a new and more progressive and diverse youthful population coming up and not accepting the norms of yesterday.

The demonstrations around the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others drew tens of thousands of youthful demonstrators for many days joining Black Lives Matter demanding justice and an end to racism. And at almost every event there were folks doing voter registration.

We all knew that the 2020 presidential election was crucial and that we would all need to involve ourselves. Little did we know that the pandemic would change our organizing and campaigning, so historically embedded into our elections cycles. We could not have the person-to-person contacts that we would all like and were accustomed to having.

Quickly we would find ourselves getting organized by Abrams, NAACP, Lean Left, Indivisible, Latinx groups, unions, and others.

November was soon upon us as we were wrapping up our voter registration efforts. We found ourselves worried about the national election. At the same time we began running hard to get out the vote.

I was not sure we could get enough votes to get a Biden win but knew we had to dream the impossible.

The Biden/Harris win surprised everyone, especially the Trump campaign.



Magdaleno Rose-Avila

As everyone now knows, as a result of the vote count the two Senatorial seats would be in a runoff to be held on January 5. This was difficult given the various holidays and office closings.

It was amazing how so many groups locally and nationally focused in on Georgia. Many groups like unions worked both from afar and also sent members to Georgia to work the streets. At the same time conservative groups were using dark money and radical political ads accusing the Democratic candidates of being un-American.

The Democratic party ran a very creative campaign with many different elements, and through hard work and organizing we were able to pull out voters a second time. Historically there is a low turnout for special elections particularly in communities of color. But this time the ground game was strong and effective.

It is incredible that a Black man and a young Jewish man have been elected as the two Senators from a reliably red state. Next up is electing a strong and smart Black woman as governor and making serious changes to the state legislature.

Leno Rose-Avila is a former member of the PSARA Executive Board, a poet, and an activist leader in the movement to abolish capital punishment.

Building a Better SSA, Part 2

By Steve Kofahl

Union officials have added their voices to the call made by Social Security Works, that the incoming Biden Administration rid the Social Security Administration (SSA) of Trump's destructive political appointees.

American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) President Everett Kelley and International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE) President Paul Shearon issued a joint press release on January 5. AFGE and IFPTE officials from the SSA bargaining units followed up with Social Security Works Executive Director Alex Lawson in a January 11 Facebook webinar. SSA workers and their representatives have expressed no confidence in Commissioner Andrew Saul or in Principle Deputy Commissioner David Black.

We don't want Biden to repeat the same mistake Obama did when, against the advice of his transition team, he supported Bush appointee Michael J. Astrue's continuance as Commissioner. Black was his SSA General Counsel, and together they disrespected and marginalized the unions, closed field offices, and severely degraded service. Saul and Black have been far worse, both for SSA workers and for those they serve.

The 35-page "Social Security Transition Report for the Biden Administration" submitted by Social Security Works lays out a set of recommendations to restore the world-class service that workers earn and pay for through their payroll taxes, and surely deserve. It suggests that SSA set a forward-looking research agenda aimed at expanding economic security. Destructive Trump Administration policies, rules, and regulations are identified for corrective action. Improvements in access and customer service, during and after the pandemic are identified. Specifications of potential legislation to expand Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits are presented, to be paid for by requiring that

the wealthy contribute their fair share. It will take years, unfortunately, to fully undo the damage that resulted from years of staff cuts and mismanagement, and to develop forward momentum.

How will we know what the Biden/Harris Administration thinks about the policy and program recommendations made by Social Security Works? An early indication will be what happens to these 10 proposed actions for Day One:

1. Give Commissioner Saul the option to resign or be fired, while removing all SSA political Schedule C employees (including Deputy Commissioner Black).

2. Withdraw, or where necessary freeze and set in motion the withdrawal of, five government-wide anti-union/anti-civil service executive orders and at least six destructive SSA rules/regulations.

3. Instruct SSA and IRS to ensure distribution of all CARES Act payments still due to Social Security and SSI recipients.

4. Extend the number of months over which Trump's deferred 2020 Social Security payroll contributions must be repaid in 2021, to ease hardship.

5. In response to the unusually low number of SSI claims filed in recent months, instruct SSA to assess, reach out, and assist vulnerable communities in order to increase applications and awards.

6. Suspend overpayment collections while the pandemic rages, and instruct SSA to review the whole issue of overpayments to focus instead on improper payments, which include underpayments.

7. Instruct SSA, in close consultation with SSA unions and the CDC, to develop a plan to refurbish offices to make them safe and "green," prioritizing those that serve communities of color and low-income areas where in-person service is most needed.

8. Instruct SSA to review its policies with the goal of getting more money



Steve Kofahl

to Social Security beneficiaries and SSI recipients, and therefore into the economy, and stop garnishment of benefits (e.g. for student debt).

9. Instruct SSA, with advice from the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, to evaluate the long-term impact of COVID-19 on survivors' ability to work.

10. Instruct OMB to revoke its erroneous interpretation of Section 13301(a) of the Budget Enforcement Act of 1990, so that SSA need not compete with other agencies for its administrative funding in the annual appropriations process.

The Social Security Works Transition Report recommendations aim to build a better SSA that respects SSA workers and their unions, and is faithful to the Agency's traditional mission to pay the right amounts, to the right individuals, on time. It can be accessed, along with a lot of other great stuff, at socialsecurityworks.org.

Steve Kofahl is a retired President of AFGE 3937, representing Social Security employees, and a member of PSARA's Executive Board.

Clallam County and Whidbey Island Fight White Supremacy

By Tim Wheeler and Lisa Dekker

The escalation of activity by armed white supremacists is not limited to the storming of the US Capitol. Clallam County, Whidbey Island, Spokane, Snohomish County and the grounds of the Governor's Mansion in Olympia have all seen a ramp-up of anger and intimidation as these groups became emboldened by the now ex-President.

Because PSARA leaders heard about right-wing activity in Clallam and Whidbey and wanted to support PSARA members in both places, they facilitated a Zoom meeting so people from both regions could listen to one another and begin to formulate ways to combat the growing menace.

Two previous articles in the *Advocate* described two frightening incidents in Sequim and Forks (Clallam County) on June 3 when armed vigilantes intimidated -- and in the case in Forks -- harassed citizens. And on this Zoom meeting we heard details about what transpired on Whidbey Island this year. (Note that there is an unfortunate history of extremism on this mostly-rural island. Each year, members of these groups from around the state gather to commemorate the death of neo-Nazi militia founder, Robert Jay Matthews, who died in a long siege of his Whidbey Island hideout by the FBI in 1984.) A PSARA member and Whidbey resident described how the extremist group, Washington Three Percenters (TP or WA3%), staged a mask-less "Freedom to Worship" rally in the small town of Freeland on October 18.

According to the *Seattle Times* that event was organized by Eric Rohde, a prominent WA3% member and recruiter who lives on Whidbey. The bylaws of the 3%er's call for members to carry weapons "every day and everywhere you legally can." In addition, Rohde has been encouraging people to join the Deer Lagoon Grange. As a result, many in Whidbey's more liberal community feared a right-wing takeover of the community meeting space, and some



Tim Wheeler



Lisa Dekker

longtime members quit the organization.

Because they wish to prevent Whidbey from becoming a regional hub for vigilante and white supremacist activity, defenders of the Grange formed a grassroots committee, "Reclaim the Grange." Their goal is to make Whidbey Island "a place where all races and people of all political backgrounds feel welcome and safe." In addition, the Whidbey folks on the Zoom shared "A Call to Hope & Action" with us, a document put together by 11 faith leaders on the island that recognizes the dangers of racism and oppression, and affirms their commitment to hope, healing, and nonviolence.

PSARA also invited Devin Burghart, director of the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights, who fights white nationalism across the Northwest and tracks the activities of the extremists groups in the region. He told meeting participants that he grew up in the shadow of white supremacist terror in Spokane where Aryan Nations was scheming to turn that region into a stronghold of KKK race hatred. "Many said 'just ignore it. It will go away,'" Burghart said. "Over and over again we learned that approach simply does not work. While elected officials and law enforcement hid their heads in the sand, Aryan Nations 'sunk its roots' into the region."

Devin was a great resource as he outlined "Ten Steps for Responding

to Bigoted Organizing in Your Community." Some of the most powerful suggestions: Research and document their activity, alert the community, and encourage civic, religious, and union leaders to speak out against any sign of hate groups. Another suggestion: To revive/recreate the Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity which back in the 1990s was an effective network of 150 organizations. Burghart said, "I'll be happy to facilitate in any way I can a revival of that coalition" in answer to the rising extremist danger.

The key to defeating these racist, anti-science forces in communities is creating broad-based, multiracial coalitions in defense of equality and democracy. "Work to expand your reach beyond your comfort level," Burghart added, including "people of color, immigrants, Muslims... look for unlikely allies" such as pro-vaccine organizations. "Develop a positive message (especially on social media) to counter the message of the ultra-right and also offer alternatives on real issues." As we celebrate our new Democratic administration in DC, not just our rural communities but all of us must recognize that voices of hate and bigotry do live in our midst. Therefore it is our duty to counter these voices by nurturing a strong movement that will create a positive and inclusive community.

Tim Wheeler and Lisa Dekker are PSARA Executive Board members.

Swords Into Ploughshares

Defunding Growlers

By Jeff Johnson

While Floyd and I walked, along the Salish Sea Olympics to the West, Cascades to the East the rhythmic slide of waves. An eagle floating in long lazy circles.

My thoughts tumble as Floyd leads us towards an interesting scent. I find momentary balance, contentment Floyd, head down, determined, moves with a purposeful forward thrust.

A full-throated growl rips asunder, all that had been crescendoing so we stop in our tracks.

The growing growl launched from the river Styx sounds of evil, sounds of death the sound of hubris destroying all that we hold dear.

And then it is quiet, but it is not the same.

These lines of free verse I wrote after a morning walk this past fall with Floyd, our Basset Hound, on South Beach on San Juan Island. It got me to thinking.

The Whidbey Island Naval Air Station is home to the nation's fleet of Growler EA-18G jets (soon to be 118 in number). This fleet is part of the nation's electromagnetic warfare defense system. The purpose of these jets is to jam the communications and launch systems of our enemies.

They also have the effect of jamming the communications and launch systems of humans, marine life (including orcas at depths of 100 feet below the Salish Sea surface), and wildlife.

Residents of Whidbey Island and the Olympic Peninsula have been protesting the Growler noise pollution issue and expansion of this form of military

presence for years. The Navy isn't listening, no pun intended.

In a world where we and our enemies can annihilate each other many multiple times over, its time to ask for the millionth time when is enough, enough.

Isn't it time to deescalate the military? Isn't it time to redefine defense? I am not a pacifist. As a long-time labor leader, I know from history and experience that the working class had to fight and struggle for every thing we have. I understand that we need to have a military presence to defend the country.

But similarly, shouldn't we expand the notion of defense to include protecting our people and communities from climate disaster, industrial pollution, corporate greed, inequality, hunger, homelessness, bigotry, racism, attacks on the LGBTQIA community, xenophobia, and fascism?

As the Prophet Isaiah urges people to "beat their swords into ploughshares," think of the humanity-defending investments we could make if we but followed this advice.

Each Growler Jet costs around \$77 million. Putting the fleet's cost at

around \$9.1 billion. And this is small potatoes compared to how much of the military budget could be redirected to much needed defense of human services.

Clearly some portion of our defense budget could be redirected to an expanded notion of defense, which allows us to invest in an equitable, sustainable and just economy. Such an effort would need to also include a Just Transition for workers at the Whidbey Naval Air Station and other military installations and manufacturing workers and engineers who design and build Growlers and other such weapons systems.

COVID-19, this past administration, and climate disaster have exposed the fault lines of our market-driven economic system. We can't return to the contradictions of the past nor allow the fascist efforts of the extreme right to take further hold. Reevaluating and re-directing defense spending is one part of changing the economic paradigm that has created the crises at our door.

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

To Renew or Donate

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321 16th Avenue S, Seattle WA 98144

- Basic contribution: \$20
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Meetings and Events

For the health and safety of our members, all PSARA events will be virtual until further notice. For the Zoom links, email organizer@PSARA.org

Webinar: How the Medicare Advantage Plans Fail Us and Would Sabotage Medicare for All: 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, February 2. See Page 1 for details.

PSARA Climate and Environmental Justice Committee: 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., Thursday, February 4.

PSARA Government Relations Committee: Noon – 1:30 p.m., Thursday, February 4

PSARA Fundraising Committee: 11:00 a.m. -- Noon, Monday, February 8.

PSARA Education Committee: 2 p.m., Tuesday, February 9.

PSARA Southend Committee: 1:00 – 2:30 p.m., Thursday, February 11.

Celebration of the Life of Tony Lee: 5:00 p.m., Friday, February 12, livestreamed on www.tony-lee.com

Political Action Day: February 16. Call your state legislators to advocate for PSARA's legislative agenda. See Page 3 for details.

PSARA Race and Gender Equity Committee: 11 a.m.– Noon, Thursday, February 18.

PSARA Executive Board: 12:30 p.m. – 3 p.m., Thursday, February 18

Lou and Friends Concert: 4:00 p.m., Saturday, February 27. See Page 1 for details.

We look forward to seeing you online until it's safe to meet in person once again.