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Michigan warning: Republican extremism goes too far

By John Rummel

The attack on workers rights and democracy in Michigan is a warning for the nation.

In the 2010 mid-term elections in Michigan, voter turnout declined and Republicans won races for governor, secretary of state, attorney general, and a majority on the Supreme Court.

They have unleashed a brutal attack. Almost 90 bills attacking rights have been introduced.

With the current extremist crowd running the Republican Party, the lesson of Michigan is clear: the far-right cannot be given the power to govern on the state or national level.

With double-digit unemployment, losing more manufacturing jobs than any other state and new jobs almost non-existent, the state legislature passed a retroactive 48-month lifetime limit on welfare cash assistance. Almost 40,000 people, the majority children, have been cut off. In addition, unemployment benefits have been cut from 26 week to 20 weeks. Other legislation will cut the amount jobless workers are eligible to collect.

One of the first acts of Republican Gov. Rick Snyder was to lower the corporate tax rate by almost \$2 billion. The loss in revenue was made up by taxing seniors' pensions, slashing the earned income tax credit for low-income workers and cutting funding of public schools.

While there is no evidence of voter fraud in



Michigan elections, Senate Bill 754, part of an 11-bill legislative package unveiled by Republicans, places new hurdles on voting and voter registration campaigns. Individuals and organizations registering voters would have to be trained and certified by the secretary of state. Other provisions require completed registration forms to be submitted within 24 hours. Photo identification requirements for absentee ballots would make voting more difficult.

Another bill prohibits schools from collecting union dues from wages of school employees.

Legislation removing all caps and limits of all types on charter schools will open the floodgates

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for the privatization of education.

SB 729, a "right-to-work" bill for school

The question for 2012 is will what happened in Michigan take place in the nation as a whole?

workers, was introduced in October. Another bill, which calls for the forced privatization of non-instructional workers in public school districts, is on its third reading in the Senate.

Already passed are bills requiring public employees to pay no less than 20% of their health care, one that prohibits paid time off for union business, and another that adds restrictions on police officer and fire fighter arbitration rights.

A bill that drastically undermines workers' compensation benefits was just passed.

Other measures will do away with prevailing wage requirements and remove the current requirement of employers to notify striking unions when they are hiring replacement workers.

While Michigan Republicans work to delay the creation of the health care exchanges required in the president's Affordable Health Care Act, a bill passed the state House prohibiting the Michigan Occupational Health and Safety Administration from developing rules more stringent than federal ones.

Republican Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette last month joined with 24 other state attorneys general in filing a lawsuit to scuttle new regulations reducing mercury from power plants.

Michigan's "emergency manager" law has resulted in such managers appointed in majority African American cities, and Detroit is now threatened. Emergency managers can terminate collective bargaining agreements, remove elected officials from office and ban them from running for office for six years, dissolve political structures such as councils, commissions and school boards, and force consolidation of services in schools, townships, cities and counties.

Other legislation prevents public employers from offering benefits to domestic partners. Another turns an anti-bullying measure into its opposite if the victims are gay or transgendered.

English-only legislation and bills requiring temporary work agencies and public employers and their contractors to use the mistake-ridden E-verify database to match Social Security numbers have been introduced.

There are more bills passed or still in committee that will negatively impact democracy, labor rights and the life of those living in this state.

The question for 2012 is will what happened in Michigan take place in the nation as a whole?



John Rummel is PW Michigan bureau chief.

The Iraq war is over - or is it?

By PW Editorial Board

With almost all U.S. troops leaving Iraq by year's end, a most painful chapter in American military adventurism is closing.

"We knew this day would come. We have known it for some time now," President Obama told troops arriving at Fort Bragg, N. C. Dec. 15. "But still, there is something profound about the end of a war that has lasted so long."

Obama deserves praise for fulfilling his promise. But many question whether that promise has been completely realized.

Some have wondered whether, with the world's biggest embassy in Baghdad and an acknowledged 16,000 diplomatic personnel around the country, Washington is trading a military presence for a State Department one.

Nor is the drastic cut in military forces necessarily the end of the story.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has said he expects some 40,000 U.S. troops to be stationed around the Middle East after troops leave Iraq. U.S. arms sales to Iraq have been escalating for several years, including jet fighters, transport air-

craft, missile-armed helicopters and tanks.

And talks for more U.S. troops in Iraq could resume after the first of the year.

What have been the results of this nearly nine-year war? Nearly 4,500 U.S. troops, and at least 100,000 Iraqis, have died. Over 32,000 U.S. troops, and countless Iraqis, have been wounded. Costs to the U.S. may reach \$3 trillion. Iraq's economy and infrastructure have been savaged, its population uprooted and many exiled.

Undoubtedly many soldiers will end up in Afghanistan, or elsewhere around the world. Others will return to a country where large numbers of vets are jobless and/or homeless, and needed medical treatment is hard to come by.

As we welcome the troops' departure from Iraq, we call on the president and Congress to bring all U.S. troops home, to assure them job training, jobs and the all-around care they need to return to civilian life.

And most importantly, to once and for all change our country's foreign policy to one of peace and cooperation around the world.

Some have wondered whether Washington is trading a military presence for a State Department one.

84-year-old Wisconsin woman told to pay \$200 poll tax

By John Wojcik

For more than 60 years Ruthelle Frank has not missed an election in her town, her state and her country. She first voted in 1948 and has voted in every single election since then.

She is an elected official in Brokaw, Wis. She is a member of the Village Board.

Now, because of the new Republican voter ID law, 2012 will be the first year Frank can't vote.

Under the new law people must carry a new state issued photo ID in order to vote. The ID itself is free but one must have a birth certificate in order to get the free ID. Birth certificates, for those in Wisconsin who don't have them, cost \$20. Opponents of the Republican voter ID law argue that this amounts to an unconstitutional poll tax.

Frank's first problem is that she does not have a birth certificate. People born at home in the 1920s did not receive birth certificates.

Her mother recorded the difficult birth (Frank is, to this day, paralyzed on her right side) in the family Bible and inserted her daughter's certification of baptism into the same Bible a few months later. Her other IDs consist of a Social Security card, a Medicare statement, and a checkbook. But without the official birth certificate, she can't get the special state ID required for her to vote.

"This is completely crazy," Frank said. "I have this proof and that proof. What are they trying to tell me? Are they saying I'm not a U.S. citizen?"

Officials in Madison told her that she would be issued a new birth certificate for \$20 because the Register of Deeds has a record of her birth.

Frank explained that there was another problem, however. When the clerk who first recorded her birth entered her name in the registry, he copied her name in a misspelled form, because the doctor present at her home when she was born had given him the wrong spelling of her last name, which was Wedepohl. To issue a birth certificate with the correct spelling she would have to pay \$200, much more than the normal \$20 fee.



Once she pays the \$200 fee she will have to petition a court to amend the misspelled document - a process that would take several weeks.

Frank said that the state officials told her to simply pay the \$20 for the incorrect birth certificate and just hope that the Department of Motor Vehicles would accept it as proof.

Officials suggested that people with total disabilities could be eligible for exemptions from the new ID requirements and that she, since she is paralyzed, could be eligible for an exemption.

"That would be lying," said Frank, "and I don't want to be forced to lie. I walk from home to the town board meetings every month. She feels that her level of disability does not qualify her for an exemption.

Frank is angry. "I look at that like paying a fee to vote," she declared. "This whole idea of photo ID to vote is for the birds."

The American Civil Liberties Union has gone to bat for Frank, and is fighting to have Wisconsin's new voter-ID law overturned.

The U.S. Justice Department says it too is looking carefully at the voter suppression laws put through by Republican lawmakers all over the country.

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Thousands at UN for voting rights

By Gabe Falsetta

They came to New York in the thousands to let the forces of reaction know that their voting rights - rights that were fought and died for - will not be taken away. The March started from the Koch brothers' offices and headed to the United Nations where the rally took place.

There is a sinister movement in America by the right and far right to disenfranchise millions of voters. The far-right Koch brothers are channeling millions of dollars to the Republicans to do the dirty work of depriving the poor working class, especially people of color, of their right to vote.

Louise Legun with the Veterans for Peace from Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania declared, "I'm here in solidarity with the people who are being disenfranchised from voting, especially people of color. We drove up from Pennsylvania and it's great to be here."

The NAACP called the action in order to inform the public of the attempt to deny people their right to vote. Local 1199 of SEIU (the Service workers), the United Federation of Teachers, the Urban League, the Professional Staff Congress, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, DC 37, and community groups such as, Make the Road joined the American Civil Liberties Union, college students and many others at both the march and rally.

"Voter ID laws are nothing but reincarnated poll taxes and literacy tests," said NAACP President Benjamin Jealous in remarks he made before the rally.

New York State Sen. Charles Schumer said, "We have an obligation that started with the patriots who put down their plows and took up their muskets so that they could vote; remember what they said? No taxation without representation. Let us vote!"

Dec. 10 was designated International Human Rights Day at the UN. The NAACP, on this date in 1948, also at the UN, issued its famous Declaration of Human Rights.

Nueva política migratoria en Denver: Prueba para la nación

Por Pepe Lozano

Denver es una de dos ciudades, la otra siendo Baltimore, que conducirá un nuevo programa piloto con la meta de implementar la nueva política migratoria de la administración Obama, política que fue anunciada en junio.

El período de prueba de seis semanas, que comenzó esta semana en Denver, forma parte de la implementación inicial de las nuevas instrucciones para fiscales a ser aplicados a casos de inmigrantes indocumentados. Dice la política que los inmigrantes no autorizados que enfrentan a la deportación pero que no tienen antecedentes penales y que cumplen con ciertos criterios pueden ser identificados como casos de baja prioridad para la aplicación de leyes migratorias, y que por trámite administrativo se puede dar "carpetazo" a sus casos migratorios.

Durante una llamada a la prensa celebrada el 8 de diciembre, discutían dirigentes locales e integrantes de la comunidad inmigrante del estado de Colorado los efectos del nuevo programa. Aplaudían muchos a la iniciativa como paso positivo hacia adelante. Su meta es estudiar y determinar la escala de la aplicación de la política y averiguar su impacto real sobre los inmigrantes locales y sus familias.

"Este es un acontecimiento nuevo y emocionante y se espera que proporcionará un alivio inmediato a miles de integrantes de la comunidad inmigrante de Denver y, según se espera, la de todo el país, dijo Julie González, directora de organización con la Coalición por Derechos Migratorios de Colorado.

Participaba en la llamada Laura Lichter, presidente electa de la Asoc-

ciación Norteamericana de Abogados Migratorios, en Denver. Calificó ella a la nueva política en términos de un peatón que cruce la calle con luz roja y otro que asalte un banco. Dijo ella que la policía debe que perseguir al que roba los bancos en vez del peatón descuidado. Cuando se trata de la aplicación de las leyes migratorias, los oficiales deben que ejercer la discreción y enfocar sus recursos sobre los verdaderos criminales en vez de los casos de baja prioridad en los cuales la persona no amenaza a nuestra comunidad ni pone en peligro la seguridad nacional.

Subraya Lichter que ya hay 300.000 casos migratorios pendientes a nivel nacional. Dice ella que encontró un estudio reciente que solo uno de cada 12 de estos casos tiene antecedentes penales.

"Con una política de discreción para los fiscales no se refiere solo a un punto determinado del proceso; es más bien un principio que debe que implementarse a cada paso del proceso," dijo ella. "Una utilización inteligente de discreción por parte de los fiscales asegurará una aplicación inteligente de la ley".

Raúl Cárdenas enfrentaba a una posible deportación. Sin embargo, su caso fue cerrado administrativamente esta semana, beneficiándose él y su esposa de la nueva política de discreción. Sin embargo, Cárdenas se siente atrapado y en limbo a pesar de las recientes noticias.

"Todavía no puedo trabajar y no puedo sostener a mi familia," dijo él. "Me siento inútil".

Dice su esposa, Judy, que ellos tienen 9 años de casados. Ella había pedido un reajuste al estatus de su esposo poco después de casarse.

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