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Coalition fights right- wing initiative

By Tim Wheeler

Not for a long time has there been such a need for increased public spending to create jobs and rebuild infrastructure, not least here in Washington State saddled with 9.2 percent joblessness.

Yet right-winger, Tim Eyman, has placed on the Nov. 3 ballot a referendum, I-1033, that would force even deeper spending cuts than those already imposed across the Evergreen state.

I-1033 would freeze state, county, and municipal budgets at the previous year's level plus population growth and the national inflation rate.

A coalition of 60 organizations including the AFL-CIO, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the Washington Education Association, Sierra Club, the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, and Microsoft, has come together to fight I-1033.

The non-partisan Office of Financial Management warns that I-1033 would slash \$2.8 billion in revenues that state, county, and local governments use to "keep our communities healthy, safe and clean." AARP estimates that "40,000 Washington residents of all ages may lose Basic Health Plan coverage" if voters approve I-1033 on November 3, 2009.

Eyman promotes the right-wing ideology that public programs are evil and the quicker they are privatized the better. Yet Washington state is a living testament of the opposite.



This reporter toted up a list of the public works projects in Washington:

- Seattle opened its light rail system, easing traffic congestion, reducing the city's "carbon footprint" while generating hundreds of union-wage jobs.

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• The keel was laid at Todd Shipyards for a new 64-car ferry for the Port Townsend-Keystone run, one of twenty auto ferries in the Washington State Ferries (WSF) fleet. Todd has just won the bid to build two more ferries, a lifeline for shipbuilding that employs thousands in the Puget Sound region.

• The ribbon was cut on a new bridge across the Elwha river replacing the single-lane span built in 1914. When completed, it will stretch well

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over 100 miles from Port Townsend to Forks and on to Lapush.

• Preparations are underway to take down two dams on the Elwha, an effort to restore the salmon and steelhead fish that once teemed in the river. This project was speeded up by an entire year when millions from the Obama stimulus package was earmarked for the dam removal.

Kaleen Cottingham, Director of the Washington State Office of Recreation and Conservation, a speaker at the Elwha bridge ribbon-cutting told the World, "These projects only work with strong commitment of local communities."

Last week, we visited the "mother" of all public works projects, Grand Coulee Dam. It generates enough electricity to supply two cities the size of Seattle, all of it free of greenhouse gases. The dams came with a heavy cost: wiping out the salmon and steelhead runs that once spawned upriver from Grand Coulee Dam, ending a way of life for the Native American Indians united in the Colville Confederation. Redressing those injustices means restoring the salmon and steelhead runs. In some cases, it means removing the dams.

That too will require billions in public funding. We stopped at the Wanapum Dam further down the Columbia operated by the Grant County PUD. Susan Parker, docent at the Wanapum Interpretive Center, told us people are being paid wages to count the salmon and steelhead swimming up the fish ladders beside these dams. Engineers, she said, are working to redesign the turbine blades in the generators so the salmon fry can swim through them unharmed. Saving the salmon may turn out to be as labor intensive as building the dams. But it is an investment that will pay huge dividends.

That project is put at risk by Eyman and other "fiscal hawks" who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Vote No on I-1033. It is a vote to save the salmon.



Tim Wheeler is a reporter for the Peoples World.

The choice of Rio de Janeiro

By PW Editorial Board

Chicago didn't get the 2016 Olympics. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, did. All Americans should offer their congratulations. It's the first time a South American country will host the games.

Some disappointed Americans, especially in Chicago, sounded like sore losers. Some supporters of President Obama, who is under attack by the extreme right, suggested that if you didn't support the Olympics in Chicago you were unpatriotic.

Frankly, half of Chicago didn't support the games. And it had nothing to do with the president, the first lady or Oprah, all of whom tried their best to bring the games to their hometown.

No, it had to do with corruption and pro-corporate profiteering policies emanating from City Hall. With a budget in shambles, many Chicagoans didn't believe that they would share in the stimulus that the Olympics are supposed to bring. Chicagoans thought they'd be left holding the debt while corporate cronies and real estate developers got paid handsomely. Buy an Olympic Village

condo, anyone?

Republicans and other extreme anti-Obama forces make themselves look ridiculous trumpeting the International Olympic Committee vote as the world rejecting President Obama. The IOC has recognized South America, and in particular Brazil, as a global player. Country after country in South America has thrown off the shackles of economic servitude and turned to democratically elected left-center and even socialist governments. Brazil is one such country. Brazil's Sports Minister, Orlando Silva, said, "Brazil has trained long and hard" to host the games. "That training includes rallying our executive, federal, state and municipal levels of government around the central goals of achieving responsible, socially equitable and environmentally sustainable development."

Chicago's Mayor Daley, on the other hand, led an organizing committee that did not involve the public and had no such goals or planning.

Passing the torch to Brazil was the right thing to do. Congratulations.



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Seven arrested at CIGNA

By John Bachtell

Seven health care activists were arrested when they refused to leave the lobby of CIGNA insurance company. The activists were demanding immediate approval of all doctor recommended treatments by CIGNA. The arrests were part of a national action and aimed at highlighting how the insurance industry drive for profits is resulting in thousands of unnecessary deaths.

“Forty-five thousand people die each year because they are denied care by insurance corporations,” said Edward Crouse, 34 of the Chicago Single Payer Action Network (CSPAN).

Crouse said all the insurance giants were equally guilty, but they targeted CIGNA because of a notorious case in which the company denied Natalie Sarkisyan treatment for a liver transplant. Her family fought the decision and forced CIGNA to finally grant the treatment, but it came 2 hours before she died.

Well-known whistle blower Wendell Potter was also the former head of corporate communications for CIGNA.

Potter recently told TV journalist Bill Moyers, “Back in the early nineties, 95 cents out of every dollar was used by the insurance companies to pay claims. Last year, it was down to just slightly above 80 percent.

“So, investors want that to keep shrinking. And if they see that an insurance company has not done what they think meets their expectations with the medical loss ratio, they’ll punish them. Investors will start leaving in droves.” Potter also said the insurance industry is deathly afraid of any public competition in the health care field. In fact, the number of competitors has been shrinking due to buyouts and mergers.

“They don’t want any more competition period. They certainly don’t want it from a government plan that might be operating more efficiently than they operate. The Medicare program is a government-run program that has administrative expenses that are three percent,” compared to the health insurance industry’s 20%, he said

Back at the CIGNA protest, Crouse said while



a single payer health care system wasn’t going to pass in this session of Congress the current reforms being considered won’t be enough to solve the health care crisis.

“Single payer may not pass, but it won’t be abandoned. We believe a single payer system is the only viable solution to the health care crisis,” said Crouse.

As he watched his friends being carried to the police wagon, Bill Bianchi of Progressive Democrats of America said “the biggest crime is the denial of insurance and the removal of insurance of those who have it.”

“Single payer is alive and well and we’ll continue to demand our legislators pass it. Everybody in and nobody out,” he said.

“Single payer may not pass, but it won’t be abandoned. We believe it is the only viable solution.”

Edward Crouse



John Bachtell is a reporter for the Peoples World.

Stella Dora workers treatment: 'Disgraceful'

By Dan Margolis

Brynwood Partners, which owns cookie-manufacturer Stella d'Oro has drawn the ire of city Comptroller and Democratic mayoral candidate Bill Thompson, who said the private equity firm's actions are "disgraceful."

When company's management tried to slash the workers' pay, paid holidays, paid sick days and pensions, the workers, members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers Union Local 50, began a nine month strike

The workers won their fight when, in June 2009, the National Labor Review Board ruled that the management had acted illegally.

However, what should have been a celebration turned into more agony. On the day the employees returned to work, Brynwood announced that it would close the plant, only to reopen with a crew of non-union workers in distant Ohio.

Thompson is furious. "I think it's disgraceful," he told the World. "Those workers were on strike for the right to be able to unionize and to fight for a fair contract, and then all of a sudden, a private equity company, to save or make more money is shutting the plant down."

Unfortunately, billionaire Michael Bloomberg, seems to have nothing to say.

Thompson, even before his election as mayor, seems to be making good on his campaign promises. He argues that the billionaire Bloomberg has become increasingly out of touch with regular New Yorkers

It is unfortunate right now that they take those jobs out of the Bronx," he said.

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Marchan por empleos en Boston

By Jose Cruz

Una vez más, la revolución empieza en Boston", dijo Paul Feeney, aludiendo a la rebelión por la independencia de las colonias norteamericanas que empezó en esta ciudad y la concentración de trabajadores, al cruzar la calle de la Casa del Estado, que se reunían para la protesta contra una "Recuperación económica sin empleos".

Feeney, activista del Local 2222 de la Hermandad Internacional de Trabajadores Eléctricos, estaba empezando el programa para la manifestación del 1 de octubre que coincidía con el primer aniversario del rescate económico a los bancos, casas de seguros y otras instituciones financieras. La manifestación fue un día antes de que se publicaran los datos de desempleo que subió en el mes anterior a 9,8 por ciento.

La consigna del día era "Empleo, no avaricia" dijo Feeney a los sindicalistas y sus aliados reunidos ahí antes de la multitud de más de mil personas oír de los trabajadores que perdieron su trabajo por la crisis económica. Después los manifestantes marcharon a las oficinas una plaza entre la compañía de telecomunicaciones Verizon y el Bank of America. Marcharon una vez más hacia el hotel Hyatt en Boston para otra manifestación.

Ana Kincaid, madre soltera de 26 años y una trabajadora social con el departamento de Niños y Familias, fue la primera en hablar.

El despido de trabajadores socia-

les solo pondrá más presión sobre el resto del personal. Aunque el convenio laboral limita el número de familias que un trabajador debe de tener a 18, muchos tienen 23 y más.

Ed Fitzgerald, presidente del Local 2222 que representa a los trabajadores de la comunicación, exigió que todo el movimiento sindical se una para prevenir lo que las corporaciones quieren hacer y adelantar la lucha obrera. Verizon, cuyos trabajadores pertenecen al Local 2222 en el área, anunció que iban a despedir 8 mil en todo Estados Unidos, como 300 de estos en Massachusetts.

Danny Manning, uno de los trabajadores de Verizon que serán despedidos dijo, "los accionistas reciben sus beneficios mientras me mandan a casa... Somos los que construimos las carreteras, puentes, carros que guían... somos los que nos arriesgamos durante las tormentas de hielo para que los consumidores tengan servicio. Somos los que fomentan la compañía y sus ganancias para que tengan una vida de lujo... Bata ya... es tiempo que tomamos acción".

Lucinda Williams, ex trabajadora del hotel Hyatt, dijo, "Nos despidieron a favor de trabajo más barato... ellos culpan a la economía. No es la economía, simplemente son groseros".



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