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Progressives say stakes in elections “higher than ever”

By Margaret Baldrige

With over 80 progressive organizations participating, the ninth annual conference of the Campaign for America's Future opened here June 18 under the banner of “Take Back the American Dream.”

Robert Borosage, conference organizer, said at the opening that it was going to be an intense three day event because the stakes are so high: to reelect the president in November and take back the House from the “brazen billionaires” who are subverting our democracy.

The agenda was filled with high-profile speakers: Melissa Harris-Perry, Van Jones, Rep. Jan Schakowsky, Damon Silvers, the AFL-CIO's policy director and Molly Katchpole.

Katchpole is the young woman who cut up her Bank of America card on national television last year and forced the major banks to forego their intended \$5 debit card fees.

Her online petition started a movement for the public to switch bank accounts from large banks to credit unions and community banks.

Katchpole set the tone for the conference, which had a strong youth component. She spoke to the plenary of her solid grounding in the experiences of her working class family, her dad having worked for 30 years as a machinist.

It's a mistake, she said, for the current budget battles to exclude or under-represent the young people because “we'll be one third of the electorate in 2016.”

She continued, “ I look at the make-up of the Congress. Where are the machinists, the fire



fighters the teachers, the youth representatives? It doesn't look like America.”

In speaking of the effort to keep the interest rate on student loans from doubling this July 1, Molly had all the conference participants stand and repeat to each other, “I stand with you, the youth.”

Van Jones, founding president of Rebuild the Dream, in his rousing presentation to the plenary, referred, too, to the energy and the courage of the youth.

“Look at these extraordinary young people. They are blessed with not knowing that what they want is impossible.”

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“He then spoke of the courage of the “Dreamers,” those undocumented immigrant youth who

**“I stand with you,
the youth.”**

came from all over the country, at great peril to themselves, to sit in at government offices in Washington, resulting in President Obama last week granting immunity from deportation under certain conditions for those under the age of 30.

It was the young, Jones said, who sent a message to the administration by engaging in the Tar Sands civil disobedience last fall, who heightened the gender equality discussion, who, by their tenacity in the Occupy movement, put income inequality on the national agenda and “bought us a year.” They showed us that if you struggle, you can win.

Youth activism was the central focus of several of the first-day “strategy sessions” at the conference, among them: The 99% Movement: Next Steps; and Student Debt Explosion: Trillion Dollar Trouble.

One theme that came out of the workshops was that while youth are boldly taking the lead in a number of anti-corporate direct actions such as at Walmart and at Wells Fargo and Verizon shareholder meetings, they count on the support and knowledge of older generations.

Intergenerational struggle was recognized as essential for taking on corporate power. And it works both ways. An older participant suggested that the League of Women Voters could use some help from young activists in registering people to vote in the current voter-suppression climate.

An additional theme emphasized by plenary and strategy session speakers alike was the idea of the “fiscal cliff,” which falls on the day after the Nov. 6th elections until the end of December when fiscal issues such as the payroll tax extension, the unemployment extension, the Bush Tax cuts and “all the other cans that have been kicked down the road,” as Van Jones put it, will be decided.

What’s at stake in these elections couldn’t be clearer.

Plenary sessions and select breakout sessions of the conference were streamed live and are available on demand at both the OurFuture.org/takeback and FreeSpeech.org websites.



Margaret Baldrige writes for the People’s World.

A big victory for health care

By PW Editorial Board

The ruling upholding President Obama’s health reform law is a huge victory.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA for short) came out of an enormous political battle two years ago. The profit-driven health industry (what a contradiction!) and its far-right political flunkies were on one side, and most of the American public was on the other side. Overwhelmingly, Americans were fed up with insurance companies’ denials of coverage and their exorbitant cost.

Because of the power of the corporate right-wing, the bill that finally became law has many shortcomings, and does not solve our health care crisis. But it is an important step in that direction. It has begun to open up health care for millions of people. And, importantly, it has put the profit-driven health insurance industry on the defensive. That will help us move forward to a national system of affordable health care for all. And that’s why the Republicans hate “Obamacare.”

Predictably, House Republican leader Eric Cantor says the GOP-controlled House will again vote on repealing the entire law next week. Talk about wasting time and taxpayer money! Millions of Americans are desperate for jobs, our infrastructure is crumbling, our health, education and environment are eroding - and these shills

for corporate profits are doing nothing about it! Worse, they are using their taxpayer-provided salaries (with accompanying health coverage!) to block any effort to improve Americans’ well-being. Instead they are trying to undermine it, in the name of “freedom.” Well, yes, freedom for Big Insurance, Big Pharma and other corporate Bigs.

Why did right-wing Chief Justice John Roberts decide to uphold the law? We suggest that he has his eye to the political winds. Occupy Wall Street’s slogan of the 99% versus the 1% struck a chord with the American people and knocked the tea party off the front pages. Overtly political anti-Obama remarks by the Supreme Court’s most extreme right winger, Justice Antonin Scalia, led the Washington Post, among others, to say the court’s legitimacy is in question. Undoubtedly Roberts made a tactical retreat.

It will take some time to see how the details of the court’s ruling play out. That includes its limitation on requiring states to include the ACA’s expanded health care access in their Medicaid programs.

As many are pointing out, what’s needed immediately is to fully implement the Affordable Care Act’s reforms on the ground - including making health coverage accessible and affordable to everyone.

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Cuba struggles for food self-sufficiency

By W. T. Whitney Jr.

Responding to popular expectations, diminished worker productivity, the U.S. blockade, and skyrocketing costs of imports - particularly food - Cuba is restructuring its economy. Agricultural changes are part of the process.

In 2008, the government opened up idle land for long-term, independent use by individuals and cooperatives. The action came in response to the annual cost of food imports rising to above \$1.5 billion and to the reality that half of Cuba's arable land, 8.5 million acres, was idle.

Almost four years later agricultural official Pedro Olivera reported that 163,000 farmers or cooperatives had received 3.8 million acres of idle land, of which 79 percent was being farmed.

Many recipients say the process was long and tedious. Some found contracts they were signing difficult to understand. Their farming operations often were delayed due to non-availability of credit and promised supplies. Many farmers protest remaining state controls over food distribution.

Led by successful rice and bean harvests, agricultural production expanded 9.8 percent over the first four months of 2012, and Cuba is having to import less rice than before from Vietnam, Cuba's main foreign supplier. Yet overall 2012 production levels so far fall below those achieved in 2005. Cuba's apparent inability to increase overall food production is part of a long pattern of relatively low production levels.

In 2010 Cuba's rice production per acre, poultry production, and corn production were all below the annual averages established over 50 years for these food products. Cuba that year spent \$159.9 million and \$155.9 million to import poultry and corn, respectively. In world rankings Cuba's current production levels for rice and corn are very low.

Paradoxically, Cuba's agricultural reformation following the Soviet bloc collapse and loss of its trading partners earned worldwide praise for Cuban farmers' practice of sustainable agricul-



ture. Cuba's 4.2 percent average annual growth in agricultural production from 1996 through 2005 was tops in Latin America.

Miguel Altieri and Fernando Funes-Monzote attribute agricultural success then to decentralized controls and the newly ascendant role of individual farmers and cooperatives. Small farmers in 2006 controlled only 25 percent of cultivated land in Cuba, but accounted for 65 percent of the island's food production while reducing their use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

The recent agricultural reforms came about in response to Cuba's burden, as reported, of having to import 70 percent of its food. Altieri and Funes-Monzote say that estimate refers to food provided through the rationing system. They indicate data for the production and distribution of some basic foods are less well known and that, in fact, Cuba may be approaching self-sufficiency in these categories.

Agriculture seems to be evolving on parallel tracks in Cuba. Human and animal powered organic farming coexists with signature tools of industrial agriculture like genetically modified seeds, big farm equipment, and elaborate irrigation systems. Yet if farmers' resiliency after disastrous hurricanes and the economic collapse of the 1990s means anything, Cuba may end up attaining a measure of food independence sometime soon.

Cuba's agricultural reformation following the Soviet bloc collapse and loss of its trading partners earned worldwide praise.

Stockton becomes largest bankrupt city in U.S.

By Marilyn Bechtel

Earlier this week Stockton, Calif., population 292,000, became the largest U.S. city to file for bankruptcy. The June 28 filing came after months of talks with creditors failed to resolve a \$26 million gap in the city's budget for the coming fiscal year.

Earlier in the week, the City Council had voted to halt bond payments, drastically cut workers' health and retirement benefits, and approve a minimum budget.

"We are extremely disappointed that we have been unable to avoid bankruptcy," Mayor Ann Johnston said in a statement. "This is what we must do to get our fiscal house in order and protect the safety and welfare of our citizens."

The city had already defaulted on some \$2 million in debt this year, resulting in creditors seizing the building that was to become the new city hall, as well as three city parking garages.

Stockton, in the midst of California's Central Valley, is a major port handling the region's agricultural exports. The city experienced a housing boom in the 1990s and early 2000s, as it attracted many people priced out when housing costs soared in San Francisco and other Bay Area cities.

In recent years Stockton has slashed \$90 million from its general fund, made big cuts to police and fire departments.

Much media commentary on the city's crisis has placed blame on a building spree during the real estate boom, and on allegedly lavish benefits granted city workers.

The city had made a commitment to its workers - many of them hired before 1986 and therefore not covered by Medicare - to fund retirement medical care, Rose said. In return, the workers agreed to take 20 percent less in salary adjustments, with the funds to be set aside to pay for the care.

Paraguay resiste, primera consigna que escuchó Insulza en Asunción

Por Prensa Latina

La primera consigna que escuchó hoy el secretario general de la OEA, José Miguel Insulza, en su inicial madrugada aquí, fue Paraguay resiste, repetida por manifestantes que condenaron la destitución del presidente constitucional, Fernando Lugo.

Unas 500 personas se encargaron de mostrar al visitante su desacuerdo con el desalojo del poder del mandatario electo y el posterior nombramiento en el cargo de Federico Franco, acción considerada un golpe de Estado parlamentario.

A pesar de todas las previsiones tomadas por los cuerpos policíacos, la caravana que condujo a Insulza y sus acompañantes desde la terminal aérea al hotel La Misión donde se aloja, debió tropezar con la manifestación convocada por los partidarios de Lugo, quienes portaban cartelones.

Patrulleras de la policía cortaron el paso a los manifestantes para facilitar la salida del aeropuerto internacional por un camino secundario, pero los protestantes aparecieron también en los alrededores del hotel repitiendo a viva voz su oposición a Franco.

En menor cuantía, un grupo de partidarios del golpe se concentraron en un parque cercano al aeropuerto, pero su demostración fue apagada por el mayor número de los seguidores de Lugo y su habilidad para acercarse, incluso, al auto de la caravana en que viajaba Insulza.

La demostración continuó durante algunas horas de la madrugada a una cuadra de la instalación hotelera, pues la policía no permitió un mayor acercamiento a ella.

De acuerdo al programa divulgado, entrevistas separadas con Franco y Lugo son las primeras actividades pautadas para Insulza y sus acompañantes, a las cuales siguen conversaciones con congresistas, dirigentes políticos y la alta jerarquía de la iglesia católica.

Una delegación de parlamentarios europeos manifestó hoy, en esta capital, su rechazo a la destitución del presidente constitucional, Fernando Lugo, y consideró que eso provocó un quiebre del estado democrático.

Parlamentarios europeos llegan a Paraguay a apoyar a Lugo

La misión está integrada por el legislador español Willy Meyer, vicepresidente de la Asamblea Unión Europea - América Latina y Caribe junto a Inés Zuber, del Partido Comunista Portugués.

Los legisladores pnntualizaron su apoyo a las sanciones impuestas a Paraguay por el Mercado Común del Sur y la Unión de Naciones Suramericanas.

Anunciaron su solicitud a la Unión Europea de suspender los acuerdos de cooperación con el gobierno paraguayo hasta que sea restablecido el orden democrático en el país.

Meyer opinó que es imposible mantener relaciones normales con países donde se registra un golpe de Estado y recaló que eso es lo sucedido en Paraguay.

Nos ponemos a disposición de las organizaciones sociales para acompañar las tareas que emprendan a fin de lograr lo más rápido posible la restitución en el cargo del Presidente legítimo de la nación, concluyó.