

The Retiree **ADVOCATE**

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

Vol XXXVI, No 3

March 2021

**We Must Win the
War for Truth**
By Mark McDermott

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Webinar on Far-Right Hate Groups in Washington State **Tuesday, March 30, 6:30 p.m.**

Far-right hate groups are active all over Washington. It is time we learn more about these groups, how they operate and recruit, and the best practices in countering their growth and ideology.

Activists in Sequim are fighting back against the QAnon takeover of the Sequim City Council and the racist attacks on the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe. On Whidbey Island voters were threatened by men with guns when casting ballots in November, and Three Percenters are trying to take control of a local Whidbey Island Grange organization.

White supremacy is at the heart of these hate groups. They seek to defend with arms, terror, and lies the institutional racism of our country that is being challenged by a growing social and economic justice movement led, in large part, by people of color. We are called on to do everything we can to stop the spread of these hateful groups and ultimately to isolate them from impacting the direction of our region and country.

On March 30, the PSARA committees on Whidbey Island and Clallam County will host in the first in a series of webinars for all PSARA members and friends. The webinar will include personal stories of what people in Clallam County have experienced and how they are responding.

Vicki Lowe, a descendent of the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe and Executive Director of the American Indian Health Commission for Washington, will share stories about the Tribe's experi-

ences with racism and the far-right. She has worked in the Health Department of the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe since 1996.

We will also have nationally recognized expert, Devin Burghart, Executive Director of the Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights, to discuss what we can do to counter right-wing organizing efforts.

Please join us for this important webinar on March 30 at 6:00 p.m.

If you receive regular emails from PSARA, watch for an email with the link to register for the webinar. If you don’t get our emails, contact us at organizer@psara.org to get registration information.



*Clallam County demonstration
against racism.
(Photo: Tim Wheeler)*

GiveBIG Day 2021

GiveBIG Day is May 5. It is one of the most important days of the year for the PSARA Education Fund. Dollars that are raised are critical to the Education Fund's annual budget, our education work, and the publication of the Retiree Advocate.

Like last year, the Executive Boards of the PSARA Education Fund and PSARA will challenge our members to collectively match their contributions. It costs approximately \$20,000 annually to produce and mail the *Retiree Advocate*. In the April edition we will announce the amount of the challenge from the Executive Boards. In the past our Executive Boards and our members have been generous, and we hope that will continue this year!

The Retiree ADVOCATE

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16th Avenue S, Seattle, Washington, 98144. Phone
206-254-4910.

Officers of PSARA Education Fund:

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psaraedfund@psara.org
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The Sixth of January

By Steven Beck

Inspired by civic poetry from Amanda Gorman today, back to the Longfellow epics I was taught in school, I offer this poem about the Trump Insurrection. It's in the style of the old "Remember Remember the 5th of November" rhyme about the failed 1605 Guy Fawkes Gunpowder Plot to blow up the British Parliament.

Never Forget the 6th of January
Donald Trump's Treason and Plot
I know of no reason the MAGA Mob's Treason
should ever be forgot

Remember Remember just that past November
Millions greet Trump's defeat with elation
But he refused conceding — Bullying — Tweeting
Spreading his viral "Vote Fraud" contagion

But each lawsuit he tried to deny votes for Biden
only proved our election'd been fair.
'Til The Electoral College confirmed common knowledge
— that the "Stop the Steal" Hoax was hot air

But with each repetition, in his Cult grew conviction
that their Emperor God hadn't lost
Though rejected by millions, he called out hardcore minions
To reverse the election by force

While McConnell dissembled, the Trump Army assembled
and he urged them forth up The Hill
"Fight like Hell" was his order to those maddened marauders
To smash and to loot and to kill

Outgunned and outnumbered like the Spartan 300
Capitol cops tried to hold their Blue Line
But the rioters' reason had been poisoned all season
and they murdered brave Officer Brian

Among those that died, poor Rosanne was trodden
'though her banner read: "Don't Tread on Me!"
Yet mere hours later, our nation's lawmakers
ruled this still was a Democracy

So which side are you on? Which side are you on?
For lynch law or a new Reconstruction?
Will you follow The Leader like sheep to the slaughter
Or help to heal and to rebuild our Nation?
O say can you hear, from both Science and Spirit
Nature and Nature's God command
that we roll up our sleeves, work together redeeming
the Dream in the soul of our land.

Steven Beck is a retired state employee, former AFSCME Local 375 union rep, and a member of PSARA.

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

By Barbara Flye

You may already realize that signing up for a Medicare Advantage (MA) Plan can be a risky endeavor depending on your health status. It's been well documented that MA plans often work best for younger, healthier beneficiaries. That's who they market to, who they aim to sign up, who they pay gym memberships for. But when your health needs increase, as happens when we age, then they "encourage" you to leave the plan by changing benefits, dropping specialists from their networks, and making it harder to get coverage for certain procedures. And because MA plans take a flat amount up front, their incentive is to provide as little care as possible so they can pocket the difference. And they've pocketed quite a lot. During this past year, the year of a pandemic, MA plans had their most profitable year on record.

You may also already know that the traditional Medicare program is not what it needs to be. It doesn't currently cover the kinds of things we all need as we age, including vision, hearing, and dental care, and has no cap on out-of-pocket expenses.

So while insurance company executives enjoy record profits, the Medicare Trust Fund, also used to directly cover the costs of those in the traditional Medicare program, is depleted. And with less money for traditional Medicare, those hoping to privatize it say it isn't working.

Due to their slick marketing (traditional Medicare doesn't invite you to a free lunch), approximately 40 percent of Medicare beneficiaries are now in MA plans.

All of these points were covered at the PSARA-hosted webinar in February featuring Wendell Potter, President, Center for Health and Democracy; Diane Archer, Founder of JustCareUSA.org and Medicare Rights Center; and

Mark Dudzic with the Labor Campaign for Single Payer Healthcare.

What you may *not* know and what was laid out by the panelists through the expert facilitation of moderator Linda Petterson, chair of PSARA's Education Committee, the increasing popularity of MA plans has the potential to sabotage our efforts to win Medicare for All.

As the numbers of beneficiaries in MA plans increase, it may make it more tempting for Congress to simply end Medicare as we know it and do any expansion through MA plans, i.e., profit-driven insurance companies.

The vision of Medicare for All as laid out in the legislation introduced by Congresswoman Jayapal and Senator Bernie Sanders enhances and builds upon an improved traditional Medicare program. So instead of being at

the mercy of an insurance company's profit motive, like most MA plans, those enrolled will get the care they need, including vision, hearing, and dental care and be protected by an out-of-pocket maximum each year.

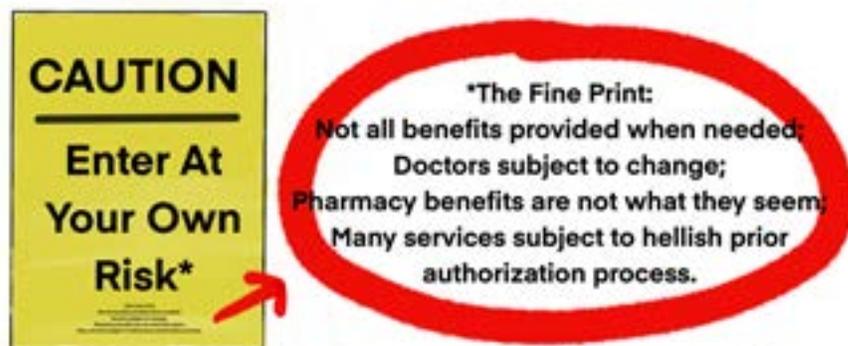
We've made great progress in advancing Medicare for All, but it will take even more work to win. In the meantime, all three panelists believe we need to build and strengthen our movement for Medicare for All by engaging in the fight to improve the current Medicare program now -- and continue to push for health care reform in viable state legislatures across the country at the same time we push for Medicare for All.

Barbara Flye is a member of the Retiree Advocate Editorial Board and our accomplished cartoonist.

The Barbed Wire

By Barbara Flye

Medicare Advantage Plans



We Must Win the War for the Truth

Mark M. McDermott

If you tell a big lie enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. Truth is the mortal enemy of the lie." – Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Minister of Propaganda.

Goebbels was speaking the truth. We live in a nation filled with big lies once called propaganda and now called disinformation. We must win a non-violent war to restore the truth as the center of our national political life. Our democracy depends on our winning. We must build a growing army of loving, caring, empathetic, listening, respectful, and relentless truth tellers in order to win the war for the truth.

A critical first step in winning the war for the truth is to deepen our understanding of the goals, methods, and impacts of the big lies of disinformation. Let's focus on disinformation and voting rights/fraud.

I have seen firsthand the power of big lies and intentional hatred grow steadily. Since 2016, I have presented 255 trainings and workshops for 17,000 attendees in 25 states. I increasingly felt the growing hostility, hatred, and tension that the big lies were deliberately intended to create. Repeatedly, attendees asked for advice with anguish in their voices. "My family, friendships, and work relationships are being torn apart by the lies and anger of Trump and his followers." "We had to cancel Thanksgiving because of the yelling." They asked "What do I do?"

One of my answers was: "I never changed anyone's heart or mind by calling them a stupid ignorant bigot. Contempt, anger, or disrespect makes it worse. You and I must engage in respectful dialogues to find new ways to find common ground. This is not easy."

The Origins of Mass Propaganda and Disinformation

In 1928, Edward Bernays, the American father of modern public relations, wrote his famous book *Propaganda*.

The opening sentence is chilling:



Mark McDermott

"The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society."

The Nazis studied Bernays and adapted his theories and methods based on big lies, big fears, divide and conquer with endless enemies, endless anger, attacking the press, and using new technologies to dominate the people.

Goebbels was clear on their goal:

"The essence of propaganda consists in winning people over to an idea so sincerely, so vitally, that in the end they succumb to it utterly and can never escape from it."

Goebbels added:

"Propaganda works best when those who are being manipulated are confident, they are acting on their own free will."

Propaganda/disinformation worked well where the press, experts, and political enemies could be intimidated, manipulated, or suppressed. Tragically it was adapted to undermine democracies.

Disinformation, Divide and Conquer, and Attacks on Voting Rights

In 1970, Richard Nixon's Vice President Agnew declared: "Dividing the American people has been my main contribution to the national political scene." One of Nixon's media advisors added: Voters are basically lazy... Reason requires a high degree of discipline... The emotions are more easily aroused."

Lewis Powell's famous 1971 memo, "Attacks on American Free Enterprise System," laid out the grand strategy for reasserting corporate domination of our democracy. A critical component was winning a war of big ideas. Disinformation wars erupted.

By 1980, Heritage Foundation co-founder Paul Weyrich said:

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

What happened? In 2006, the Republican-controlled Congress reported:

"Between 1982 and 2006, the Department of Justice blocked over 700 proposed voting changes by state and local governments"... a majority were "calculated decisions to keep minority voters from fully participating in the political process."

These changes were allegedly needed to stop voter fraud, which was non-existent then and now.

This long war on the truth and voting rights did not start with Donald Trump and will not end with him leaving office. On December 8, 2020, the Georgia Senate Republicans announced:

"We will reform our election laws to secure our electoral process by eliminating at-will absentee voting."

By January 26, 2021, legislators in 28 states had introduced 106 new bills to restrict voting rights. Their goals are to stop non-existent voting fraud.

Merely having the truth does not guarantee victory in a disinformation war. We must learn new ways to win people back to the truth. It will not be easy, but we will prevail.

Mark McDermott is a PSARA Executive Board member. He will present his new webinar "We Must Win the War for the Truth to Preserve and Strengthen Our Democracy" on Thursday, March 11, at 5:00 p.m. PST hosted by United for a Fair Economy. For more information email Markmcdermott1@msn.com or go to www.Markmcdermott.com

Let's Not Return to "Normal"

By Sen. Rebecca Saldaña

"All our phrasing--race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy--serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth ... You must always remember that sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body."

--Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*.

Recently, Mike Andrew posed important questions in this publication following the election of President Biden. What is "normal?" "Do we really want to go back there?" These are questions I ask when wondering how to move forward as the pandemic wanes. We hear much yearning for the pandemic to end so things will go back to normal, and in government we often talk about "recovering" from the pandemic. But I don't want us to recover if it means returning to a normal that allows the great violence Ta-Nehisi Coates describes in *Between the World and Me*. Instead, we must insist on transformative reimagining to build back better than before.

This means pausing to consider aspects that have not been taken into account in the past. Who did we leave out of the unemployment safety net? Whose children did we lock up and throw away? Who was never at the table?

It means centering our lives, our decisions, and our goals around those who have not been allowed to benefit from our society. This would allow Black men and women, essential workers, womxn, immigrants, salmon, and thus all of us to simply breathe fully, freely, as we were all created to be.

Our normal certainly has a lot of room for improvement. Right now, normal means an economy where the wealthy few increase their profits while many Washingtonians struggle to make ends meet in the face of business clo-

tures and layoffs. Building back better would mean fixing our state's upside-down tax system and ensuring that the wealthiest in our state pay their fair share with policies like an excise tax on excessive capital gains. It would mean removing the 60-month lifetime benefit limit for families in need of TANF, and finally funding the Working Families Rebate.

Right now, normal means essential work performed mostly by womxn and immigrants – child rearing, early education and after-school care, domestic work, agricultural, and food service work – is invisible and undervalued. Building back better would mean removing all exemptions from minimum wage and overtime pay, and valuing and investing in childcare infrastructure as crucial to our economic future. It would mean establishing portable healthcare benefits, paid family and medical leave, and long-term care benefits. And it would require updating our unemployment and workers compensation to stop penalizing single parent households, primary caretakers, or laborers based on employment and immigration status.

Right now, normal means a criminal justice system and set of laws that disproportionately criminalize and lock away Black and Brown individuals and people with disabilities. Building back better requires changing policing and criminal legal systems that harm BIPOC communities and implementing fairer sentencing based on individual circumstances. And it would take reenvisioning what community-led, equitable, and trauma-informed restorative justice, rehabilitation, and reentry look like.

Right now, normal means a continued reliance on fossil fuels at the cost of our environmental and community health, and a transportation system that devastates ecosystems and impedes the natural migration of our state's salmon population. Building back better would mean passing the



Sen. Rebecca Saldaña

HEAL Act, which puts environmental justice into statute, advancing clean fuels policy for our transportation sector, and strategic investments in greener, climate resilient transportation and broadband infrastructure that cleans up our waters.

Our country's white supremacist legacy is embedded in our laws, our culture, and our democratic and economic institutions—indeed, in our very bodies. Undoing anti-Blackness and racism is not comfortable, easy, or cheap. It requires daily diligence, pulling back floorboards, pulling out rot, replacing foundations. It means building a new, more resilient, and universal design into our remodels and into new structures within our democracy, institutions, and systems, including in our personal lives.

I leave you with a question. How can we, together with our communities, in all our imperfection as human beings, open ourselves up to be transformed, to participate in transformation, and to commit to the daily work required within ourselves and our communities to prevent a return to normal? Because, as James Baldwin said, "History is not the past, it is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history."

Rebecca Saldaña is a Washington State Senator (D-37) and a member of PSARA.

What Do We Do Now?

By Robby Stern

On December 28, Whidbey Island and Clallam County PSARA members and their invited guests met to share and discuss their experiences with ultra-right groups including the Proud Boys, Patriot Prayer, and the Three Percenters. The presentations of their experiences left no doubt: 1. These organizations are organizing in their area, and 2. They are intent on attempting to intimidate and threaten people of color and people of goodwill who oppose their messages of white nationalism, hatred, physical violence, and armed insurrection. Trump has opened the door wide for these groups, and he and other national and state elected leader are encouraging these domestic terrorists.

The 74 million voters who cast their ballots for Trump, an avowed authoritarian, did so for a variety of reasons. The ultra-right fascists are a part of the Trump base. They view the Trump voter base as ripe for their message, potential sympathizers for their goals, and supporters of their violence and threats of terror.

While many of us feel great relief that Trump will no longer have the power of the presidency, his influence will continue. The Biden administration is likely to propose incremental changes as they face determined Republican opposition and division within the Democratic party. The Senate is still majority conservative regardless of the wonderful victory in the Georgia election, e.g. Democratic Senator Joe Manchin from West Virginia. The House Democrats lost a significant number of seats, and the establishment Democrats are pointing to the progressives as the cause of their failure.

As we think about how the election impacts what PSARA does, we must take into account the reality of active fascist forces in our region and country. We need to be educated on who they

are and how they operate. We need organizing tools for limiting the damage they can do.

At the December 28 meeting we were joined by Devin Burghart, Executive Director of the Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights. This Institute tracks these hate groups and provides education about them and what we can do to counter them. Hopefully PSARA will be able to integrate opposition to the growing threat of fascism into the work we already do.

With Democratic control of the Congress and White House, PSARA will join with our national allies to advocate for significant improvements to Social Security and Medicare. These two social insurance programs are very popular across a large swath of the US population. Expanding and improving these programs may provide some in-roads into a portion of the Trump base that is also being recruited by the fascist movement. Many people in our country, including a significant portion of the Trump base, are experiencing deep economic insecurity, in part a result of neo-liberal policies which led to the deindustrialization of the US economy. Centrist Democratic leadership bear a large responsibility for these policies. Making major improvements to Medicare (both benefits and coverage) and Social Security may help wean some people away from the Trump base.

The fascist movement in our country is rooted in racism and white nationalism. When Trump and his Republican allies talk about fraud in the electoral process, that is code for the votes of people of color. They are trying to denigrate and undermine the growing political strength of people of color. It appears the Republican party will continue to embrace their fascist allies while some Republican leaders "criticize" their fascist tactics.



Robby Stern

PSARA must continue to support the struggle against racism, homophobia, economic exploitation, militarism, and the continued extraction and use of fossil fuels. Our work has to reflect an understanding that institutional racism is woven into the fabric of our country and impacts all areas of our work.

Our country is changing and people of color are on the way to becoming the majority. As this demographic transition proceeds, we can stand in solid opposition to those who choose to react negatively to the evolution of our country.

We have learned an incredibly important lesson from the 2020/21 election in Georgia. Significant victories can be won if we think strategically, educate, and organize.

Robby Stern is President of the PSARA Education Fund.

Recognizing Environmental Justice

By Jeff Johnson

Recently I heard Anishinaabe tribal leader Esther Eoshe, of the Ojibwe White Fish Nation, tell the Legend of the Creator's Gift. During these times of existential crisis, it is particularly poignant.

The Creator gathered together the animals and asked them to look after the sister and brother humans that had just been created. The Creator asked for help in figuring out where to hide a special gift for them. All of the animals had great ideas of where to hide the gift, but the Creator said unfortunately the humans were clever and if hidden in these places the gift would be discovered before they were ready for it.

Finally, the little field mouse suggested that the gift be hidden inside the humans. The Creator thought this was a wonderful idea. The Creator's gift was the gift of love and it was hidden inside the human heart. And when humans can see beyond themselves and can live in harmony with others, they will have discovered the gift of love.

Esther relates this parable to imagining a different way of living to reverse the harm of climate disaster. She thinks it is time that we discover the gift of love in a more contemplative, slower paced, and less harmful way of living.

There are two bills before the state legislature that begin to reimagine the way we live and center environmental justice in our transition to a less harmful way of living. One is the HEAL Act and the other is the Washington Strong Act.

SB 5141, The HEAL Act, is championed by the environmental justice organization Front and Centered, progressive unions, and PSARA. "The HEAL Act recognizes the legacy of racial injustice that has caused grinding inequality as well as health, housing, education, wealth, and justice disparities by centering environmental justice principles in the way our State Agencies address climate change and industrial pollution," says Front and Centered Executive Director, Deric Gruen.



Jeff Johnson

By defining environmental justice in state law, the legislation requires state agencies to use a racial justice lens in their strategic planning and goal setting. The Agencies must create a process for engaging affected communities in every level of work from planning to evaluation. This will help overcome historic health and safety disparities by giving community members both voice and agency.

Put simply the HEAL Act puts disproportionately impacted communities at the center of the economic recovery and the transition away from fossil fuels. And by using tools like the Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map resources can be targeted to the most disproportionately impacted communities.

The HEAL Act also creates an Environmental Justice Council composed of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color representatives to help our state agencies in the transition to incorporating environmental justice in the way our state does business.

The Washington Strong Act creates a carbon tax on major fossil fuel emitters and then bonds this revenue stream for investments in clean renewable energy projects, energy retrofits, carbon sequestration, mitigating energy costs to lower-income households, and creating a just transition fund for displaced workers and communities.

Representative Lekanoff and Senator Lovelett have been working with Front and Centered, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 21, and other progressive organizations to embed environmental justice and worker just transition principles into what is now Proposed Substitute Senate 5373.

PSSB 5373 builds off of the work done by the environmental justice community, labor, tribes, and the environmental community in building a just, equitable, and sustainable transition away from fossil fuels embodied in Initiative 1631. The goal is to significantly lower carbon and greenhouse gas emissions while leaving no worker or community behind.

Should the HEAL Act and the Washington Strong Act pass, it would allow Washington State's economy to prosper while at the same time allowing us to live in a less harmful and more harmonious way as imagined by Sister Ester Eoshe of the White Fish Nation.

Jeff Johnson is a PSARA Executive Board member, a member of the PSARA Climate and Environmental Justice Committee, and a Board Member of the Labor Network for Sustainability. He is a former President of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

On the Road to Medicare for All

By Steve Bauck and David Loud

On January 22-24 Healthcare-Now! and the Labor Campaign for Single Payer Healthcare convened the annual Medicare for All national strategy conference. Central themes were how COVID has exposed the gaping holes in our health care system and how it is shaping strategies to win Medicare for All. Because the conference was online, there were over 1,100 participants, far more than attended previous strategy conferences.

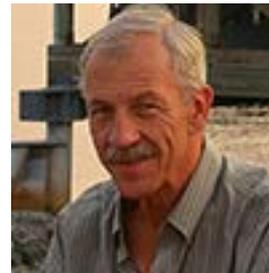
This past year we once again faced the reality that there is another ongoing pandemic in our country - systemic racism. That reality is highlighted in the disparate impact of COVID on BIPOC and immigrant communities. The conference focused on this and how to build a mass health justice movement that centers the needs and leadership of those most impacted, with strategies to address inequalities in our health care system. Building stronger support in BIPOC and immigrant communities will take work to overcome the distrust based on experiences of racism in our health care system.

Support for Medicare for All continues to grow in the labor movement. A majority of unionized workers are in unions that endorsed Rep. Jayapal's bill in 2019. In 2020, a resolution endorsing Medicare for All was adopted by unanimous vote at the WA State Labor Council convention. But portions of the labor movement are not yet on board and are focusing on lowering drug prices and building on the Affordable Care Act.

At the start of the pandemic 30 million people were without any health insurance and another 50 million were underinsured and disproportionately non-white. During COVID millions more have lost insurance. An immediate need is to provide adequate coverage and access during the pandemic. The \$1.9 trillion "American Rescue Plan" relief package being developed in Con-



David Loud



Steve Bauck

gress would help millions access care, but millions more would remain unable to afford the care they need.

Rep. Jayapal and Senator Sanders introduced the Health Care Emergency Guarantee Act last year, under which Medicare would cover all uninsured people during the pandemic and would pay the copays and deductibles of existing private and public plans. If that proves not possible to pass, we need to press that any "public option" plan be administered by Medicare rather than by for-profit insurance companies. Relief measures that demonstrate what good public insurance looks like will help us get to Medicare for All.

A key to advocating a universal single payer plan is strengthening traditional Medicare in the meantime. Traditional Medicare is the only health insurance with no cap on out-of-pocket copays and coinsurance, leaving a risk of huge medical bills for major illness. A cap needs to be put on out-of-pocket expenses. Benefits can be expanded to include vision, hearing, and dental, and prescription drug prices can be lowered through direct negotiation. All these benefits and more were passed by the House in 2019 (HR 3), but died in the Senate. We expect these to be taken up again, as well as proposals to expand Medicare eligibility to include everyone under 25 and over 50. And Rep. Jayapal will soon reintroduce her Medicare for All bill, the North Star to guide us.

Historically, most progressive national policies in our country have

first been implemented on the local or state level before becoming national law. Rep. Ro Khanna of California plans to reintroduce the State Based Universal Health Care Act, which would allow states to pool their federal health care dollars to help fund state-based universal health care plans. This is very timely, as Washington, Oregon, California, New York, and other states are working on their own universal health plans. In Washington, SB 5399 would create a Universal Health Care Commission for this purpose and establish 2026 as a date certain by which all Washingtonians would have health care coverage. (Advocates hope to get there sooner.) Universal state plans can serve as models for future national legislation and can help build the grass-roots movement to make it happen.

The movement for Medicare for All faces tremendous opposition from the vast corporate resources of the health care industry, 20 percent of the economy. To overcome the industry's political influence, we need to keep growing the movement, especially in BIPOC communities and Labor, and fight for key strategic victories along the way.

Highly recommended videos from the Medicare for All Strategy Conference are online at <https://www.youtube.com/user/HealthcareNOWNatnl/videos>

Steve Bauck is PSARA's Outreach Co-Vice President. David Loud is a PSARA Executive Board member and a leader of the Health Care is a Human Right WA.

The Vaccine--Fair Access or Global Apartheid?

By Michael Righi

Despite all the frustrations of the vaccine distribution system, most of us will likely get vaccinated some time this year. Not true for folks in poor countries. Some experts are saying many will not get their shots until 2024. Three years from now!

Rich countries have contracted with Big Pharma companies for existing and upcoming supplies. The US, Canada, and EU countries have reserved enough doses for two to four times their entire populations. So far 130 countries have not gotten a single dose of vaccine.

Why? Pharmaceutical corporations have gotten a web of patents on vaccines, production methods, testing data, etc., to be able to throttle supply and maintain extremely profitable prices.

This is a moral and ethical issue: What is it about my life that is more important than an African villager's? It is a public good issue – no one is safe until we all are. And it is a racial justice issue; the countries left out are mainly Black and Brown.

Debt and Trade Agreements

There is economic colonialism involved here. Over the last 40 years, indebted low- and middle-income countries (LMIC's) have paid billions to rich-country banks and "investors." To make these payments, debtor nations have cut back on their health systems, even though health care is fundamental to life and to development.

Now COVID economic crises have slammed poor countries. Wealthy countries have recently offered paltry amounts of debt relief without forcing private-sector lenders to do the same. Poor country childhood vaccination rates (not for COVID, but for measles, etc.) have dropped precipitously; 600 million more folks have dropped below World Bank poverty lines.

So-called trade agreements since NAFTA in 1994, have been negotiated mainly for the benefit of large corporations (negotiated by Clinton, never forget), mainly to allow for the outsourcing of good jobs to low-wage, low-regulation countries.

In addition, corporations, especially in pharmaceuticals and tech, have loaded these agreements with intellectual property protections, extending and enforcing their patents. (These are the TRIPS agreements, in international trade jargon.) This has become a key corporate strategy – enshrine provisions into trade language. It is a back-door way to constrain national policies.

This means medicine and vaccine patents give Pharma hugely profitable monopoly rights. During the AIDS crisis in the 80's, popular protest in the Global South forced some concessions, allowing patent waivers and some local production of retroviral AIDS drugs. But it took struggle and lost time and lives.

Gates, Always Gates

The Gates Foundation, along with the World Health Organization, has worked with many countries to set up COVAX, which would buy and distribute a very limited supply of vaccines to LMIC countries. The previous administration refused to help; at least Biden is going to join. But the needed funds are not coming in, and even if they do it would mean only about 10 percent of all poor country populations would get the vaccine, undoubtedly bypassing the very poor in those countries.

So, then, would workers in Bangladeshi fast-fashion industries not be vaccinated while rich-country consumers flock back into stores? How about workers in the lithium mines supplying batteries for our electric cars? Mexican agricultural workers growing tomatoes and avocados for us?



Michael Righi

We do not need charity; we need justice. India and South Africa have proposed at the WTO to suspend pharmaceutical monopolies – a TRIPS waiver – during the pandemic (the US under Trump blocked it). Doctors Without Borders demanded that all vaccine deals between companies and countries, including cost and trials data, be made public.

Fine, but justice demands more. Big Pharma and rich countries must be forced to share the know-how and the intellectual property other countries need. There must be technical assistance for countries to build their own manufacturing facilities. Trade rules must be rewritten.

Governments put billions into research and demand nothing from hugely profitable companies. These corporations want to be seen as our saviors during this pandemic. But they make billions and keep the patents, which allow them to decide who gets the vaccine and at what price – who lives and who dies. The balance between the power they have and the public good is way off. That has to change!

Lives matter more than profit.

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

Texas Freeze: Unnatural Disaster

By Mike Andrew

Insurance companies that don't want to pay claims often use the expression "Act of God" to describe disasters that are supposedly so unpredictable that no reasonable person would foresee them.

If there are such events, the Texas freeze is definitely not one. Instead of an "act of God," it's most certainly an act of humans, and one that was entirely predictable.

Here's the situation in a nutshell. Unusually cold weather blankets the central US. An unexpected winter storm hits Texas. Temperatures plummet into the teens. Demand for electricity and natural gas spikes as people try to heat their homes.

The demand for power is too great for Texas's system – which, by the way, is completely separate from the rest of the country – and the whole power grid threatens to go down.

State officials decide the best course of action is to allow "rolling blackouts" to reduce overall demand. Four million people lose power. They are unable to heat their homes, cook, or turn on lights at night.

Because the houses are unheated, the pipes freeze. People are without drinking water. As temperatures rise, water gushes from ruptured pipes. Peoples' homes are no longer habitable. Financial losses amount to some \$18 billion.

Over 70 people are dead as a direct result of the cold and associated hardships.

Harris County emergency officials report "several carbon monoxide deaths" in or around Houston as people tried to heat their homes with gasoline-powered generators. Three young children and their grandmother, trying to keep warm, also die in a suburban Houston house fire. In Galveston, the medical examiner's office requests a refrigerated truck to expand body storage.

People in Black and Latinx communities are especially hard hit. They live in older, less insulated homes, with aging pipes. They live further from grocery stores if they need to buy food and water. Already suffering disproportionately from the COVID-19 pandemic, their communities suffer great harm.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott blames the catastrophe on Texas's wind turbines and warns that "the Green New Deal would be a deadly deal for the United States of America."

In fact, as everyone – including the governor – knows, Texas runs on fossil fuels, primarily oil and natural gas. It was the failure of the state's natural gas industry to supply increased demand that resulted in the system-wide collapse.

Let's trace the problem back to its origins. As we all know, burning fossil fuels results in substantial warming of the planet. Bubbles of warm air displace the polar vortex – the cold air that circles the poles – and it bulges out in unexpected ways. That's why you get unusually cold air covering the central US, and snow storms in Texas.

That's how the problem started. But it got worse because Texas couldn't buy extra electricity from other states when it needed it.

It's not that outside energy producers don't want to do business with Texas. Energy companies buy and sell power across state lines all the time. They don't care who they sell to as long as they make a profit. It's that Texas doesn't want to do business with them.

Why not? Why does Texas insist on keeping a totally separate power grid? It all goes back to 1935. In that year, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed



Map of impending disaster

the Federal Power Act assigning regulatory powers to the Federal Power Commission.

The legal framework for doing so was the interstate commerce clause in the US Constitution. Since electricity and fuels needed to generate it are commonly sold across state lines, the federal government is entitled to regulate the industry.

By setting up a completely Texas-based power grid, Texas officials kept their power companies free from what they saw as the threat of federal regulation.

In 1970, Texas set up the inaptly named Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), which brokered a pact among all the state's power companies that they would never, ever buy or sell electricity outside the state so that they could all go on happily unregulated.

Since Texas is a pretty big energy market, and it has loads of oil and natural gas, that system could work for awhile – at least until demand spiked. Then Texas companies were barred from buying outside energy to meet the demand and the whole system crashed.

The future promises even more catastrophes of this kind as long as fossil fuels are our major power sources and as long as privately-owned industries resist public regulation.

PSARA On the Move

Save the Dates and Watch for Details

By Karen Richter

May 1, 4:00 p.m.: Concert with John O’Conner promoting Give Big for the PSARA Education Fund.

John O’Connor began his involvement in the labor movement right out of high school when he went to work in the factories of Waterloo, Iowa. An interest in folk music and Woody Guthrie led to a 30-year career as a folk singer and a cultural educator, performing in concerts, coffeehouses, schools and colleges, union education programs, and political action events.

"Songs For Our Times" came out in 1984 and was named one of the best albums of the year by the *Washington Post* and several folk publications and radio stations. He also recorded a CD produced in conjunction with Collector Records called "We Ain't Gonna Give It Back," which is regarded by many as one of the best collections of original songs on the American labor movement. Thirty years later John is still stalwart in his focus of fighting for the working class and inspiring them with his music.

May 22, 4:00 p.m.: Storytelling with Dan Yashinsky.

Dan Yashinsky is a well-known Canadian author, performer, and community organizer. He founded the Toronto Festival of Storytelling and co-founded the Storytellers School of Toronto. He also began the longest-running open session in North America: 1,001 Friday Nights of Storytelling.

Dan has performed his stories at festivals in Israel, Sweden, Norway, Holland, England, Wales, Germany, Brazil, Austria, France, the US, Singapore, and Ireland. He is the editor of four acclaimed collections of Canadian stories. Dan created and hosted Talking Stick, a CBC Radio One show. He has been a storyteller-in-residence at Queen's University, Toronto Public Library, and UNICEF Canada.

Please check Dan Yashinsky's website: <https://www.storycare.ca/watch-listen/> to preview several of his great stories.

June 19, time TBD: The Art of Grace in the Face of History, a poetry/storytelling/music workshop organized by Jaye Ware in honor of Juneteenth.

Jaye believes that grace of voice and sound through song, poetry, the spoken word, and the piano expresses the power of resilience and hope.

Jaye has organized a workshop that includes CJ Dudley, who will carry us through troubled waters by singing foot-tapping, body swaying spirituals and hip-hop accompanied by piano. Ashanti Proctor will perform old time religion hymns from the plantation fields to the brilliance of Beyoncé. Jacqueline Ware and Dr. Georgia McDade will perform spoken word designed to highlight heroes and shed light on lesser known African Americans who made impressive contributions to society and the African American community.

August 21, 4:00 p.m.: Author’s reading by Tim Wheeler, reading from his newest book.

Tim Wheeler has spent his life fighting for union rights, racial and gender equity, world peace, and environmental justice.

He estimates he has written 10,000 news reports, exposés, op-eds, and commentaries in his half-century as a journalist for the *Worker*, *Daily World*, and *People’s World*. He also served as editor of the *People’s Weekly World* newspaper. He lives in Sequim, Washington, in the home he shared with his beloved late wife, Joyce Wheeler.

His book *News for the 99%* is a selection of his writings for the *People’s World* representing a kind of history of the nation and the world from a working-class point of view. Tim will read excerpts from his book, which is a collection of stories about Tim’s life and the people he covered as a reporter. Tim will send a signed copy of his book to donors making a donation of \$20.00 or more.

Karen Richter is PSARA's Membership Vice President and Chair of our Fundraising Committee. She is also Vice President of the PSARA Education Fund.

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

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

PSARA Climate and Environmental Justice Committee: 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., Thursday, March 4.

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

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

PSARA Education Committee: 2:00 p.m., Tuesday, March 9.

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

PSARA Race and Gender Equity Committee: 11:00 a.m.– Noon, Thursday, March 18.

PSARA Executive Board: 12:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m., Thursday, March 18.

Webinar on Far-Right Hate Groups in Washington State: 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 30. See Page 1 for details.

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