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Activists conduct peaceful disobedience to aid formerly incarcerated

By Marilyn Bechtel

Tired of waiting after months of discussions with the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, advocates of greater county spending to help formerly incarcerated people staged a peaceful disruption of the supervisors' meeting to press their demands.

Since last summer, a coalition brought together by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights has been urging the five supervisors to increase funding for community-based programs and services to help formerly incarcerated people return successfully to the community.

The Jobs Not Jails coalition has been calling for an end to the current practice of giving most funds from the county's public safety realignment budget to the sheriff, and urging instead that half the money go to community-based housing, health care, education and job training programs for people coming out of jail, starting with the current 2014-15 fiscal year.

They have also been calling on the supervisors to sign a pledge stating that they support "50% for Jobs Not Jails."

At the meeting, speakers including a representative of the Alameda Labor Council advocated for the increase in reentry spending.

The Labor Council's statement called incarceration "a labor issue," and urged Alameda Coun-



ty to "be a leader and a model in California. Jails do not make safe communities. Jobs, education and opportunities make safe, strong communities."

Ella Baker Center organizer Maria Dominguez reminded the supervisors that they had yet to respond to the Jobs Not Jails coalitions' recommendations.

When it became clear that no action would be taken at the current meeting, some 75 supporters

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in the audience began to chant and sing freedom songs. Five supporters, including Ella Baker Center's executive director, Zachary Norris, crossed the barrier separating the supervisors from the audience, calling on the four supervisors present to sign a pledge of support for the allocation.

By allocating 60 percent of its realignment funds to programs and services, neighboring Contra County has achieved a drop in their recidivism rate by 21 percent.

The meeting was then recessed. Afterwards, Supervisor Richard Valle signed the activists' pledge of support, while Supervisor Keith Carson read an extensive statement calling for half the public safety budget to go to community programs and services in the upcoming fiscal year starting July 1, 2015.

Norris and the four other protest leaders remained in the chambers, in the company of the county sheriff and his deputies, for over an hour after deputies escorted other protesters out. They then rejoined supporters outside the County Administration Building.

The Ella Baker Center says the action brought "key victories," and is calling on supporters to step up their pressure.

"This is a critical moment," Norris said in a message to supporters. "In just a couple of weeks, the supervisors will vote on the county's public safety budget, and we need to increase the pressure to make sure they pass a Jobs Not Jails budget."

The county's Public Safety Realignment budget stems from 2011 California legislation that

shifted people convicted of non-violent, non-serious, non-sex related offenses from state prisons to county jails, and in turn, allocated state funds to each county.

In a letter to the county supervisors, the Ella Baker Center pointed out that since realignment began, Alameda County "has engaged in some promising practices," and is to be one of 11 California counties profiled by the Public Policy Institute of California and the Board of State and Community Corrections "to identify effective and efficient recidivism reduction practices."

The Center urged the county to build on this momentum by moving resources where they are needed most, "reentry and alternatives to detention."

The letter noted that by allocating 60 percent of its realignment funds to reentry programs and services, neighboring Contra Costa County has achieved "an astonishing drop in their recidivism rate by 21 percent."



Marilyn Bechtel writes for People's World.

New report says oil trains endanger 25 million

By Blake Deppe

On the heels of two recent oil train derailments in Ontario and West Virginia, the Center for Biological Diversity released a report offering new details and insights into the immense risks posed by unregulated and expanding oil-by-rail transport. The report, *Runaway Risks: Oil Trains and the Government's Failure to Protect People, Wildlife, and the Environment*, notes that with the increasing use of oil trains comes the chance of an uptick in derailments and explosions - and that it's innocent U.S. citizens who are going to feel the burn.

According to the report, an estimated 25 million Americans live within the one-mile evacuation zone recommended by the U.S. Department of Transportation in the event of an oil train derailment. And animals are at risk as well: oil trains pass within a quarter mile of protected critical habitat for at least 57 threatened or endangered species, including the California tiger salamander, California red-legged frog, piping plover, and bull trout. Oil trains also pass through 34 national

wildlife refuges, as well as important lakes, reservoirs, and other bodies of water.

"These oil trains pose a massive danger to people, wildlife, and our environment, whether it's trains passing through heavily populated areas or some of our most pristine landscapes," said Jared Margolis, attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity who focuses on the impact of energy development on endangered species. "The federal government has failed to provide adequate protection from these bomb trains. We clearly need a moratorium on crude-by-rail until the safety of our communities and the environment can be ensured."

Noting the lack of safety regulations and oversight, he added, "People, wildlife, rivers, and lakes will pay a huge cost for the government's failure to act. Margolis concluded, "The reality is there's no way to safely transport the highly volatile crude. Instead these extreme fossil fuels should be left in the ground for our safety and to avoid the impending climate catastrophe."

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Corporations using LA election to exert control over schools

By David Trujillo

The teachers' union here, along with parents and community leaders, faced off against a powerful, well-financed challenge from the corporate-sponsored California Charter School Association in Tuesday's school district elections.

Bennett Kayser, the incumbent backed by the United Teachers of Los Angeles, was forced into a runoff against CCSA's hand-picked candidate, Ref Rodriguez. CCSA funded a PAC called "Parent Teacher Alliance in support of Rodriguez." The runoff will take place May 19.

Bennett Kayser is a public school classroom teacher with over 40 years of community service. Ref Rodriguez is a well-paid charter school administrator who runs a non-profit charter school organization, "Partnerships to Uplift Communities." Most charter schools in Los Angeles are non-union. CCSA advocates who have funded Rodriguez include the Koch Brothers, Walmart, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, junk bond billionaire Michael Milken, KB Home, Eli Broad, and other billionaires.

Rodriguez has attacked the teachers' union for supporting the incumbent and has falsely claimed that Kayser has discriminated against Latinos. The Latino community would have nothing to do with this desperate attack and negative campaign tactic. In response, Bennett Kayser gathered support from



Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis, labor leader Dolores Huerta, City Council member Gil Cedillo and many other elected Latino and community leaders. His support by the teachers union and his support for the Dream Act have also been well received in the community.

Rodriguez was criticized in the campaign for paying low wages to his workers while making a substantial income from his non-profit charter organization. CCSA and Rodriguez claim that charter schools save money and allow for more classroom flexibility. By contrast, Kayser said, "The charter school reformers are nothing more than privatization advocates attempting to dismantle public education."

The charter school advocates criticized UTLA for supporting incumbent Bennett Kayser. Yet it is the teachers union that has been responding and addressing concerns by parents, students and educators. The local political pundits and media never mention who the corporate sponsors are responding to. LAUSD board member Kayser said, "I will always put students first, no matter what the special interests want."

What happens to teacher creativity and innovation? What happens to parent involvement outside the testing model? This is not school reform."

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More than 80 groups urge Pfizer to leave climate-denier ALEC

Special to Peoplesworld.org

Common Cause joined a coalition of 84 public interest, religious, environmental, labor, public health, civil rights, and investor organizations today in calling on pharmaceutical giant Pfizer to end its membership in the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

The letter to Pfizer signed by the organizations argues that the company's corporate social responsibility policies do not line up with ALEC's public policy agenda. Specifically, the letter contrasts Pfizer's public commitment to addressing climate change with ALEC's denial of climate change and opposition to renewable energy measures. The letter also highlights differences between ALEC and Pfizer on public health laws, citing ALEC's support of the tobacco industry.

ALEC is an organization of more than 1,000 state legislators and an undisclosed number of corporations. Its corporate and legislative members meet several times annually to vote as equals on "model" legislation that often is tailored to benefit the corporations involved. The task force meetings where the group does the bulk of its work are closed to reporters and the public. Common Cause has filed a tax "whistleblower" complaint against ALEC, accusing the organization of masquerading as a charity while acting as a lobby for its corporate members.

More than 100 corporations and non-profit groups have left ALEC since 2011, when Common Cause and other groups launched a campaign to call public attention to the group's activities.

Debaten en la ONU sobre la igualdad de género

Prensa Latina

La directora ejecutiva de ONU-Mujer llamó a hacer realidad la campaña mundial lanzada el pasado viernes por Naciones Unidas, 50-50 para el 2030, dirigida a lograr ese año la plena equidad de género.

La directora ejecutiva de ONU-Mujer, Phum-zile Mlambo-Ngcuka, afirmó este domingo que llegó el momento de alcanzar en el planeta la igualdad de género y el empoderamiento de las féminas, tras siglos de discriminación.

"Qué clase de mundo es este que condena a la mitad de su población a una condición de ciudadanía de segunda clase en el mejor de los casos y a la esclavitud absoluta en el peor de ellos? ¿Cuánto costaría en realidad liberar el potencial de las mujeres?", preguntó en una declaración circulada por el Día Internacional de la Mujer.

Según informa PL, Mlambo-Ngcuka llamó a hacer realidad la campaña mundial lanzada el pasado viernes por Naciones Unidas, 50-50 para el 2030, dirigida a lograr ese año la plena equidad de género, a partir del esfuerzo colectivo de todos los sectores de la sociedad.

Hay una necesidad imperiosa de modificar el ritmo actual; la baja representación de las mujeres en la toma de decisiones políticas y económicas amenaza el empoderamiento y la igualdad, de cuyo abordaje los hombres pueden y deben formar parte, advirtió.

La vicepresidenta sudafricana recordó que hace dos décadas 189 líderes se comprometieron en la Declaración y

la Plataforma de Acción de Beijing con un futuro diferente para las féminas de sus países y del mundo.

Cuánto se podría haber ganado de respetarse las ambiciosas pero realistas promesas, por qué no se han cumplido, preguntó.

Algunas ocupan lugares en los principales centros de toma de decisiones; en 1990, las jefas de Estado o de Gobierno eran 12; en el 2015 son 19, pero el resto son hombres. Ocho de cada diez parlamentarios todavía son hombres, subrayó.

Mlambo-Ngcuka destacó la disminución un 45 % de la mortalidad materna y la creciente asistencia a clases de las niñas, muchas completando la educación básica e ingresando a niveles superiores.

También reconoció el hecho de que dos décadas atrás apenas cuatro de cada diez féminas tenían empleo remunerado y asalariado, mientras hoy casi la mitad disfrutan de ese derecho.

Sin embargo, persisten las brechas, y tenemos este año la oportunidad y el desafío de superarlas, reiteró en el texto.

En los últimos días se realizaron múltiples acciones para despertar la conciencia global sobre la importancia de empoderar a las féminas, en aras de enfocar su potencial hacia la construcción de un mundo en paz, prosperidad y armonía con la naturaleza.

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