April 8 marked the 75th anniversary of the Works Progress Administration, the largest federal jobs program in U.S. history and the most famous program of the New Deal of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

During its existence from 1935 to 1943, the WPA employed over 8.5 million victims of the Great Depression in public works projects, large and small, in every corner of the country.

The struggle to create the program had an eerie similarity to the recent fight for health care reform.

The bill establishing the WPA easily passed the House of Representatives, but faced fierce opposition from Senate Republicans howling “socialism” and Southern Dixiecrats opposed to any program helping African Americans, who suffered unemployment at nearly twice the rate of whites.

The right wing also fought the WPA because they saw it as consolidating Roosevelt’s voter base.

The WPA became the largest employer in the country and workers received prevailing wages and benefits. Many were organized in the newly legalized labor movement.

While opponents screamed that WPA projects were “make-work” and “boondoggles,” the achievements of the WPA are legendary and remain treasures of our democratic heritage.

They also created a huge demand for steel, fuel, construction materials and consumer goods and got the Depression-wracked private economy moving again.

Under the WPA, construction of the 469-mile Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina and Virginia began.

The 69-mile Merritt Parkway in Connecticut and the 127-mile Key West Overseas Highway were built.

In New York City the WPA built the Triborough Bridge, Lincoln Tunnel, Central Park Zoo and LaGuardia Airport.

The WPA built numerous sports facilities including the Orange Bowl in Miami, and many public buildings including the Oregon State Capitol, the Tennessee Supreme Court building, the Kan-
The WPA became the largest employer in the country and workers received prevailing wages and benefits.

The WPA became the largest employer in the country and worked produced 650,000 miles of roads, and built or improved 124,000 bridges, 800 airports and 125,000 public buildings. The WPA Federal Artists Project employed thousands of artists, writers and musicians, who produced over 10,000 arts projects. Many of these projects were murals.

“Government has a final responsibility for the welfare of its citizens,” President Roosevelt told Congress in his annual message in 1938. “If private cooperative effort fails to provide work for willing hands and relief for the unfortunate, those suffering hardship through no fault of their own have a right to call upon the government for aid. And a government worthy of the name must make a fitting response.”

In today’s crisis there are 20 million Americans desperately in need of full-time work. Just as during the Great Depression, the private sector will not and cannot produce the jobs needed to rebuild our nation’s crumbling infrastructure, launch the needed new green energy projects and breathe new life into our nation’s economy. There is simply no market. Working people have been impoverished and cannot buy the goods and services to revitalize the nation. Further, there are not sufficient profit margins to motivate the private sector to shift and take up these badly needed projects.

Marking the 75th anniversary of the WPA, Jobs for America Now, the 60-member coalition launched by the AFL-CIO, called for all-out support of HR 4812, the $100 billion Jobs for Main Street bill to assist local government and school districts. The bill, written by California Congressman George Miller, has just over 100 cosponsors and aims to create or save 1 million jobs. While it is the most ambitious jobs bill so far, it only begins to address the unemployment problem. Ultimately the only solution is massive, direct employment by the federal government - a new WPA.

Rick Nagin writes for the People’s World.

For true nuclear security, disarmament is essential

By PW Editorial Board

As a presidential candidate, Barack Obama vowed to pursue “a world in which there are no nuclear weapons.” He also pledged that during his first year in office he would “lead a global effort to secure all loose nuclear materials.”

This spring his administration is building on those promises with its Nuclear Posture Review, the New START treaty to cut U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons, and now this week’s nuclear security summit. The process will continue next month at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

As it advocates smaller weapons stockpiles and narrows the criteria for U.S. use of nuclear weapons, the Nuclear Posture Review also highlights the need to secure vulnerable nuclear materials worldwide.

Addressing the summit, President Obama highlighted “a cruel irony of history - the risk of a nuclear confrontation between nations has gone down, but the risk of nuclear attack has gone up” and now “is one of the greatest threats to global security.”

In its final statement, the summit called on nations to cooperate for nuclear security, including keeping “non-state actors” from being able to use nuclear materials “for malicious purposes,” and banning illicit nuclear trafficking.

International cooperation in “nuclear detection, forensics, law enforcement and the development of new technologies,” strengthening “physical protection” and “material accountancy” - all are indeed vital in today’s world.

But no matter how successful such cooperation becomes, true nuclear security also depends on fulfilling the president’s other objectives.

Much rests on what is sure to be a centerpiece of next month’s review of progress under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty - the obligation of all signers under its Article VI “to pursue negotiations in good faith” to achieve complete nuclear disarmament and to conclude a treaty for general and complete disarmament.

Only when this great goal is won will it be possible to truly end the threat of catastrophe from the “malicious” use of nuclear materials, whether by nations, by “non-state actors” or by accident.
Demand to curb Wall Street has GOP in a bind

By John Wojcik

Reflecting the mass anger at Wall Street, President Obama has told congressional leaders that he will not accept a weak finance reform bill simply in the name of “bipartisan accomplishment,” according to White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs.

Republicans such as Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee, after having spent months working on crafting a bill as a member of the Senate’s banking committee, may break ranks with their party if it tries to filibuster reform.

The national outcry for steps to curb Wall Street has so emboldened Democrats that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., is prepared to bring the banking committee bill to the floor with no concessions to Republicans and essentially dare them to vote against the measure, according to numerous sources on Capitol Hill.

Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., banking committee chair, took to the floor of the Senate and blasted Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and other right-wing Republicans for “falsely claiming that the bill would create more bailouts.”

Dodd told the Senate that the GOP, out of desperation, had “turned to Frank Luntz, their political strategist and here is what Mr. Luntz came up with, and I quote: ‘The single best way to kill any legislation is to link it to the Big Bank Bailout.’”

“It’s a naked political strategy,” Dodd declared, warning, “And if it succeeds and another crisis sinks the American economy, then the next recession and all of the damage it will bring to middle class families will have happened for the sake of a talking point.”

A review of government records on campaign contributions shows that McConnell takes more money from Wall Street than any other sector.

Labor and its allies, meanwhile, continue to turn up the heat on Congress.

The AFL-CIO has announced that unions will take the battle directly to Wall Street April 29 with a mass march and rally for finance reform. The unions intend too make the point that the big banks were responsible for the loss of 11 million jobs in America and they should be made to pay to help create the new jobs needed.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said that, in addition to the reform measures emerging from Congress, there should be a financial transactions tax to raise money for massive federally funded jobs programs.

“Working people are going to tell the banks on the 29th that we are not their ATMs,” Trumka said.
En 350 centros de detención a través del país, hasta 1.000 veteranos de guerra nacidos en el extranjero, residentes permanentes pero todavía no ciudadanos, esperan la deportación.

Los veteranos militares, muchos de ellos víctimas del estrés postraumático luego de haber servido en Vietnam, Irak y Afganistán, cometieron crímenes graves después de recibir su separación honorable (franca libertad). Bajo la ley existente exigen estas condenas una deportación automática. Un alto porcentaje de las condenas están relacionadas con las drogas.

Algunos 32.000 inmigrantes ya guardan prisión por varias ofensas esperando ser deportados a sus países de origen.

Uno de estos detenidos es Rohan Coombs, ex Marine nacido en Jamaica que peleó en el Operativo “Tormenta de desierto” [la primera guerra del Golfo]. Coombs, que sufre de estrés postraumático, fue condenado por posesión de mariguana. Luego de ser liberado en la prisión, fue entregado a las autoridades migratorias, informa Democracy Now.

La ley de inmigración enmendada de 1996 amplió la definición de “crímenes serios” por los cuales una persona puede ser deportada.

La propuesta de ley HR 2988 ha sido introducida en el Congreso para dirigirse al problema. Enmendaría esta propuesta “el Código judicial de Estados Unidos para declarar claramente que los activos de las fuerzas armadas de EEUU son connacionales y no ciudadanos, y para pedir al Departamento de Seguridad Patria una suspensión de sus expulsiones de los Estados Unidos de América”.

Por Joe Sims