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“Fiscal cliff” actions urge Congress to tax rich, no cuts

By Mark Gruenberg

Union leaders spent early December blasting Republican plans to back the U.S. budget off the “fiscal cliff” by cutting Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, urging their members to call their lawmakers with a strong message against that scheme.

The AFL-CIO and MoveOn, along with other coalitions and groups, will hold national actions on Dec. 10, including flooding Congress with phone calls, petitions, and letters, with the simple message of “no cuts, tax the rich.”

The pressure for unionists to weigh in rose as the ruling House Republicans - aided and abetted by their filibuster-happy GOP Senate colleagues - absolutely refused to budge from their stand for protecting the Bush tax cuts for the rich.

President Barack Obama and party members reminded Republicans “elections have consequences” and voters returned them to office Nov. 6 on that platform of increasing taxes on the rich and leaving them alone for everyone else.

The two political sides engaged in their war of words as the government moves closer to a Jan. 1 budget deadline. Then, the Bush tax cuts end, extended federal unemployment benefits stop, a higher payroll tax deduction from workers’ paychecks kicks in and billions of dollars in defense and domestic spending cuts start - unless the two sides reach a compromise overriding that combination.



**Call Congress right
now at 888-659-9401
and tell your
Representative and
two U.S. Senators:
Cuts to Social Security,
Medicare, and Medicaid
can't be part of any deal
to avoid the fiscal cliff.**

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The big roadblock is the House, whose ruling Republicans, in obedience to their tea party wing, are adamant about extending the tax cuts for the rich.

Union leaders took no specific position on Walz’ move, but that’s the combination they favor - along with no cuts to Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare - and that’s the combo they want members to lobby lawmakers for.

“The House Republican leadership put forward a plan that would squander trillions of dollars by extending tax cuts for the richest two per-

T H I S W E E K :

- “Fiscal cliff” actions urge Congress to tax rich, no cuts
- Editorial: Time to examine our gun culture
- Raising Medicare age would hurt seniors, the economy
- Minnesota lockouts don’t stop holiday music
- Protestan en España contra austeridad en salud

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cent of Americans and lowering top tax rates even further,” AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said in one statement.

President Barack Obama and party members reminded Republicans "elections have consequences."

House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, calls their plan "a 'compromise' because it includes \$800 billion in tax revenues from closing unspecified 'loopholes,'" Trumka continued. "This is the same 'fuzzy math' that Governor Romney tried to sell in the last presidential campaign." Debate on the GOP nominee's idea revealed this sort of loophole closing either increases taxes on the middle class or increases the deficit."

AFSCME President Lee Saunders urged his 1.6 million members to call or e-mail their lawmakers with a simple message: "America needs jobs, not cuts."

The Teamsters also urged their members to call their lawmakers, providing a toll-free number for them to do so - and a video of Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, addressing a business group that advocates cutting Social Security and Medicare.

"The Republican proposal is a non-starter," said SEIU President Mary Kay Henry. "Any plan that does not include restoring the tax rates for the wealthy to Clinton-era levels is simply unacceptable. All Americans must pay their fair share in taxes if we are going to continue our economic

recovery and address the budget deficit.

AFGE went one step further, mounted more than 100 rallies nationwide on Dec. 5 to protect Social Security - and the jobs Social Security Administration workers.

"Cutting Social Security's budget or making modifications to Medicare and Medicaid should not be part of a grand bargain to reduce the deficit. These cuts will only punish Americans who count on Social Security and Medicare by adding to backlogs and limiting assistance to the American public, especially the poor, our seniors, the disabled and families that have lost a parent or spouse," said Witold Skwierczynski, president of AFGE's National Council of Social Security Field Operations Locals.

If the automatic budget cuts kick in starting Jan. 1, AFGE cites an independent study showing there would be an immediate hiring freeze at Social Security, 300 field offices would have to close and up to 3,500 workers would be laid off.



Mark Gruenberg writes for the PAI newswire.

Time to examine our gun culture

PW Editorial

By now we all know the basic facts. On Saturday, Kansas City Chiefs inside linebacker Jovan Belcher shot and killed Kasandra Perkins - his girlfriend and mother of his three-month-old child - before driving to the Kansas City Chiefs facility and shooting himself in the head.

But of all the articles written on the subject, only one stuck out for making a wider societal connection on this sports issue. It was a piece by Fox Sports columnist Jason Whitlock. It took the nation by storm Sunday night.

During halftime of Sunday Night Football's Philadelphia Eagles/Dallas Cowboys game, Bob Costas aired a 90-second editorial commentary about the murder/suicide. In it, he quoted Whitlock, "Our current gun culture simply ensures that more and more domestic disputes will end in the ultimate tragedy and that more convenience store confrontations over loud music will leave more teenage boys bloodied and dead ... Handguns do not enhance our safety. They exacerbate our flaws, tempt us to escalate arguments and bait us into embracing confrontation rather than avoiding it."

The backlash came quick and heavy. Fox and Friends openly criticized Costas. Videos were uploaded all over the internet calling Costas' 90-sec-

ond talk a "rant." National Rifle Association President Wayne LaPierre argued that the situation could have been averted if Kasandra Perkins had been armed.

In the aftermath of this most recent tragedy, America is again being prevented from having a real discussion about violence, especially gun violence.

We need to look at a society where people spend longer times in lines trying to qualify for and receive quality mental health care than it takes to qualify for purchasing a firearm. We need to look at a society that stigmatizes seeking mental health care as weakness and associates guns with masculinity. We need to look at a society that reinforces behavior choices that escalate situations, even if that means violently, rather than using creative and restorative problem solving.

This debate needs to occur without bumper sticker slogans, without waiting for our pundits, politicians, and talking heads to trot out talking points. The debate on the gun culture and the culture that allows at least one out of every three women to be abused physically or sexually needs to happen as we try to come to grips with this most recent incident that has garnered national headlines. The time is now - before another tragedy.

Bob Costas aired a 90-second editorial commentary about the murder/suicide.

Raising Medicare age would hurt seniors and the economy

By Bruce Bostick

The much-touted Republican plan to raise the eligibility age of Medicare would raise health care costs for seniors, hurt the overall economy, and put increasing pressure on older Americans, a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found.

"This is a policy change that seems straightforward, but has surprising ripple effects," Tricia Neuman, Medicare specialist with Kaiser, said. "It's a simple thing to describe ... but I don't think people have thought through the indirect effects."

The idea of raising Medicare's eligibility age became a national demand of Republicans after House Budget Chair and vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan put forward his budget, which called for massive cuts to Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid and other federal programs that help poor and working Americans, while pushing continued huge tax cuts for the wealthy.

Among the indirect cost shifts the Kaiser study identified are the following;

- * Higher Medicare premiums for those on Medicare because younger (and healthier) 65- and 66-year-olds would be kept out of the program, raising Medicare's insurance costs. Kaiser said the cost increases for seniors could top three percent due to this change.

- * An increase in costs for companies providing health care to their workers due to older workers staying on company health care plans instead of going onto Medicare at that age.

- * Higher premiums for those on private insurance programs across the board as older, and less healthy, workers are forced to stay with private insurance rather than moving onto Medicare, as they now do.

- * Much higher out-of-pocket expenses for more than two-thirds of older adults, as they are forced to wait two years longer to be Medicare-eligible.

- * Kaiser and the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projected a huge increase in uninsured Americans if Medicare eligibility is raised by two years. Texas and other states where Republican administrations have said they will refuse the federal increase in Medicaid under the



Affordable Care Act are expected to be particularly hard hit.

Republicans, led by House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio, continue, even after suffering a historic defeat in the recent elections, to make the change in Medicare eligibility a centerpiece in their campaign to slash federal spending for poor and working Americans while keeping major tax cuts for the wealthy.

While President Obama is taking a tougher post-election position in budget talks, some Democrats appear ready to accept raising the Medicare eligibility age. Steny Hoyer, leading Democrat from Maryland, said last week that the Medicare eligibility shift is "clearly on the table."

The AFL-CIO, AARP, Alliance for Retired Americans and other organizations representing working and retired Americans are working hard at mobilizing their grassroots base, demanding "No cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security - have the wealthy pay their fair share."

Tim Burga, president of the Ohio AFL-CIO, in a radio interview last week, compared the so-called "fiscal cliff" to the Mayan Cclendar, which some alarmists have stated sets this year as the "end of the world."

"I think we'll be here the day after both of these phony, made up, so-called 'crises,'" he said. "The point is that we can't let self-promoting corporate snake oil salesmen stampede us off of a real cliff, destroying real programs that really help real people and our real economy."

The idea of raising Medicare's eligibility age became a national demand of Republicans.

Lockouts don't stop music

By Mike Hall

In cities across the country this holiday season, theaters will be packed for performances of the Christmas classic ballet, the "Nutcracker Suite"-in many cases performed by dancers of the Musical Artists (AGMA). Symphony halls will be full as orchestra musicians-many who are members of American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada (AFM)-fill the air with holiday-themed concerts.

But in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn., the home concert halls of Minnesota Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra will be dark. The world-class musicians of both highly honored orchestras have been locked out since October. The management of both orchestras is demanding massive pay cuts-as much as 50%-and other harmful new provisions.

But the AFM musicians of both orchestras are making sure Twin Cities' music lovers won't go empty-eared this season.

The locked-out Musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra will perform two "Ode to Joy-Special Holiday Concerts" Dec. 15 and 16 at the Ted Mann Concert Hall on the University of Minnesota campus.

On Dec. 2, the former music director, Pinchas Zukerman, returned to lead the musicians in an all-Mozart benefit concert and another former music director High Wolf has offered to conduct a Dec. 21 benefit performance of Handel's "Messiah."

AFM's International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians has established relief funds for musicians of both orchestras. Donations for the Minnesota Orchestra can be sent to Minnesota Orchestra Members; c/o Jason Arkis; 3916 Joppa Ave., South; St. Louis Park, MN 55416. For the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, send donations to: Carole Mason Smith; 2190 Carter Ave.; St. Paul, MN 55108.

Protestan en España contra austeridad en salud

By Prensa Latina

Miles de habitantes de Madrid y empleados del sistema de salud municipal, indignados por las reducciones presupuestarias y los planes de privatizar parcialmente algunos hospitales y servicios, se manifestaron el domingo en algunas de las plazas más conocidas de la capital.

Más de 5.000 personas se congregaron en la céntrica Puerta del Sol, de acuerdo con cifras de la policía, después de marchar de las plazas Neptuno a la Cibeles. Los organizadores calcularon que asistieron unas 25.000 personas, muchas de ellas con batas blancas y uniformes azules. La "marea blanca", como la llaman sus organizadores, fue la tercera marcha así de grande de este año.

Fátima Branás, vocera de los organizadores, dijo que los planes de privatización son miopes al no considerar los posibles ahorros sin tener que desprenderse de los servicios.

"Lo que de veras suponen sus planes es un cambio total del modelo sanitario y un desmantelamiento del sistema", aseveró.

El gobierno madrileño, a cargo de Ignacio González, sostiene que las reducciones son necesarias para garantizar los servicios médicos durante la recesión.

La salud y la educación son administradas por cada una de las 17 regiones semiautónomas de España y no por el gobierno central y cada una establece sus planes de gasto. Las regiones representan casi 40% del gasto público. En la región de Madrid gobierna el Partido Popular, el grupo de centro-derecha que también encabeza el gobierno central con Mariano Ra-

joy.

Muchas regiones pasan apuros a medida que se contrae la economía española en una doble recesión desatada por una crisis del sector de bienes raíces en 2008.

Algunas que han gastado de más y no pueden pedir un préstamo en los mercados financieros para saldar sus grandes deudas están recortando sus presupuestos.

"Nos enfrentamos a una situación verdaderamente difícil porque estamos viviendo la posible venta de todo el sistema sanitario español", dijo el doctor Gerardo Antón, de 58 años. Agregó que los cambios propuestos por González atraerán a inversionistas más interesados en las utilidades que en el servicio público.

Las regiones españolas tienen una deuda combinada de 145.000 millones de euros (185.000 millones de dólares) y unos 36.000 millones de euros (47.100 millones de dólares) deben refinanciarse este año. España no quiere seguir los pasos de Grecia, Irlanda, Portugal y Chipre, que tuvieron que solicitar un rescate financiero internacional.

En otras noticias, la red social Twitter se erige domingo en el escenario del respaldo internacional al presidente de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, tras una convocatoria lanzada con ese propósito por las autoridades de este país suramericano.

El ministro para la Comunicación e Información, Ernesto Villegas, llamó a una acción de ese tipo a nivel mundial para este mediodía.

El funcionario lanzó el reclamo a participar bajo la etiqueta de ELMundoEstaConChavez.

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523

Email: contact@peoplesworld.org