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A real “moment of truth”

By Marilyn Bechtel

This past week's release this week of the Republican-led House Budget Committee's proposed fiscal 2012 budget has drawn cheers from right-wing commentators for its draconian approach to turning around a deficit expected to exceed \$1.5 trillion this fiscal year and ultimately eliminating the national debt - now over \$14 trillion.

While calling for increases to military spending - now well over half of “discretionary” federal spending - and cutting top tax rates for wealthy individuals and businesses, the proposal announced by Budget Committee chair Paul Ryan, R-Wisc., would repeal federal health care reform, privatize Medicare and devastate Medicaid. It would sharply cut funds for other human needs programs, among them education, transportation, food safety and veterans' services. It envisions cutting federal spending by about \$6 trillion over the next 10 years.

Ryan said of his proposal, “This is not a budget, this is a cause.” And at week's end, Republicans were prepared to shut down the government for that “cause.”

Among the commentators was New York Times op-ed columnist David Brooks, who declared in his April 4 column, “Moment of Truth,” that Ryan had “grasped reality with both hands.”



Brooks called the proposal “the most comprehensive and most courageous budget reform proposal any of us have seen in our lifetimes.”

The Obama administration has also called for cuts to human needs programs, which though far smaller than those the Republicans advocate, would still cause widespread pain.

Leaving aside whether reducing the deficit should be a top concern now, with an economy only starting to recover from the worst downturn since the 1930s, or the \$1 trillion cost of extend-

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ing the Bush-era tax cuts for the very rich, there is another way to turn around the annual deficit and ultimately eliminate the national debt, while not just preserving, but actually increasing government spending on vital human services.

The first week of U.S. involvement in the intervention in Libya reportedly cost \$550 million.

Last year the Sustainable Defense Task Force, initiated by a bipartisan group of members of Congress and made up of experts from a spectrum of viewpoints, came up with ways to cut nearly \$1 trillion from military spending over the next decade. Writing in Talking Points Memo in February, task force member William Hartung of the New America Foundation pointed out that this figure is comparable to the \$1.1 trillion the Obama administration hopes to save in domestic spending.

Hartung points out that U.S. military spending equals that of all the rest of the world, and notes that many of the most expensive items “are irrelevant to the most urgent threats we face.”

U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., has for some time urged a 25 percent cut in U.S. military spending, which could save many tens of billions from the administration’s proposed Pentagon budget for 2012 alone.

In 2008, economists Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes put the total cost of the Iraq war, including related costs such as treating and caring for returning veterans, at \$3 trillion. Two and a half years later, they said that estimate “was, if anything, too low.”

Last year it was reported that monthly Pentagon spending on the Afghanistan war had for the first time exceeded monthly spending on the war in Iraq. So costs there might ultimately reach similar levels.

And the first week of U.S. involvement in the intervention in Libya reportedly cost \$550 million.

The New Priorities Campaign calls for ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, making major cuts in Pentagon spending and making “immediate, significant increases” in domestic spending for jobs, infrastructure, new technologies, health care, environment, an effective social safety net and other human needs programs.

Yes, David Brooks: There is another way to lower deficits and the national debt, and at the same time let our country use its tremendous resources to make sure that everyone’s basic needs are met. That will truly be “grasping reality with both hands.” That will be the real “moment of truth.”



Marilyn Bechtel is a writer for the People’s World.

To guarantee life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, tax the rich

By PW Editorial Board

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are rights written in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, to be pursued as goals for free citizens living in a democratic society. Freedom of speech, press, persons, and other provisions in the U.S. Constitution grant us the right to work for and build institutions, which can best achieve these goals.

Most believed the business-labor working relationship New Deal reforms would be permanent. However, Wall Street financiers, bankers, and U.S. multi-national corporations thought otherwise - until President Ronald Reagan broke PATCO.

A war against unions, wages, and benefits, has been escalating from that first blow, leading up to the present attempts to outlaw collective bargaining by public worker unions. The central function of trade unions is to bring together all workers on a job-site, in an industry, trade, or profession, into one bargaining unit, so they have the strength to speak and bargain with management with one voice. Destroying collective bar-

gaining eliminates the core reason for a union’s existence.

The only recourse for workers so affected will be to strike for their demands, which could lead us back to the often-violent confrontations between capital and labor in pre-New Deal days. The laws being passed stipulate fines and jail time for striking.

Concerned citizens show the American public is not buying the “fix the budget” propaganda. People are learning that the Ohio budget “can be fixed” by reinstating the 2005 twenty one per cent tax cut for the super-rich and corporations, which cost about \$2.1 billion has been lost to our state treasury by this one misplaced tax measure.

Putting our millions of unemployed workers back to work at jobs with good wages and benefits, paying taxes, is the only way to fully solve the state budget problems. This can be done with the right policies and programs, which need to be addressed by Ohio’s administration and legislature.

Destroying collective bargaining eliminates the core reason for a union’s existence.

Ten thousand Ohioans kick off fight to repeal Senate Bill 5

By Anita Waters

Ten thousand gathered on the grounds of the Ohio Statehouse and chanted “We Are Ohio!” on Saturday afternoon at the kickoff rally to repeal Senate Bill 5, Gov. John Kasich’s union-busting initiative that takes away collective bargaining rights of Ohio’s public workforce. The mood was hopeful as union members both public and private and their supporters vowed to issue a Citizen’s Veto of SB 5 by putting it on the ballot next November and defeating it once and for all.

According to the AFL-CIO, Senate Bill 5 is only the first of many planned attacks on the working class in Ohio. In his call to the rally, Tim Burga, Ohio AFL-CIO President, accused Ohio lawmakers of weakening our communities and destroying good jobs to help Governor Kasich pursue his agenda. Rally participants on Saturday were asked by volunteers in orange AFL-CIO vests to sign up to collect signatures on petitions to demand the November ballot referendum.

On a tented stage in front of the Statehouse steps, speaker after speaker identified themselves as Ohioans, and the crowd each time enthusiastically responded “We Are Ohio!” A small business owner, a day care worker, two winners of the Ohio Teacher of the Year, and a Vietnam Vet were among the many people who called on the crowd to unite to support the labor rights of public workers. The crowd included many public workers as well as other labor union members who recognize the deeply anti-worker and anti-middle class nature of SB 5. Firefighters in their helmets, teachers with School Employee Association banners, and people showing their support for the Amalgamated Transit Union, United Auto Workers, Fraternal Order of Police, Teamsters and United Mine Workers of America, among dozens of others, were in the audience and walking around the



Statehouse periphery.

Also speaking at the rally was A.J. Smith, a City Councilman from Middleton, Ohio, where the first attempt was made to introduce legislation to overturn municipal workers’ collective bargaining rights in 2010. Despite the town’s location, in the heart of John Boehner’s congressional district, pro-union forces were able to defend workers’ rights there by preventing passage of the legislation.

It was 43 years ago this week that Martin Luther King Jr. was killed while speaking at a rally in support of sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. Rally speakers reflected on King’s understanding of the importance of labor rights. One speaker intoned cadences that recalled King’s, exhorting the crowd to “march to every municipality, township and city, march to every neighborhood and playground, march to every office building, fire station and police station, to every school, to every state employee and government employee, march like a mighty army in defense of what we know is right.

Organizers expect the SB 5 petitions will be ready later this month. Then, the hard work of collecting more than 230,000 signatures begins.

Over 230,000 signatures are needed by the end of June.

In Texas, thousands rally to “Save our State”

By Jim Lane

On April 6, two days after 1,000 union-inspired protests rattled America, tardy Texans held their statewide coalition march and rally against the budget passed by the Texas House. The budget is likely to close schools and medical facilities while creating another 335,000 unemployed Texans and raising the state’s unemployment rate another two percent. The budget that was passed in the Texas House, but not approved in the Senate so far, would cut \$23 billion from current state expenditures.

The president of the Texas AFL-CIO, Becky Moeller, reported that every affiliated union, plus three unaffiliated Teamster locals, were represented at the rally. They estimated that there were more than 6,000 protesters. In addition to union members, there was a large contingent from the Texas Organizing Project, a community organization, and a small group from the League of United Latin American Citizens.

Several top political leaders joined the labor leaders on the podium. One speaker that may have surprised the unionists represented the Oak Cliff (part of Dallas) Chamber of Commerce. Labor and the business organization have lately had several occasions to work together against cuts that would destroy education and infrastructure. Even though the Chamber of Commerce took a leading roll in funding the Republican campaigns of 2010, they have taken their distance on infrastructure issues.

Protesta comunitaria contra la redada en escuela primaria

Por John Rummel

Como una escena de ficción de una mala película, los agentes de inmigración y aduanas de Detroit (ICE) llegaron en seis SUVs grandes con los vidrios oscuros y rodearon los predios y el patio de la escuela elemental Academia Hope el 31 de Marzo.

Su objetivo era capturar a los padres de familia que dejaban sus hijos en la escuela. Cuando la escuela estuvo rodeada, dos padres de familia se refugiaron en el interior de la escuela, otros dos fueron perseguidos y detenidos después de dejar los niños en la escuela.

En la conferencia de prensa que se hizo el 6 de Abril para protestar por esta acción, el Director de la Escuela, Ali Abdel, expresó que estaba profundamente indignado por esta acción y los padres de familia dijeron que “ellos eran dedicados trabajadores y no criminales”.

El Director de la Escuela dijo que después de esta redada la escuela se ha convertido en un campo abandonado.

Abdel dijo que esta redada va tener efectos duraderos, algunos estudiantes ya no vendrán más a la escuela, otros se preguntaran qué va a pasar con ellos, y muchos empezaran a tener efectos colaterales en sus estudios.

La conferencia de prensa tuvo lugar fuera de la escuela a pesar de una fría llovizna que caía. Los oradores dejaron claro que la culpa de esta redada se debe a las órdenes de la Directora del ICE en Detroit.

La representante demócrata del Estado, Rashida Tlaib, que representa esta área, dijo que este tipo de acciones esta resultando una especie de modelo de la directora, con agen-

tes diseñando aéreas de chequeo en escuelas, iglesias y supermarkets. Otros oradores indicaron que esta acción esta fuera del área regular de la acción de ICE, de acuerdo a su código interno, que indica que no deben atropellar aéreas sensitivas como escuelas, iglesias y otras. Por ejemplo esta escuela esta cerca de la Iglesia San Francisco de Asís.

Ryan Bates, director de la Alianza por la Reforma y los Derechos de los Inmigrantes en Michigan, cuando le llamaron acerca de este incidente, dijo: “No lo puedo creer. Esto es infame, estúpido y cruel”. Cuando fue al sitio de la redada preguntó a los agentes de ICE si ellos tenían Orden Judicial para hacer esto, ellos le contestaron “No necesitamos Orden Judicial para estar en una calle pública frente a una escuela”. Entonces Bates les dijo que ellos estaban atemorizando a los estudiantes y a los adultos, después de lo cual los agentes se retiraron del lugar. Pero el Director Abdel indicó: “Los agentes regresaron más tarde al toque de la campa para terminar el día”.

Lawrence García, presidente de la Asociación de Abogados Hispanos de Michigan, dijo que la comunidad esta demandando a una completa investigación de las personas responsables que autorizaron estas acciones fuera de control, que se censure y castigue a los culpables y que finalmente que ICE asegure que su atiene a sus códigos internos y que respete leyes como la Cuarta Enmienda, que prohíbe registrar sin Orden Judicial y se tome como objetivo en forma impropia cierta gente. Si esta solicitud no es contestada dentro de siete días, una queja oficial será dirigida al Departamento de Justicia.

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