

# PEOPLE'S WORLD

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## 16,000 boost Women's Economic Agenda

By Diane Mohney



**S**ixteen thousand participants, in a post-State-of-the-Union phone conference Wednesday night, discussed a Women's Economic Agenda for the nation. With passion and the wisdom that comes from experience, working women from across the country related their experiences of trying to decide whether to pay the rent, buy food, or pay medical bills with paychecks that are 77 percent that of men; for women of color the disparity is sharper. They also spoke of needing support in fighting for their rights on the job.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Reps. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., and Donna Edwards, D-Md., opened the discussion on behalf of women Democrats in Congress by noting that current policies do not reflect the way women and their families live their lives. They summarized proposed legislation that will benefit working women and their families.

Lilly Ledbetter, for whom the Fair Pay Act of 2009 is named, told her now famous story of how a jury awarded her pay and retirement benefits lost due to 20 years of pay inequity, only to have the U.S. Supreme Court overturn the verdict, saying she should have made inquiries earlier to see she was receiving equal pay. Because of her fight, the Equal Pay Act, known as the Lilly Ledbetter

Act, was passed in 2009, but it did not overturn the court's decision.

More is needed, the women said. Even though the Equal Pay Act is supposed to assure equal pay for equal work it is often not enforced, and women who demand enforcement risk being fired, demoted or passed over for promotions.

Participants said that, though they aware that the Family and Medical Leave Act allows them to take 12 weeks of unpaid sick leave or unpaid leave

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to care for ill or injured children, they often face financial disaster if they take unpaid time off. One woman pointed out that only the U.S. and one other country, Papua New Guinea, do not provide paid maternity leave.

Child care is a huge financial burden for most

**Women's paychecks are 77 percent of men's.**

families, the cost often equaling one parent's pay. One woman spoke of finding enough in grant money to pay for books and college tuition, then taking out a loan of \$30,000 to pay for day care for her child while she finished her college degree. Another woman, noting that not all day care facilities are safe, told of her husband finding his son lethargic at the end of the day at day care. At home he was found to have a high fever. Emergency room personnel diagnosed him with pneumonia and hospitalized him.

The stories women told of trying to provide for their families, make sure their children were in affordable, safe, reliable, nurturing day care centers that will set them on a course to eventually be successful students, while frequently caring for two generations - their children, and aging parents - were compelling. Their stories showed the need for policies that address the issues working families face. President Obama's State of the Union speech was quoted: "It's time to do away with ... policies that belong in a 'Mad Men' episode." To rectify the situation and make life bearable for women and working families, the

Women's Economic Agenda includes the following proposed legislation:

\* Amending the Family and Medical Leave Act to include mandatory paid leave for childbirth, child-rearing and caring for a sick or injured relative.

\* Passing the Child Care Access and Refundability Expansion Act, HR 3740, introduced by Rep. Donna Edwards, which would make critical changes in tax law regarding deductions for child care costs.

\* Passing the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would end secrecy regarding individual employees' pay and require that employers prove that pay is not gender-based.

\* Improving the Family and Medical Leave Act so that all workers earn paid sick leave. A plan, to be administered by Social Security, to provide partial income protection for 12 weeks through paycheck deductions (about \$1.50 per paycheck) has been introduced by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y.



**Diane Mohney contributes to Peoplesworld.org.**

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## **Pete Seeger and the revolutionary power of song**

By PW Editorial Board

**T**he world is mourning the death of Pete Seeger. Pete was a troubadour of the sweeping mass organization of workers by the CIO during the Great Depression.

He and his close friend, Woody Guthrie, sang for the defeat of racist Jim Crow at home and fascism abroad in Spain and Hitler Germany.

During the Cold War of the 1950s, witch hunters targeted Pete and fellow artists like Paul Robeson for their associations with the Communist Party USA. Pete endured decades of a blacklist that attempted to silence him and the mass movements. His refusal to buckle to the climate of fear and intimidation, his principled defense of his pro-working class values, made Pete Seeger a hero to millions including modern-day troubadours like Bruce Springsteen, who admired Seeger so deeply that he called him the "Father of Folk Music." Many called it a watershed moment when Seeger performed "This Land Is Your Land" with Springsteen at the Obama inaugural celebration

at the Lincoln Memorial.

When the Civil Rights Revolution erupted, Pete was ready. He composed and sang songs like, "If You Miss Me At the Back of the Bus." He arranged "We Shall Overcome" so that it became the anthem of the movement. When the movement against the Vietnam War escalated, Pete, his banjo, and his voice became a constant at the huge mass demonstrations in Washington D.C. Songs, reflecting the values of those powerful mass movements, welled out of his fertile imagination: "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," "Turn, Turn, Turn," "Guantanamera," and a thousand more. Yet no one was more collegial, embracing other great singers and their songs, sharing the stage with them. He founded or co-founded The Almanac Singers and the Weavers. His drive to clean up the Hudson River was typical of Seeger's mass politics. Only the millions marching---and singing---can make rivers safe for sturgeon. Or planet earth for humans. Pete Seeger, presente!

**His refusal to buckle made him a hero.**

## Could medical marijuana turn Florida blue?

By Joshua LeClair



**T**he Florida Supreme Court recently approved a ballot measure to make medical marijuana legal in the state. The ruling was split 4-3 between liberal and conservative judges. Now Florida's voters will decide the issue this November.

As recently as December, the ballot initiative looked doomed with only roughly 120,000 of the 683,000 needed petition signatures collected. But with one week still to go, United for Care turned in 1.1 million signatures, with the needed amount verified last week.

United for Care's website says the "United for Care Campaign is run by People United for Medical Marijuana (PUFMM) - an organization formed by Kim Russell, whose grandmother - ill with glaucoma - would not break the law, despite the medical benefits that marijuana could offer her condition."

United for Care is chaired by attorney and activist John Morgan, and managed by Ben Polara, a "veteran in Florida political affairs and advocacy." According to the organization, "Recent polling shows that over 70 percent of Floridians support the legalization of medical marijuana in our state."

But when looked at with the 2014 elections in mind, the ballot initiative may also serve as a "get out the vote" tool. David Adams and Zachary Fagenson at Reuters write: "Democrats believe it could energize their base in a midterm electoral season that generally results in low turnout, while polls show even a majority of Florida Republicans support medical marijuana use."

They go on to say the current tea party favorite Republican Gov. Rick Scott, who is running for re-election in the Sunshine State, strongly opposes the ballot initiative and stated that he will vote against it. Gov. Scott's main challenger, and former Florida governor, Charlie Crist supports medicinal marijuana and has been a public proponent of the effort to get the initiative on the ballot for 2014. The fight for medicinal marijuana "could set the stage for a political battle in a state that is both a harsh enforcer of drug laws and a major pot producer," the Reuters commentators write.

Reid Wilson at the Washington Post writes that many Republicans fear the medicinal marijuana initiative is nothing more than a "Trojan horse for the Crist campaign." According to Wilson, Republicans fear that the amendment will push turnout among younger progressive voters, who obviously will be voting Democratic in November.

With Florida's gubernatorial race this November being the only one in a big swing state, the medicinal marijuana amendment may bring about a Democratic victory with the election of former governor Crist. That would be a big blow to Republicans leading up to the 2016 presidential campaign.

**Democrats believe medical marijuana could energize their base.**

## Hartford rising for Community Bill of Rights

By Joelle Fishman

**H**olding hands and singing, “we shall overcome,” community leaders, activists, and parents of public school students gathered here at J.C. Clark Elementary and Middle School on Martin Luther King Day to call for a “Community Bill of Rights” that would address the triple evils of “racism, militarism, and consumerism” King warned of.

The multi-racial rally, called in the spirit of Dr. King’s 1964 poor people’s campaign, was held in Hartford’s North End, one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the nation. The 2011 Census reports that 36 percent of the largely African American and Latino population live below the official poverty level, blocks away from the headquarters of the world’s wealthiest insurance companies.

“Today we honor Dr. King, and the inspiring work that he did, by making a commitment to righting societal wrongs,” declared Rev. A.J. Johnson of Urban Hope Refuge Church. He called for ordinances and legislation to address the needs of single parents and people returning from prison in the community.

Hartford Rising, the coalition that organized the rally, hosted a meeting at Rev. Johnson’s church to begin drafting a Community Bill of Rights to be delivered to the Hartford City Council and all elected officials.

The social contract will seek to address the city’s high employment, disparities in civil rights, income inequality, and lack of a quality public education for all its students.

## Los Republicanos y la reforma migratoria

Por Emile Schepers

**E**l jueves 30 de enero de la dirección del Partido Republicano en la Cámara de Representantes dio a conocer su lista de principios para la reforma de inmigración. Esto dará inicio a un nuevo debate sobre si es posible pasar la reforma migratoria integral en este Congreso .

Los principios republicanos , presentado por el presidente de la Cámara de Representantes John Boehner, de Ohio , son vagos y un cajón de sastre que dan algunas cosas para la comunidad inmigrante , pero también imponer otras medidas represivas severas. Los puntos principales son :

“El control de la frontera y del Interior debe ser lo primero “ .

“ Implementar el Sistema de Seguimiento de Visas de entrada y salida “ .

“ Verificación de Empleo y Aplicación en el lugar de Trabajo “ .

“ Reformas al sistema de inmigración legal “ .

“Juventud”.

“ Las personas que viven fuera del Estado de Derecho “ .

Como reacción , algunos activistas y organizaciones dijeron que es bueno que al menos algo ahora se haya presentado en la Cámara. Pero antes, los republicanos en la Cámara habían dicho que iban a introducir proyectos de ley poco sistemáticos y no como un paquete “integral” . Desde el punto de vista de los derechos

de los inmigrantes , esto es muy peligroso . Si, por ejemplo , los elementos más represivos de los “ principios “ republicanos fueron presentados en primer lugar para la acción legislativa , existe el peligro de que su aprobación causaría que el tema principal en el que los activistas de los derechos de los inmigrantes están preocupados , es decir, la legalización de los indocumentados , sería olvidado. Esto significaría que la situación de los indocumentados y sus familias podría llegar a ser mucho peor.

La AFL -CIO (Federación de Trabajadores)y otros se han opuesto fuertemente a la falta de una garantía de un camino a la ciudadanía en los principios republicanos. Algunos de los otros artículos son mucho peor, sobre todo los que que cortan la legislación por la unidad familiar e imponen medidas más enérgicas . Pocos inmigrantes indocumentados dirían que preferirían ser deportados si no pueden tener “ un camino especial a la ciudadanía” su prioridad es poner fin a las deportaciones masivas que traumatizan a comunidades enteras.

El movimiento de los derechos de los inmigrantes se compromete a seguir presionando al Congreso y al mismo tiempo seguir exigiendo que el gobierno de Obama a amplíe la suspensión de la deportación que ha dado a los “dreamers” a fin de incluir el mayor número posible de inmigrantes indocumentados.