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With GOP — it's never a honeymoon

By Tim Wheeler

Sting and Stevie Wonder caught the spirit of the moment singing “Brand New Day” as the crowd danced with joy at one of Barack Obama’s inaugural balls the night of last Jan. 20.

More than a million people filled the Capitol Mall earlier that day celebrating the people’s victory in breaking the 30-year stranglehold of corporate America and the Republican right. They were celebrating the election of the first African American president and a majority Democratic House and Senate. The Democrats won on the basis of their promises to help those who hard hit by the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Within a few weeks of Obama’s swearing in, the honeymoon was over. The bland assurances of “bipartisanship” came to an end. The corporate right GOP reverted to open warfare, taking their lead from the Bush-era political guru, Karl Rove, former Vice President Dick Cheney and right-wing bloviator Rush Limbaugh.

Their obstructionist strategy emerged last August when the House and Senate postponed votes on health care reform and went home to hold town-hall meetings. In a blitz organized by “Freedomworks,” former Texas Rep. Dick Armey’s



front group, “Tea Party Patriots,” packed these town-hall meetings with screaming, shrieking provocateurs.

“This was a sneak attack by the Republican right and the insurance lobby” said Jarvis Tyner, executive vice chair of the Communist Party USA in a phone interview. “The people weren’t prepared. This bogus ‘movement’ was an attempt to

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silence and intimidate the people, including members of Congress, who want health care reform with a strong public option.”

Their goals go beyond immediate obstruction of pending legislation, Tyner continued. “Their aim is to wreck Obama’s presidency and set the stage for a resurgence of the Republican right in

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the upcoming congressional elections in 2010 and the presidential election in 2012.”

The corporate ultra-right, Tyner added, recognizes that if Obama succeeds in pushing through his agenda of creating a new green-jobs economy, affordable health care for all, and expanding workers' union rights, it could freeze the GOP from the White House and control of the House and Senate for a generation as Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal program did in the 1930s.

Labor leader Richard Trumka called the town hall disruptions “corporate-funded mob rule” and “Brooks Brothers rioters.”

Tyner pointed out “it would be a mistake to think these rightwing fanatics represent the general view of the American people.”

He stressed that a majority of the people favor “public option” health care reform, employee free choice, immigration reform with a path to citizenship, and increased public works spending to repair the infrastructure and create jobs.

The eminent civil rights leader, Dr. Joseph

Lowery, “calls this a ‘Time of Renewal,’ like the American Revolution, the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, the New Deal of the 1930s, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s,” Tyner said. “It’s a time of renewal and not of regrets.”

Obama’s tenure in the White House “has enhanced the possibilities of victory,” Tyner added. “The people’s forces have a very powerful ally in the President of the United States,” Tyner said. “In the co-op where my wife and I live, 80 percent white, there is strong support for Obama.” Just the other day a neighbor said to Tyner, “Boy am I ever glad Obama is in there and not George W. Bush!”

But there will be no progress without struggle, he continued. “If health care reform is passed and signed, we’ll have a fight to implement it because the insurance companies will do everything they can to block it,” he said.



Tim Wheeler is a national correspondent of the PW.

Here comes the sun

By PW Editorial Board

Little darling, it’s been a long cold lonely winter Little darling, it feels like years since it’s been here Here comes the sun, here comes the sun and I say it’s all right.”

So wrote the Beatles’ George Harrison in 1969. It’s not exactly a holiday carol, but it’s good to sing right about now.

In the Beatles’ England and all the Northern Hemisphere, the Earth tilts farthest away from the sun in “dark midwinter.” The growing cold and dark are hard for humans to cope with. In earliest human society, survival through the winter was no sure thing, and wintertime starvation was common.

Then comes the Winter Solstice, Dec. 21, when we start to tilt back toward the sun. Here comes the sun!

So, humans celebrate. A quick look at Wikipedia turns up scores of winter solstice celebrations, past and present, around the world.

Christmas and Hanukkah fit right into this tradition, along with their more recent compan-

ion Kwanzaa. For some they are deeply religious holidays. For some they represent rebirth and renewal. For many they are just fun, or a celebration of lights amidst the darkness, warmth amidst the cold.

As we look around the world at this solstice and holiday time, we see a lot of grief and hardship. Here in the U.S. and across the globe, people don’t have enough to eat or die of easily curable or preventable diseases. In too many places, this season, the lives of children and families are shattered by violence and war, some of it propagated by our own country. Our own children lack adequate health care and schooling. Joblessness, home foreclosures and insecurity afflict our people and our communities.

But if this dark midwinter teaches us anything, it’s that humans persevere. And not just persevere, but come together to struggle through the cold and dark, light the candles, plow the warm spring soil and reap the harvest of a new and brighter year.



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Health care bill must be worthy of working people

By John Wojcik

For the health care bill that is emerging in the Senate “to be worthy of the support of working men and women, substantial changes must be made,” declared Richard Trumka, the federation’s president in a statement this afternoon. The statement, which followed by 24 hours an emergency session during which the federation’s executive council discussed the Senate compromise, said, “The AFL-CIO intends to fight on behalf of all working families to make those changes and win health care reform that is deserving of the name.

“The absolute refusal of Republicans in the Senate to support health care reform and the hijacking of the bill by defenders of the insurance industry has brought us a bill that is inadequate,” said Trumka. “It is too kind to the insurance industry.”

The official AFL-CIO statement on the compromise measure lists three changes that it says should be made in the Senate bill.

First, the federation wants a public health insurance option which it described as “the way to break the stranglehold of the insurance industry over consumers that has led to double digit premium increases virtually every year.”

Second, the statement says, more must be done to make employers pay their fair share of the costs of reform

.A third “must,” according to the statement, is that “the benefits of hard-working Americans cannot be taxed to pay for health care reform - that’s no way to rein in insurance companies and it’s the wrong way to pay for health care reform.”

Trumka did indicate, however, that the federation considers some parts of the Senate bill to be positive. “It will provide health insurance to 30 million more Americans and provide subsidies to low-income individuals and families,” he said. “Benefits will have to meet minimum standards



and insurance companies will no longer be able to deny coverage based on pre-existing conditions or impose lifetime or unreasonable annual limits. The bill also included some relief for plans with early retirees as well as delivery system reforms that may lead to lower costs over the long haul.”

Trumka noted, however, that “because the bill bends toward the insurance industry, it will not check costs in the short term, and its financing asks working people and the country to pay the price. The House bill is the model for genuine health care reform. Working people cannot accept anything less than real reform.”

At a Thursday press conference the Service Employees International Union indicated that it too is seeking similar improvements in the Senate bill and specified that it hopes the House-Senate conference on the bill will result in some of those improvements.

“We think it’s time for the Senate to take a vote,” declared Andy Stern, the union’s president.

“It’s time for the obstructionists to get out of the way and it’s time to write the final chapter on this health care bill. It’s time to move to conference and we will fight so that the process there will result in something better than what we see in the Senate now.”

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Houston elects first gay mayor

By James Thompson

Who would have thunk it? Houston, the fourth largest U.S. city elected its first openly gay mayor on Dec. 12. The election of Annise Parker to the office of Houston mayor is a major accomplishment for progressive forces in Houston and around the country.

In the general election held on Nov. 3, Parker faced a wide field of candidates ranging from the far right to the far left. Three center left candidates affiliated with the Democratic Party including Parker, Gene Locke and Peter Brown garnered over 78% of the vote in the general election. All three had the endorsement of the Harris County AFL-CIO. There was only one Republican candidate, Roy Morales, and he got about 20% of the vote in that contest.

The Dec. 12 run-off was between Parker and a former civil rights activist and attorney, Gene Locke. Both candidates had the endorsement of the Harris County AFL-CIO Central Labor Council. The Harris County AFL-CIO has an active labor-to-neighbor program that contacts union members and their families, urges them to vote and provides educational material on the candidates.

The run-off was a bitterly fought contest and some commentators noted that Locke allied himself in the end with big business interests who used anti-gay tactics. Parker got a helpful hand from the Stonewall Democrats, a national LGBT group, who called voters in a massive get-out-the-vote effort.

Obviously, Parker's tactics paid off while Locke's tactics missed the mark.

Nueva ley en Ohio impacta a inmigrantes

Por Mundo Popular

El 9 de diciembre se quedaron más de 40.000 automóviles sin registración legal en Ohio. Varios meses anteriores, el Buró de Vehículos de Motores (BVM) del estado envió una carta a los dueños de estos autos para decirles que si no proveían un carnet del estado de Ohio, un permiso para conducir o un número de Seguro Social, les revocarían la registración.

Estos autos fueron registrados a través de otra persona a quien el dueño del carro autoriza por escrito y notariado para registrarlos de acuerdo a las leyes de Ohio. No obstante, el estado decidió cambiarlo y muchos, especialmente inmigrantes, están afectados.

Líderes de las comunidades latinas dicen que esto discrimina contra los hispanos y trataron de demandar en los tribunales. Desafortunadamente, el tribunal falló a favor de Ohio.

La sección de Ohio de la Liga de Ciudadanos Latino Americanos Unidos (LULAC por sus siglas en inglés) dijo, a través de su director para el estado Jason Riveiro, que esto no tenía nada que ver con la seguridad en las carreteras, sino que el estado estaba tratando de meterse en los asuntos de inmigración. La inmigración está gobernada por el gobierno federal y no los estados.

Organizaciones latinas dicen que esto es para impactar a los inmigrantes indocumentados.

Algunos líderes les pidieron al BVM que trate cada caso individual cuando estos individuos tengan que registrar sus carros de nuevo. Ellos dicen que así son menos los que están impactados por la nueva regla y que puede que el Congreso y el presidente Barack Obama ya hayan instituido una reforma migratoria.

El comerciante y líder de empresarios hispanos, Joseph Mas, dijo que esta era una forma ilegal de hacer cumplir con las leyes federales de inmigración. Los empresarios también dijeron que esto va a perjudicar a los negocios latinos y a los que sirven a esa comunidad.

El BVM en su carta les dijo a los dueños de automóviles que tenían que proveer la prueba y pagar \$3,50 por ese privilegio. En la demanda, las organizaciones latinas dijeron que como era legal registrar el vehículo de esta manera, cambiarlo ahora y cobrarle también debe de ser ilegal.

El abogado de inmigración que presentó el caso para los hispanos, Dennis Muchniki, dijo que el estado de Ohio estaba actuando de una manera caprichosa y burocrática que no toma en consideración a los inmigrantes, sus familias y los negocios que dependen de ellos.

