



Behind the scenes in the business of medicine

# How our profit-driven medical system fails to deliver healthcare

Bethany Weidner

The advent of a pandemic virus showed us in vivid terms that our healthcare system is a mess. The US response to the coronavirus has been disorganized, characterized by misinformation and confusion—and resulted in more deaths and infections than in any other developed country. And it's not over yet.

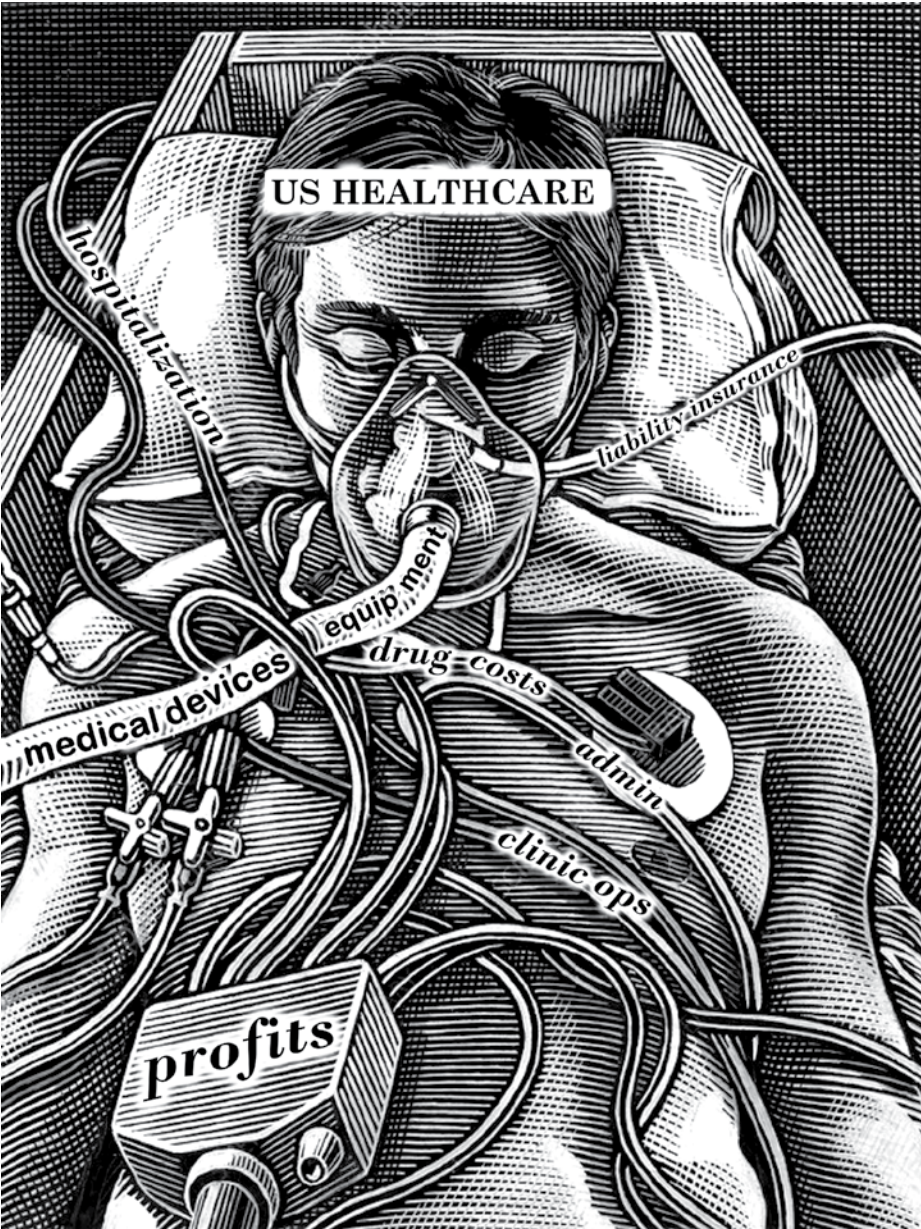
We have learned a lot about what's essential in an epidemic—because it was missing. Diagnostic tests, high filtration masks, shields, gloves, ventilators: nonexistent in some locations, in short supply in others, or available only for prices 5 to 10 times the normal rate.

Also missing: a coordinated, systematic approach from public health and political authorities. Will tests for the infection be free? Will treatment of Covid19 be free or covered by insurance? No one is certain. Several thousand medical workers responding to the outbreak in the United States have been infected. Dozens have died. Those who spoke out have been threatened, punished or fired.

Many people are now focused on creating a system that promotes health and provides care for all who need it because the need is so apparent. Our existing system is deadly. To plan a future that is better, however, we need to understand the past actions that led to our current system. How did we get to this place?

In 2019, the medical industry accounted for \$3.65 trillion dollars of spending nationally. That bill keeps growing as players in the health business find additional ways to cash in on the lucrative medical market.

The search for maximum profit leads to abandonment of areas



where there is no wealth to extract, even as medical costs everywhere continue to grow. Most of us know nothing about the companies that drive the costs and therefore determine who is able to access healthcare—and who isn't.

What we have isn't a healthcare system. It's a marketplace. It prioritizes

profitability, not health, and directs both its services and its rewards to the rich and powerful. Executives command multimillion dollar salaries; investors reap dividends. The result is a destructive mix of deprivation and excess. The current public health crisis has simply made those realities more visible.

## Some key sectors of the medical business:

Pharmacy and biotech companies raked in almost a half-trillion dollars in 2018. They protect this income stream in a number of ways. They proliferate patents to extend their monopoly on various drugs. This prevents development of generic versions that could be offered for a lower price. They raise prices on their most-prescribed drugs (40-70% in a recent 4-year period). They promote profitable specialty and "life-style" drugs while doubling or tripling the price of essential medications. Consider insulin: some diabetics pay as much as \$400 a month despite the fact that even "new versions" of insulin are cheap to produce.

At the same time, biotech companies scorn research into vaccines and antibiotics that support public health but promise little profit. Work on the antibody test that could be useful as we move away from the coronavirus peak is being done by universities and research institutes. (Once that work is complete, Big Pharma will be there to sell it.)

## Medical device and equipment companies

These are another important profit-driven cost generator in the medical industry. Typically, they focus on complex devices that use advanced technology and generate high profit margins. [See sidebar.] In the last few years, consolidation among device companies helped them maintain control over pricing. As one analyst noted, "2018 was a fantastic year, with at least a dozen medical device companies racking up stock gains of more than 25%."

## Hospitals and hospital systems

As in other sectors, hospitals are consolidating to shore up profit margins. More than three fourths of US hospitals are "non-profit" but they are not different from for-profit hospitals in our money-oriented medical system. Both systems are driven by the same motives: expand in size and visibility, increase market share,

► **Healthcare**, continued on page 14

# Farmworker Unions sue over COVID-19 "garbled and non mandatory" protections

Gabe Guarente

As many in Washington look for signs that the COVID-19 outbreak is slowing, some working in the food supply chain feel as vulnerable as ever—and are taking action. On Thursday, several labor organizations, including Familias Unidas por la Justicia and the United Farm Workers, filed a lawsuit in Skagit County, urging Washington officials

to immediately update its health and safety standards to protect agriculture workers.

Farms have been deemed essential businesses during Washington's stay-at-home order, but the lawsuit claims safety guidelines to protect against the spread of the novel coronavirus are "garbled and non-mandatory," endangering the lives of many. For instance, a March 23 update to the temporary worker housing guide-

lines suggested that those sick with coronavirus could be placed on one side of the same room as uninfected workers.

This lawsuit was filed just a few days after a report in the Seattle Times raised alarms about practices at several farms and warehouses in Central Washington, where workers have labored in close proximity, and sanitization measures seem haphazard. Crews at one particular farm in

the Yakima Valley allegedly had to bring their own soap and water from home, and workstations at some warehouses—where workers don't have gloves or masks—are not set six feet apart. Yakima County now has more than 440 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with a rate higher than in the Puget Sound area this month. Skagit County—where the lawsuit was filed—has 218 confirmed cases.

► **Farmworkers**, continued on page 6



**Works in Progress (WIP)**, is a community newspaper based in Olympia WA, that has been published monthly since 1990.

WIP's mission is to contribute to the struggle for justice across economic, social, environmental and political realms, and to expand participatory democracy across classes, races, and genders.

**Editorial policy**

Our priority is to focus on stories that are ignored or misrepresented in the media, especially those that relate directly to our mission. We seek well-researched news stories, serious analyses of issues confronting our communities and account of personal experiences or reflections by local writers. We encourage articles that relate to the monthly theme, but material on other topics is also welcome.

Informed opinion pieces are accepted when accompanied by facts, examples, and sources. We discourage writing where a key point is stated as fact when it's unproven or in serious dispute. Writing that stereotypes groups or categories of people won't be accepted.

Once we receive a submission, we may choose to publish it or not. While the views expressed in the material we print are those of the author alone, WIP aims to print material that is consistent with our mission. WIP reserves the right to edit all submissions for accuracy, length, and clarity of expression. We will work with authors if there is a need for editing that extends beyond those areas.

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Another world is possible:

# Valuing memory and imagination

Enrique Quintero

**The splinter in the eye**

Life on Earth and this nation cannot continue in this way. The prospect of four more years of Trump hovers over us like a bad omen, threatening all life. This calamitous prediction not only presages the future to come, but is also directly connected to the policies of the past and the present. Our future is shaped by our past and our present.

Our past and current policies have placed the interests of big capital and corporations ahead of the interests of the people and the well-being of the planet. They have favored parasitical profits rather than rewarding those who labor in order to survive. We knew to be concerned about nuclear annihilation. We now see, more clearly than ever, the intertwining of ecological and economic hardships.

## Thinking Out Loud

We must do something to change the Zeitgeist of our time or we will perish.

Luckily, we have irony, the peculiar sense of humor for times such as ours. For example, the Trump administration's sluggish response to COVID-19 in an obscene way has validated the Republican war cry to 'MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN'. The US tops the chart of confirmed cases and deaths worldwide (609,995 and 30,000 respectively at the moment of this writing).

The Covidiot's in the White House appear to be on course to perpetuate this questionable distinction. Theodore Adorno once stated that the "splinter in the eye is the best magnifying glass." Ironically, the virus that has infected more than two million people and claimed over a hundred thousand lives has become the 'splinter in the eye' needed to magnify the unsolvable contradictions that were somewhat masked in pre-COVID-19 pandemic times.

History, as Marx reminds us, is the history of class struggle. People around the world have carried on heroic fights against capitalism and for social justice, human rights, and democracy. Nonetheless, capitalism — through a series of legitimate and illegitimate, many times violent measures — reigns as the dominant economic system throughout the world. Ironically, some of capitalism's strength lies in our acceptance of the very ideology that perpetuates our current conditions, which helps contain much needed social change. Complaisance, apoliticism, the over emphasis of consumerism, and tacit tolerance of the shrinking space for political discourse among citizens.

Paradoxically, the cruel reality of existing living conditions, unveiled and magnified by the current pandemic, offers us a new possibility for imagining and implementing a richer language of human solidarity, spreading and accelerating, like the virus itself, widespread recognition of the fundamental in-

difference to human suffering that is built into our current economic system. A better world is possible, but to get there, we need both memory and imagination.

**Memory**

Memory needs to be understood as something other than the enumeration of past crimes against the people. To be sure, names and events must not be forgotten: *ni perdón ni olvido* <sup>1</sup>, as Latin Americans say in reference to the pro-fascist dictatorships in the sub-continent. More important than enumeration is the realization that the suffering we remember could have been lessened had we organized society differently.

Memory helps us understand our present situation too. It is a splinter in the eye, so to speak, that magnifies our view, connecting the past, present and future. In this historical moment, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the irrelevance of the parasitical classes and the vital importance of other forms of labor. First responders, health care and hospital workers, truck drivers, crop pickers, grocery store workers, postal workers, among others are reminding us that labor constitutes the heart and muscle of society.

Corporations, hedge funds managers, bankers, financial speculators, conservative politicians and other free marketeers are revealed in their true condition of social irrelevancy. This was true before COVID-19—memory reminds us of this. And memory gives us the

image of those who remember, who know that in the present we are part of a long struggle aimed at supporting the well-being of the largest possible number of humans. Only a future that works for most will reflect the deep memory of humanity.

**Imagination**

Reality is always richer than imagination. To imagine what a better world will look like, we first must determine, as David Harvey puts it, the kind of people we want to be, the kind of social relations we seek, the relations with nature we will cherish, the style of life we desire, and the aesthetic values we will hold. Moreover, a better world is not the same as an arbitrary metaphysical desire.

A better world will only materialize through human actions within the laboratory of society, which requires elements of control and prediction. In addition, we need to name the criteria that make one world better than another. Following David Harvey again, a better world is one closer to a humanistic tradition — both secular and religious — based on dignity, tolerance, compassion and as he puts it, the liberation of human potentialities.

We know we have the right vision when the world we are imagining and working towards is designed to satisfy the needs and promote the well-being of the largest possible number of people.

1. Neither forgiveness nor forgetness.

## Upcoming themes

We chose to replace our scheduled May theme with another more urgent focus: Another world is possible. Consequently, we will be focusing for June and July on these themes, which seem to have a somewhat different meaning given the pandemic, social distancing and our unknown exit conditions.

**June: Linkages** What things connect us to one another—especially when we can't be in proximity to one another? Beyond the physical and social question, there is the political question. How are our issues and political causes linked and how can we express that in narratives and organizing?  
**Deadline May 15.**

**July: Unintended consequences** That's a pretty suggestive topic given our current situation. We hope that many of you might have some thoughts about this. We invite you to think also about "unintended" consequences that could have been, should have been predicted. The handling of an epidemic offers many areas for reflection—as does intervening in other countries, prioritizing profit over all other values, etc. And then there are homely instances of unintended consequences of our own individual behavior... We would love to hear from you.  
**Deadline June 17.**

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Works in Progress is celebrating thirty years as a community-based, volunteer-run, progressive community newspaper. WIP started as a community newspaper sponsored by the Thurston County Rainbow Coalition. The mission statement then read like this: “Our aim is to confront injustice and encourage a participatory democracy based on economic, social and environmental justice. Works in Progress is dedicated to providing a voice for those most affected by the exclusionary and unfair practices that seek to silence the oppressed.” To celebrate WIP’s 30th anniversary, we will run short pieces each month that highlight issues WIP writers were concerned about then, and continue to write about today.

Highlighting past issues that remain critical

During this, our anniversary year, WIP each month will highlight an issue that concerned WIP writers over the years, and still are a concern for us today.

In 1997, WIP ran a piece by Dr. Manning Marable called “The plight of the working poor.” Marable was writing about the crisis of jobs for low income people—or rather the lack of them.

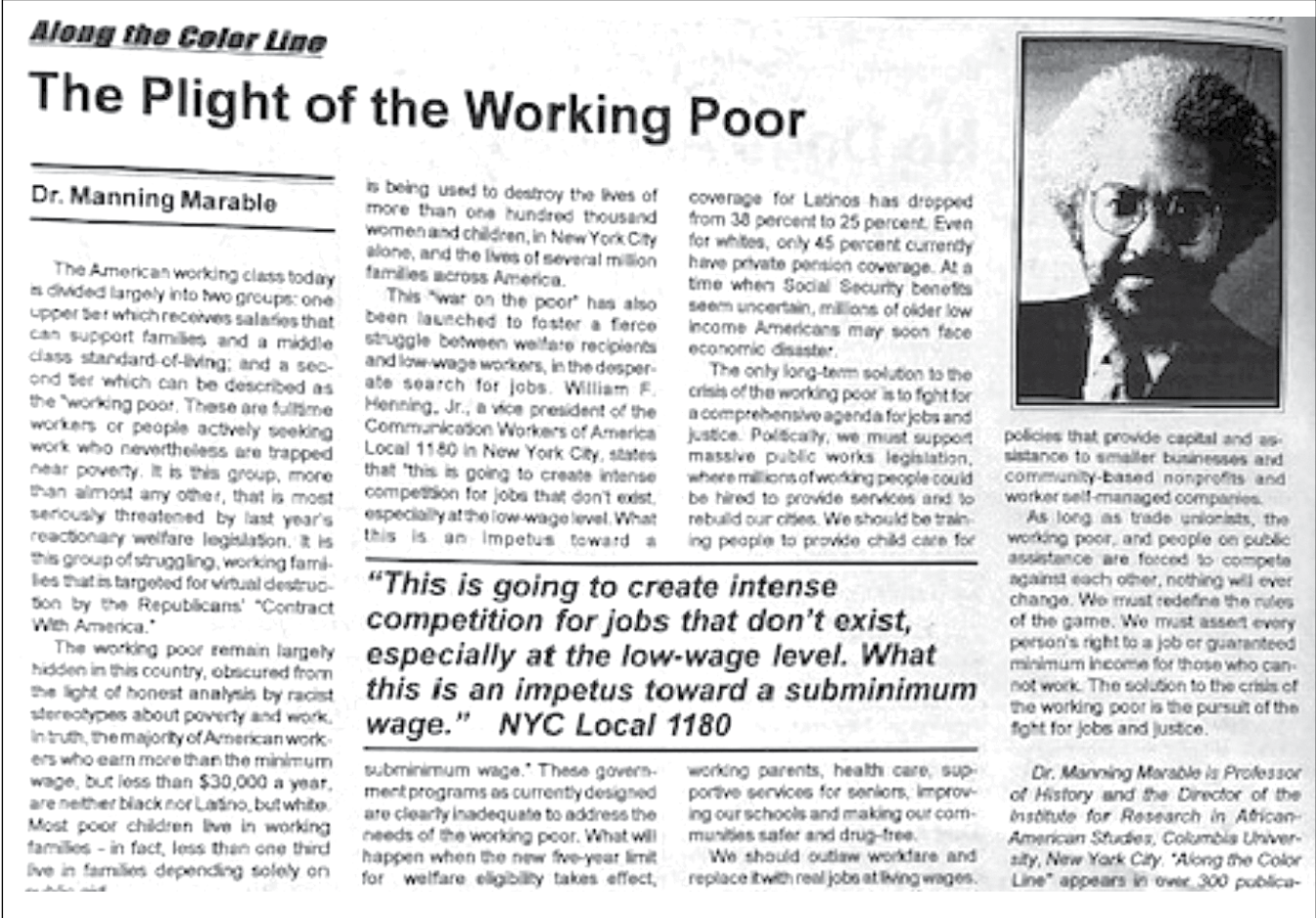
Marable wrote, “Perhaps the larger question to be answered is why there is a crisis of jobs for low income working people? Part of the fault lies in the deliberately destructive policies of the corporations, which in recent years have destroyed or exported millions of higher paying jobs in steel, auto, tire, and chemical industries. The new jobs created in the 1980s and 1990s often had limited fringe benefits and poor health care coverage. One 1996 study by researchers at the University of Massachusetts at Boston notes that the overall percentage of blacks covered by private pension plans has fallen from 45 percent in 1979 to 34 percent in 1993, while pension coverage for Latinos has dropped from 38 per-

Then this happened...

...Olympia planners told developer Jerry Mahan he has to comply with city requirements, even though he has a powerful attorney and a lot of influential backers. Our February and March issues detailed how Mahan attorney Heather Burgess demanded that the city “timely complete” its review of her client’s project with no more information. But a project that envisions 181 single-family homes located over an unpermitted gravel mine and toxic dump site merits thorough evaluation. For now, it seems that the city is serious about exercising its responsibility to get the accurate and complete information necessary for an informed decision that protects the community now and in the future. Go to www.olywip.org for more details.

...the insult to Americans’ intelligence continued as Florida Gov. Ron Desantis declared WWE

Looking back to celebrate 30 years of Works in Progress



cent to 25 percent. Even for whites, only 45 percent currently have private pension coverage. At a time when Social Security benefits seem uncertain, millions of older low income Americans may soon face economic disaster.”

The focus of Marable’s critique, 1996’s Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act which was proposed by Republicans and signed into law by former president Bill Clinton, made thousands of families ineligible for income assistance.

Some things haven’t changed. In 2020, President Trump’s sweeping changes to eligibility requirements for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) made nearly 700,000 people ineligible for income assistance. As Maggie Dickinson, faculty member at Guttman Community College in NYC explained,

wrestling an “essential service”—you know, like grocery stores and gas stations. ...just another arrow in the Republican Party’s battle to replace common sense with an ideology lethal to tolerant Americans.

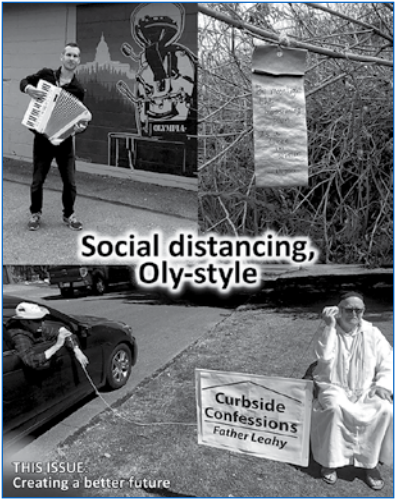
...Rocky Prairie won’t become the hub of a new logistics empire... Thurston County Commissioners recently took a preliminary vote that should lead to rejection of a request by a Kansas City-based developer called NorthPoint Development. The corporate owners want the Commissioners to rezone about 750 acres of Rocky Prairie property to rural resource industrial from rural one home per 20 acres. This would allow NorthPoint to move ahead with a plan to construct a massive intermodal (truck & train) industrial cargo center near Millersylvania State Park. A final vote will come later this year.

it’s the same argument: “if we cut people off of benefits, food stamps or Medicaid or cash assistance, they’ll go into the workplace, and that’s a path out of poverty. But in reality, that has never actually worked.”

Marable concluded his piece by advocating that the “solution to the crisis of the working poor is the pursuit of the fight for jobs and justice.” Twenty-three years later, his solution still holds.

Emily Lardner

About the cover



Olympians are finding ways to connect with each other in spite of the Covid-19 quarantine: a musician shares accordion music on the west side, Japanese haikus appear on tree branches along the zigzag path near the Capitol, and “Friar Leahy” offers drive-by confessional via his tin-can communication system. Our theme, *Another World is Possible*, is inspired by the World Social Forum.

Photos by Lori Lively, Bethany Weidner, and Aristides Pappidas.

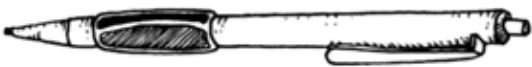
You write to WIP Hello President,

I just want to tell you that I don’t think very much of you as president. You are destroying this country. You promise people things, necessary things like test kits for the coronavirus. You don’t send them anything—and people are suffering and dying. Considering the seriousness of this virus, you should be working hard, not just talking about nothing. It is obvious that you are not capable of doing anything morally right,

and I would very much appreciate your stepping down and admitting that you are a fool and an idiot. It is heartbreaking to know that all these people are suffering because you would not act in a responsible way.

Also, quit belittling the women journalists. They are smarter than you.

Mary Kasimor





Perspective

Incarcerating more people is not a solution

# Proposal would create a new prison in Grand Mound

Lea Kronenberg

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is planning to open a new women's prison at the site of the closed Maple Lane youth detention center in Grand Mound. This prison expansion is opposed by many area residents, and No New Women's Prison, a group of criminal justice advocates with experiences in Washington prisons that formed in Fall 2019, is trying to stop it.

The proposed DOC project aims to renovate the existing 64 bed juvenile segregation units to provide 128 minimum custody female beds at a cost of \$4.38 million, budgeted by the State Legislature. The new prison is being presented as a potential solution to overcrowding at the Washington Corrections Center for Women which has a capacity of 738 inmates. Since 2014, women inmates have been transferred to Yakima County Jail, a site with its own overcrowding problems, allowing DOC to frame the new prison as a "humane" re-entry solution. There is also some secrecy about how many beds are planned. DOC's website says 128, but a legal services lawyer asserted DOC eventually plans for 700 beds.

Washington DOC's December 31, 2019 fact card lists an average of 19,160 individuals in its custody, and is operating at 100.3% of capacity. This does not include people housed in county and city jails. The Prison Policy Initiative tracks rates of incarceration throughout the country. It shows the prison population has gone from less than 5,000 to about 18,000 since 1978. The number of women incarcerated in Washington prisons has increased from about 200 in 1978 to 1,449 in 2015, with a sharp increase starting in the mid-80's. In fact, "Nationwide, women's state prison populations grew 834% over nearly 40 years—more than double the pace of the growth among men." In Washington State, the women's prison population quadrupled in the last 35 years, enough to completely cancel the decline in the men's prison population. The average cost for incarceration ranges from \$90-\$150 per day, or \$30,000 to \$55,000 per year.

Criminal justice advocates point to the documented inequities of mass incarceration on low-income communities and people of color. People with little means cannot afford effective counsel and must rely on the overburdened public defender system and are often the focus of law enforcement. People of color are disproportionately incarcerated and given harsher sentences for the same crimes as their white peers. But women's incarceration fails women and families in distinct ways.

According to a 2006 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 73% of women in state prisons had mental health problems. Of these 73%, three-quarters also had substance abuse issues and 68% had a history of physical or sexual abuse. A 2005 study by Northwestern University found that 98% of women in jails

had been exposed to trauma during their lifetime.

More than two-thirds of women in state prisons are drug dependent or drug abusers, much of which is driven by a need to self-medicate in response to trauma and victimization. Also, women living in poverty often resort to illegal activities just to survive, especially given the gender inequalities in pay that a majority of women experience. Unfortunately, treatment for women in prison is usually inadequate to address these needs, being the exception rather than the rule. In fact, prisons are more likely to be the site of significant sexual, emotional and physical violence that compounds the suffering of these women and does nothing for public safety.

Another reason for the increase in women's incarceration is the "tough on crime" policies of the 1980's and 90's that were responsible for 40% of the total growth

of women in state prisons during that time, a tenfold increase. The "war on Drugs" shifted resources to stricter drug enforcement and other low-level offenses, both of which affected women more. In fact, most incarcerated women were convicted of property or drug crimes—nonviolent offenses.

The Vera Institute of Justice noted that "between 1989 and 2009...the arrest rate for drug possession or use tripled for women—while the arrest rate for men doubled." Sentences for drug crimes became much longer due to mandatory minimums, "three strikes" laws and conspiracy laws that deliver harsh sentences to even peripheral players in drug offenses. Because women are more likely to engage in low-level, rather than serious offenses, they fell victim to a criminal justice system whose response was incarceration.

Besides the terrible impacts on individual women, the effects

on their families are especially troubling. 62% of women in prison are mothers of minor children, and are more likely than fathers to be the primary caretakers of their children. Separating children from their mothers in prisons which often lack face-to-face contact and are often far from home makes visits difficult and expensive. Even worse, if children are placed in foster care, the family can be permanently disrupted.

No New Women's Prison is advocating a different approach. Recognizing the brutality of caging people, they want Washington to stop investing in "racist, sexist, anti-poor, ableist, homophobic, transphobic infrastructure and redirect those resources toward all the things our communities need, like childcare, health care, housing and income support." Resources would be better spent if directed to the root causes of incarceration—the lack of opportunity, mental health and drug abuse treatment, child care, education and affordable housing. Advocates against mass incarceration, including Angela Davis, concur, pointing to the costly expenditure of scarce state and community resources on prisons that are ineffective at reducing recidivism, rehabilitating inmates, or improving community safety. We see that the COVID pan-

► Prison, continued on page 13





Who’s afraid of the big, bad Fox?

# Fox News sued for calling coronavirus a hoax

Esther Kronenberg

Open government watchdog and advocate, Arthur West and his local group, WASHLITE (Washington League for Transparency and Ethics) have gained international media coverage for a lawsuit filed against *Fox News* and Rupert Murdoch for their repeated labeling of the COVID-19 virus a “hoax”. The story was first covered by the *Times of San Diego* on April 3, and has since been picked up by news outlets around the country and the world, including *Vanity Fair*, the *Daily Beast*, the *Seattle Times*, *Forbes*, several law-oriented newsletters, and papers in Germany, France, Spain and Holland.

The lawsuit, filed April 2 under the Consumer Protection Act, alleges that *Fox News* violated the act by “falsely and deceptively disseminating ‘News’ via cable news contracts downplaying the dangers to the public of the coronavirus as a ‘hoax’.” Defendants knowingly disseminated false, erroneous, and incomplete information, which was reasonably relied upon by the public and which had the effect of delaying and interfering with the implementation of effective mitigation and countermeasures against the virus,” the League said in the complaint. The suit does not seek monetary damages, but only seeks an injunction to stop Fox News

from claiming that the pandemic is a hoax, along with reasonable attorney fees. The complaint has been found cognizable by *Forbes’* lead attorney Bryan Sullivan, writing in *Forbes* magazine.

The lawsuit closely followed the publication of an open letter to Fox News signed by 74 journalism professors saying its coverage was “a danger to public health,” and urged the networks to “help protect the lives of all Americans—including your elderly viewers—by ensuring that the information you deliver is based on scientific facts.”

*Fox News’* first reaction was to dismiss the lawsuit as frivolous. “Wrong on the facts, frivolous on the law,” said Lily Fu Claffee, general counsel for Fox News Media. A Murdoch executive told *The Daily Beast* “The strategy is no settlements, even if it costs way more to fight the lawsuit and seek sanctions for ambulance-chasing lawyers.” But within a few days, *Vanity Fair* reported that Fox insiders had expressed “real concern... that their early downplaying of the coronavirus actually exposes *Fox News* to potential legal action by viewers who maybe were misled and actually have died from this,” especially since Rupert Murdoch cancelled his 89th birthday party on March 11 at the same time top hosts like Sean Hannity and Trish

Regan were telling viewers that it was all a hoax.

Since the WASHLITE lawsuit was filed, Fox has called in big guns, hiring Donald Trump’s favorite law firm, Jones Day. One of the planned four attorneys on the case was a lead lawyer, and “argued before the Florida Supreme Court on behalf of George Bush in the 2000 presidential election Florida recount controversy.” President Trump’s White House counsel, Don McGahn, was a partner in the firm.

Forbes’ Bryan Sullivan writes WASHLITE does present a cognizable theory of liability. Washington’s law only requires misconduct rather than having to prove actual damages.

The Consumer Protection Act provides: “Unfair methods of competition and unfair or deceptive acts or practices in the conduct of any trade or commerce are hereby declared unlawful.” It references television broadcasting stations saying it does not apply to those entities that distribute information “in good faith without knowledge of its false, deceptive or misleading character.” The lawsuit cites two examples of misconduct, though it expects far more will be uncovered during discovery. In one, Sean Hannity comments “Oh, let’s bludgeon Trump again with this new hoax.” In the second example, Trish Regan

opines next to a graphic that reads “Coronavirus Impeachment Scam.” At least one poll found that *Fox News* viewers were taking the virus less seriously.

WASHLITE was at first represented by Green Party Washington gubernatorial candidate Elizabeth Hallock, who compared the free speech argument to Fox News yelling “‘There is no fire!’ when there is a fire.” The legal team has since gained the support of “Super Lawyer” Seattle attorney Catherine Clark, who volunteered to join the plaintiff’s team after reading an initial news account. Clark considers this a “case of national importance,” disputing claims the suit is “a political case.” She terms it “a case brought in the interest of the protection of the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the State of Washington under Washington law so that the citizens can be well-informed on the dangers of this pandemic and the steps necessary to prevent the spread of this disease.”... (it) raises the question of how do we take care of each other as a country.”

The case is on the King County Superior Court calendar with a trial date set for March 29, 2021.

*Esther Kronenberg writes about environmental matters for Works in Progress.*

# “Housing Options Plan” would gentrify older, modest neighborhoods

Olympia’s Planning and Development Department has decided that its new Housing Options Plan will have no significant impact on our environment and our neighborhoods. The plan prescribes new duplexes, triplexes, and apartments, along with larger and taller ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units, a.k.a. “back-yard cottages”), along with relief from parking, on-site owner and other current ADU requirements.

The City’s position is that there are no immediate impacts from the plan per se, however there are cumulative impacts. It would unleash these by allowing “up to 950 additional, primarily market rate, infill development housing units in existing neighborhoods.”

The reality is that these added units would not be spread evenly across the city’s low density housing zones. Certain neighborhoods will be unaffected or very lightly

affected. Subdivisions completed over the past 20 or so years, during which time minimum lot sizes have been repeatedly reduced, leave little space for free-standing ADUs. Subdivisions consisting of Homeowner Associations typically have restrictions that limit construction to single-family detached houses -- the City plan leaves these unaffected. Neighborhoods of high-property-value residences would be prohibitively expensive for conversion and replacement.

That leaves older, lower income areas as targets. Specifically properties characterized by large lots with small, inexpensive houses that lend themselves to being torn down and replaced by the multiplex structures newly permitted under the City plan. These are primarily on the eastside, northeast, and northwest. The bottom line is that impacts will be concentrated in a limited number of neighborhoods, and will therefore

be likely to have significant effects on those neighborhoods and their city services.

These effects reflect the entire range of impacts that the Environmental checklist (SEPA) claims will not occur in the category of neighborhood factors such as noise, loss of green space, loss of tree cover, and loss of solar energy capacity. The checklist also denies any impact due to environmental factors like increased impervious surface area, groundwater levels and quality, and stormwater runoff. Any impacts on public service elements like school capacity, street capacity, parking, sewer and water infrastructure, and stormwater conveyance capacity, some of which are already overburdened are also said to be nonexistent.

The City claims that structures will not be demolished and residents will not be displaced. The checklist says clearly that the intention of these policy changes is to add primarily market-rate infill housing in existing residential areas, a primary effect of which is demolition and displacement.

Another problem with the checklist responses is that they confuse likely actual impacts with allowed impacts. This is apparent in comments regarding view blockage, impacts on plants and marine life, the amount of impervious and hard surfaces, etc. A SEPA checklist is supposed to deal with impacts on the community, not impacts relative to regulatory limits, which is a very different matter.

A similar problem exists when the City states there will be no change in “available utilities”, but does not

mention impacts on these utilities. The response to a question about negative impacts on transportation or public services and utilities is similarly problematic when it says that existing providers will continue to provide services, but fails to address the potential impacts on those providers.

Other responses are actually erroneous, as when the checklist states that there would be no impact in parking requirements. The proposed ADU element definitely includes such changes. The statement that there will be no increased need for public services like fire, police, transit, and schools ignores the fact that increases will be needed to serve the increased population moving into the new “housing options.”

A final concern not mentioned by the City is the fact that the “housing options” changes would, under state law, not be appealable. “Compliance with democratic norms” is not a listed criterion of course, presumably because it is generally understood that in democracies citizens are able to challenge actions by their elected officials. To state that appeals will not be allowed is to take a step away from democracy and toward authoritarianism. This is intolerable. This proposal should not be pursued unless a way can be found to allow normal appeals.

*This is an edited version of official comments submitted by Bob Jacobs to the Olympia Planning Department. Bob is a long-time resident and former Mayor of Olympia.*

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Dispatch from the trenches

In Wisconsin the aim was to limit who voted

Our agent in place

[Note: All registered voters in Washington state receive their ballot and vote by mail. It's also possible to request a ballot if you need to vote before the regular mailing—the application requires only your signature for verification.]

Dateline April 9. Tuesday was a nightmare in Milwaukee. Due to the lack of poll workers—most being elderly—and with the high number of COVID-19 cases spiking the city, polling places were canceled in droves. Neil Albrecht, Director of the City of Milwaukee Election Commission, could set up only 5 polling sites that met the CDC guidelines.

The National Guard helped to fill in at some sites, but the lines were hours long. It was generally

Farmworkers

From page 1

"Nothing in the law states that farms have to implement social distancing for their workers," Erik Nicholson, a national vice president of the United Farm Workers (UFW), tells Eater Seattle. "The rules are a patchwork effort."

"We are aware of this issue and the office has been working with stakeholders on it before the suit was filed," Gov. Jay Inslee's press secretary, Mike Faulk, said. "Our efforts continue."

As the growing season ramps up, farms will continue to have an influx of workers, with few places to put them. According to Nicholson, more than 25,000 will arrive from Mexico and other countries with temporary visas. "They are going to be living in employer-owned housing, bunking in close quarters, and traveling back and forth to farms in cramped busses," he says.

Civil Eats also recently published a report about this issue, noting that Washington isn't alone in falling short of providing protections—farmworkers in California and Oregon are among those on the frontlines with few protections against the coronavirus. As that piece notes, a recent poll conducted by UFW on its Spanish-language social media platform showed more than 90 percent of the farmworkers who responded had not been advised by their employers on best practices to resist the virus, and many had been given no information at all.

But this is the first time that organized legal action has been taken to address these issues within the West Coast agriculture industry during the pandemic. "Farmworkers need clear, specific, enforceable protections from COVID, and they needed them weeks ago, when we first started asking [Gov. Inslee] for help," said Andrea Schmitt, attorney and advocate from Columbia Legal Services, one of the firms that filed the lawsuit on behalf of the unions. "The state has to act decisively to protect the workers who bring us our food—and the communities where they live."

Gabe Guarante is the editor of Seattle Eater, a restaurant-focused digital site owned by Vox Media. This article was posted on April 17, 2020 at [www.seattleeater.com](http://www.seattleeater.com).



a very nice day, except that severe storms moved in around 6 pm. Most people stuck it out. The black community has been hit especially hard with the virus, so making them come out to vote under these circumstances was especially criminal. Yet it was a major election for our city. On Milwaukee's ballot were races for mayor, county executive and many other local offices, plus the state Supreme Court.

Everything Governor Evers tried to do to postpone the election was blocked by Republicans. The week before the election, a Federal judge allowed an extension to April 13th to receive absentee ballots—so many were requesting absentee ballots that the state was having a hard time even getting them out in time.

Then the Republicans appealed the extension to the Supreme Court. Evers called a special legislative session on the Saturday before the

scheduled election date to address mail in/postponement, but the Republican members refused to take it up. Evers had no choice but to try an Executive Order, but the Republican majority State Supreme court ruled—quite expeditiously—that he didn't have the power to do it. Immediately after this ruling, the same justices overturned the federal court's decision that had extended the deadline for absentee ballots.

On top of all this, in order to submit an application for an absentee ballot, Wisconsin voters are required to download a picture of an official photo ID and provide it to their municipal clerk's office. This is obviously an obstacle for those who a) don't have a smartphone, b) don't have ready access to internet (note that libraries are closed due to coronavirus), c) don't have an approved photo ID already

(DMV has reduced hours and now requires appointments due to coronavirus), and d) don't even know how to download and deliver electronically...it's not so easy for technologically challenged.

As someone who has watched this bullshit go on for at least 10 years in Wisconsin with all the same players—save ex-Governor Scott Walker, who was ridden off into the sunset—even I am surprised at the lengths these monsters will go to stay in power. It has been very hard for me to follow the stay-at-home orders, when I want nothing more than to go out there and stir things up. But I need to settle down because it's difficult to be rational right now.

And that's what is needed...an intelligent plan to stop these bastards. I thought Elizabeth Warren had one. When I can come out of my home again, if we can ever come out of our homes again, I'm not going back to my employer or HR or payroll or any of that. I'm tapping into Zenobia.\*

As in WWI, "disease and shell shock [are] rampant in the trenches" but communications from those hunkered down in them today remind us that another world is necessary.

*\*Zenobia was a cultured monarch who fostered an intellectual environment, a court open to scholars and philosophers. She was tolerant toward her subjects and protected religious minorities. The queen maintained a stable administration that governed a multicultural multiethnic empire. (Wikipedia)*



This photo of Raul Guzman harvesting produce at Underwood Family Farms was taken by Juan Carlos and originally appeared in *The Star*.

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# The Republicans' systematic attempt to put an end to majority rule

Gary Murrell

At this country's founding, members of the ruling class in most states granted the vote only to property-owning white men—themselves. A right to vote was expanded during the nineteenth century, first to include all white men, then black men (although that right was obliterated by the end of the century and had to be regained in the struggle for civil rights in the 1960s). After 1900 women, Indians, and Puerto Ricans who lived on the mainland were able to vote. The only citizens legally denied the vote were felons (who can vote in some states), people who live in US Territories and those below age 18.

### Briefly, one person one vote

In 1965, passage of the Voting Rights Act ensured that state and local governments could not deny American citizens the equal right to vote based on their race, color, or membership in a minority language group. Or so we thought.

### Minority rule

The fact that more citizens call themselves Democrats indicated to Republicans that one-person-one-vote put them at a disadvantage—the more people who voted, the Republicans believed, the less likely it was that Republicans could win elections.

With that in mind, Republicans have devised strategies to circumvent voting rights. After a decade or two focused on winning in state legislatures, the Republicans turned to a tactic as old as the republic to disenfranchise voters: Gerrymandering. Once in power in statehouses, Republicans were able to redraw legislative district boundaries to favor Republican candidates. As one example, Wisconsin Republicans engineered an election map that resulted in

## In this time of Covid19, where does the Republican project to disenfranchise voters leave us?

Democrat candidates in the last election getting the most votes overall, but losing in a majority of the districts. The result is that Republicans dominate the legislature with a super-majority.

Gerrymandering isn't the only tool in the Republican disenfranchisement toolbox. From President Trump on down, Republicans claimed, falsely, but convincingly to their base, that Democrats across the country were engaged in extensive voting fraud. Ironically, the main documented case of fraud was carried out by North Carolina Republicans.

In states around the country Republican legislatures have enacted measures to discourage voting among groups presumed likely to vote Democratic. Voter ID laws target black people, other rules deny the vote to students living away from home. Several states have wiped thousands of people from the voting rolls. A new challenge to robust voter turnout came in April when the Wisconsin and US Supreme Courts declared null the governor's executive order extending the deadline for mail-in ballots, with the result that voters had to risk their lives at a limited number of overcrowded polling places.

### Who will get to vote in the 2020 election?

In this time of Covid19, where does the Republican project to disenfranchise voters leave us? We will have a presidential election in November. How we will conduct that election will, in all

likelihood, determine the outcome of an election that is among the most crucial in our history.

There is no doubt Republicans will attempt to disrupt the election and eliminate as many voters as possible. "I don't want everybody to vote," declared influential conservative activist Paul Weyrich. "As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down."

Congressional Democrats proposed a national vote-by-mail program in the first Covid19 stimulus package. Without it, tens of millions of Americans could be compelled to stand in line at polling places in close proximity to one another just to participate in the democratic process. Or they might stay home.

Trump and Republicans opposed the funding for nationwide mail-in balloting. On Fox and Friends, Trump complained about the proposal, "They had things, levels of voting that if you'd ever agreed to it, you'd never have a Republican elected in this country again." He pressed the issue in one of his daily campaign events masquerading as aCovid19 news conference: "Mail ballots, they cheat. Mail ballots are very dangerous for this country because of cheaters. They go collect them. They are fraudulent in many cases. They have to vote. They should have voter ID, by the way."

Yet, as elections expert Charles Stewart of MIT reminded us, "voting fraud in the United States is rare." The US military has used absentee voting successfully since the Civil War. Five

states, including Washington, vote exclusively by mail. Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia have systems in place for no-excuse-necessary absentee voting. Another seventeen states allow mail-in ballots, but require an excuse to vote absentee. According to the rules in most of those states, if you're ill you can get an absentee ballot. Does the possibility of being infected by a virus in a pandemic meet that requirement? Unless some miraculous cure appears before the election, it seems likely that we will find out.

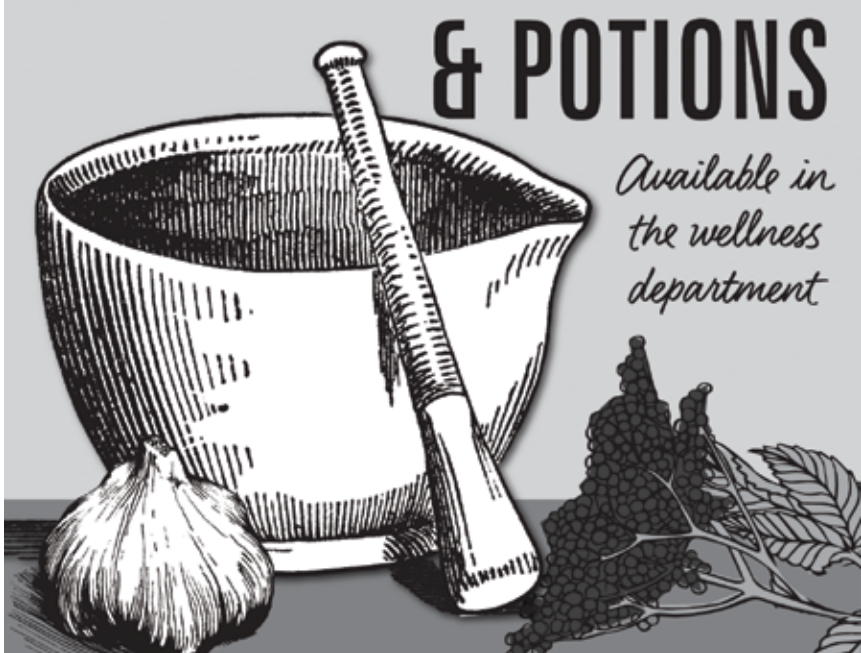
If Congress adopts universal mail-in voting it might mean that more voters come to the polls—to the dismay of Republicans. A massive defeat of Trump and a sweeping rejection of Republican minority rule could, if voters demand it and Democrats allow the progressive wing to lead their party, signal a turn for the better. In a country altered irrevocably by the pandemic we might see movement toward a more just and equitable society: health care for all, fully funded public education, income equality, worker's rights, a substantial social safety net, and most importantly, since this pandemic is certainly a rehearsal for what awaits us if we continue to ignore it, focused attention to climate change.

### A worse world is also possible

But even with an election that turns out Trump's corrupt regime there is a dark side. Trump and his minions will not accept defeat with equanimity. Trump will tear the nation apart when he loses. He will support and condone violence in the streets as he did with his tweets supporting protests against state governors in April. As we contemplate how to hold an election in November, we must also contemplate the consequences that are sure to follow.

*Gary Murrell lives and is sheltering in place in Hoquiam.*

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# In Norway, an egalitarian social democracy is thriving

[Ed note: At the beginning of last year, Donald Trump lamented the lack of immigrants to the US “from places like Norway.” This excerpt from a Nation magazine interview with Ann Jones about her stay in that country explains why.]

The US has a long history of disguising grasping self-interest as the “right to individual freedom.” Norway, on the other hand, created itself as an egalitarian social democracy, and that makes all the difference.

### Billionaire capitalists aren’t in the driver’s seat

In Norway, for the most part, self-interest and the public interest coincide. Like the US, it’s a capitalist country. But unlike the US, Norway regulates capitalist ventures and is the major shareholder in some private enterprises of public concern.

Wages and working conditions are not dictated by billionaire owners but negotiated once a year by national confederations of enterprise and labor, for labor retains the power to set the standards of work.

### Promoting the general welfare

To ensure equality—without which democracy is not possible—the government also oversees a universal welfare system. It collects high but fair progressive income taxes to support universal health care, almost-free education from preschool through university, full

unemployment compensation, affordable housing, public transport, and the like. The result is one of the most equal, democratic, highly educated, innovative, modern, technically advanced, and happy societies on the planet.

### Public resources held for public benefit

You may have heard that this remarkable success owes itself to Norway’s “oil wealth” drawn, since the 1970s, from the North Sea. It’s a tale Conservative columnists rerun to dismiss the obvious advantages of a welfare state. In fact, Norway’s oil money is stashed in a sovereign wealth fund, officially the Government Pension Fund, now valued above \$1 trillion.

With only 4 percent of a year’s income available to the government in case of emergency—and rarely used—the fund invested largely in oil producers until 2017. After that year, it began a popular transition to investments in solar and wind power.

### The real source of economic—and individual—development

And here’s a fact that these Conservative columnists never mention: According to Norway’s Ministry of Finance, the real source of new money expanding the welfare state was not oil but the income taxes paid by women who entered the workforce, on a par with men, just

about the time the oil came in [the mid-1960s].

The welfare state, in turn, enabled women by taking on some of their traditional jobs in the home: health care, child care, elder care, and primary education. Norwegians liked these arrangements so much that by 1981 they chose their first woman prime minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, who later went on to head the World Health Organization.

### Pressures from the coronavirus emergency

Over the last few days, the oil fund has become a bone of contention in Norway, with the government tapping into the surplus to meet the coronavirus emergency and economists protesting that the emergency should be met by additional progressive taxation so the fund would be preserved for its original intention: providing old-age pensions to future generations.

### Covid19: similar issues, different impacts on people

These days, Norwegian enterprises—including the oil industry—feel the same pain as those in other nations afflicted by Covid-19. Shops close, businesses struggle, the currency loses value. But in Norway, the sick are well cared for by the national health service, workers are still paid by employers or through national insurance,

and, in a changing job market, some workers may choose to be retrained at public expense. Few, if any, are homeless. None will go hungry. Covered by the welfare system, Norwegians can focus on family, friends, the future: what matters most to them.

### A Conservative government, led by a woman

Incidentally, the current government is not Communist or even Socialist, as Americans may fear, but Conservative and led by women. (When Trump met Prime Minister Erna Solberg in 2018, he marveled that she spoke English, and then announced the first delivery on Norway’s \$10 billion purchase of American fighter jets: F-35s and F-52s, though the latter exist only in the video game Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare.)

As conditions worsen around the world, Solberg has asked Norwegian students abroad to consider coming home. And on March 14, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology urged the return of its students studying in countries “with poorly developed health services and infrastructure... like the United States.”

*Ann Jones, a Distinguished Fellow at the Quincy Institute, was interviewed by James W. Carden in the April 2 Nation magazine. The full interview at <https://www.thenation.com> goes beyond this description of Norway to critique the economic and social policies that have failed the US. Read it online or, better yet, subscribe to The Nation for their unique coverage.*

# Join the club that’s building a better world

In a culture driven by petro dollars, the Better World Club is an intentionally well-kept secret. Like AAA, BWC provides roadside assistance to motorists every day of the year, contracting with local small businesses to service vehicles in distress. Dollar for dollar and mile for mile, BWC offers the same or better coverage for towing, jump-starts, lockouts, as well as travel discounts and trip interruption insurance.

What BWC doesn’t support are automobile, oil, tire and cement interests—the Highway Lobby—which seek to perpetuate themselves with endless road construction and blockage of projects to improve mass transit.

AAA is on record stating that cars are not responsible for air pollution, spending millions every year to influence government policy on mass transit, car design (including

safety features), suburban sprawl and global warming, opposing bicycle lanes and other low-cost, low impact forms of transportation.

By contrast, members of BWC who take steps to reduce their carbon footprint are rewarded for their efforts. Hybrid vehicle owners receive a 10% discount (new members only) and a 20% surcharge is added for owners of the ten worst gas-guzzling cars.

Better World Club offers an alternative to AAA in other ways on their website (written, they note, by employees well-caffinated by sustainably-farmed, locally roasted coffees delivered by bicycle courier):

BWC supports state efforts to regulate automobile emissions.

BWC consistently supports the funding and development of bike lanes. National and Regional AAAs have fought against bike lanes and public transit funding.

BWC supports the use of highway tax dollars to fund mass transit.

BWC supports a broad enforcement of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts.

BWC Donates 1% of our yearly revenue to environmental cleanup and advocacy. AAA does not.

BWC created the first and only nationwide, 24/7 bicycle roadside assistance program. AAA has bicycle roadside assistance only in certain cities and states.

BWC maintains a carbon-neutral headquarters and fleet service program. AAA does not.

To learn more, visit [betterworldclub.com](http://betterworldclub.com).

## Small Kindnesses

I’ve been thinking about the way, when you walk down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs to let you by. Or how strangers still say “bless you” when someone sneezes, a leftover from the Bubonic plague. “Don’t die,” we are saying. And sometimes, when you spill lemons from your grocery bag, someone else will help you pick them up. Mostly, we don’t want to harm each other. We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot, and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder, and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass. We have so little of each other, now. So far from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange. What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these fleeting temples we make together when we say, “Here, have my seat,” “Go ahead—you first,” “I like your hat.”

Danusha Laméris

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# Workers are essential, CEOs are not

Mindy Isser

Low-wage workers are on the front line in the battle against coronavirus. While many workers have started telecommuting — and many others have unfortunately been laid off — low-wage workers are busy cleaning our streets, making sure we have enough to eat, and, of course, nursing us back to health if we get COVID-19. Despite being linchpins of a functional society, these workers are often treated as expendable or dismissed as “unskilled.” But over the past few weeks, we’ve seen just how irreplaceable they are.

In California, New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and elsewhere, state governments have rolled out increasingly strict orders to enforce social distancing and close all businesses except those deemed “essential” or “life-sustaining.” While these lists vary from state to state, each includes grocery stores, laundromats, restaurants (serving takeout and delivery), factories that produce foodstuffs and other products, gas stations, pharmacies, and hospitals.

What do all of these businesses have in common? They rely on the labor of low-wage workers who, in many cases, toil without benefits, unions, and workplace protections. Public workers are still on the clock, too, cleaning our streets, delivering our mail, and making sure we have access to utilities and other social services. While many government workers have unions, they are often accorded the same lack of respect as their low-wage, private-sector counterparts.

But imagine a global pandemic without postal workers or UPS drivers getting us our messages and packages; without cashiers and

stockers keeping grocery stores up and running and full of food; without care and domestic workers providing life-saving medical and emotional support to some of society’s most at-risk people; without utility workers making sure we have a supply of water, electricity, and gas; without laundromat workers enabling us to clean our clothes, towels, and sheets; without sanitation workers collecting our trash and slowing the spread of germs.

employees as emergency workers, making them eligible for childcare and other services. Stop & Shop workers have received a 10 percent pay increase and two additional weeks of paid sick leave. Safeway, Target, and Whole Foods workers won a \$2-per-hour increase. And unionized workers at Kroger in Washington state have been given hazard pay, a demand taken up by many grocery and other frontline workers across the country. These victories, while small, have inched

Many of them work for minimum wage or close to it — and without health benefits — meaning that they could contract coronavirus and get stuck with either a massive bill or no health care at all. Meanwhile, with many school districts closed indefinitely, parents are missing the critical and challenging work done every day by nannies, childcare workers, and educators of all kinds.

These workers have a right to higher wages, full benefits, health and safety guarantees, and strong unions — just like every other worker.

Hopefully, this crisis will not only elevate the status of low-wage workers but spark a new wave of organizing to boost standards and build power across these “essential” industries. Because it’s low-wage workers — not bankers, landlords, or CEOs — who make our society run.

*Mindy Isser works in the labor movement and lives in Philadelphia. She is a frequent contributor to Working In These Times, where this article appeared after having been published 3/25/20 by the quarterly magazine Jacobin (<https://jacobinmag.com>).*

Hopefully, this crisis will...spark a new wave of organizing to boost standards and build power across these “essential” industries.

While many individuals have expressed appreciation for these frontline workers — leaving hand sanitizer out for their letter carrier; calling for an increase in teachers’ salaries after having to homeschool their kids for a few days — our society has long undervalued them, both monetarily and otherwise. That’s starting to change, thanks to the crisis and worker organizing that has turned up the heat on bosses.

Minnesota, Michigan, and Vermont have all classified grocery store

us closer to a society where low-wage workers finally get the remuneration and respect they deserve.

But what does it say about our country when the jobs that are most critical to sustaining life at its basic level are also some of the lowest paid and least valued? Grocery store workers and first responders are exposing themselves to a massive health crisis in order to keep the rest of us functioning as normally as possible.

## Coronavirus, epidemics and capitalism: The bugs are in the system

Governments around the globe have had since December to prepare for the novel coronavirus. And while some countries have done better than others with their response, here in the U.S. the for-profit medical industry is practically ensuring that more people catch the virus and more die from it. As with other disasters and emergencies, capitalism makes things worse. Now is the time to mobilize our unions and community organizations, along with small businesses to insist on immediate and effective action to protect public health.

Like other epidemics before it, coronavirus is a threat compounded by capitalist greed and callousness. As disease ecologist Peter

Daszak recently put it, “Unprecedented road-building, deforestation, land clearing and agricultural development, as well as globalized travel and trade” make pandemics likelier than ever, especially when “between outbreaks, the will to spend money on prevention wanes.” Global warming and nuclear proliferation have shown that capitalists will always trade tomorrow’s welfare for today’s dollar if we let them.

To address this crisis, the Freedom Socialist Party raises these demands:

- ◆ A universal, free, nonprofit, nationalized medical industry, including pharmaceuticals, managed by healthcare workers and patients
- ◆ Free testing, treatment and vaccines
- ◆ International cooperation on the virus treatment and vaccine research; outlaw profit-making from the crisis
- ◆ Unlimited paid sick leave for all workers, with government assistance as necessary plus full compensation for lost wages due to closures or quarantines
- ◆ Free laptops and Wi-Fi at home and free lunch programs for *all* students when schools close; free childcare for parents who have to work
- ◆ Emergency financial assistance for small businesses hurt by the epidemic, including subsidies for paid sick leave
- ◆ Increase public and private staffing levels to perform the intensified cleaning required
- ◆ Train all at-risk workers and provide proper protective equipment
- ◆ Stop the racist scapegoating of Chinese and all Asian and immigrant communities

- ◆ No abridgement of civil liberties
- ◆ Redirect military spending and border wall funding to coronavirus response, prevention and cure

*This is an excerpt from the statement issued by the Seattle/Puget Sound Freedom Socialist Party. Read the full statement and related articles about the situation locally at <https://socialism.com/freedom-socialist-newspaper>*

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*Crazy Monk is an Olympia street poet, teacher and musician. He can be reached at [gypsymonk1@gmail.com](mailto:gypsymonk1@gmail.com).*

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# Dear Vice President Joe Biden,

We write to you as leaders from a diverse array of organizations building political power for young people in the United States. We are all deeply committed to ending a presidency that has set the clock back on all of the issues that impact our lives.

While you are now the presumptive Democratic nominee, it is clear that you were unable to win the votes of the vast majority of voters under 45 years old during the primary. With young people poised to play a critical role deciding the next President, you need to have more young people enthusiastically supporting and campaigning with you to defeat Trump. This division must be reconciled so we can unite the party to defeat Trump.

Messaging around a “return to normalcy” does not and has not earned the support and trust of voters from our generation. For so many young people, going back to the way things were “before Trump” isn’t a motivating enough reason to cast a ballot in November. And now, the coronavirus pandemic has exposed not only the failure of Trump, but how decades of policymaking has failed to create a robust social safety net for the vast majority of Americans.

The views of younger Americans are the result of a series of crises that took hold when we came of political age, and flow from bad decisions made by those in power from both major parties. For millions of young people, our path to a safe and secure middle class life is far more out-of-reach than it was for our parents or grandparents. We grew up in a world where “doing better than the generation before us” was not a foregone conclusion.

Instead, we grew up with endless war, skyrocketing inequality, crushing student loan debt, mass deportations, police murders of black Americans and mass incarceration, schools which have become killing fields, and knowing that the political leaders of today are choking the planet we will live on long after they are gone. We’ve spent our whole lives witnessing our political leaders prioritize the voices of wealthy lobbyists and big corporations over our needs. From this hardship, we’ve powered a resurgence of social movements demanding fundamental change. Why would we want a return to normalcy? We need a vision for the future, not a return to the past.

New leadership in November is an imperative for everything our movements are fighting for. But in order to win up and down the ballot in November, the Democratic Party needs the energy and enthusiasm of our generation. The victorious “Obama coalition” included millions of energized young people fighting for change. But the Democratic Party’s last presidential nominee failed to mobilize our enthusiasm where it mattered. We can’t afford to see those mistakes repeated.

Young people are issues-first voters. Fewer identify with a political party than any other generation. Exclusively anti-Trump messaging won’t be enough to lead any candidate to victory. We need you to champion the bold ideas that have galvanized our generation and given us hope in the political process. As the party’s nominee,

the following commitments are needed to earn the support of our generation and unite the party for a general election against Donald Trump:



## Policy:

**Climatic change:** Adopt the frameworks of the Green New Deal and make specific commitments around achieving a just transition to 100% Clean Energy by 2030 for electricity, buildings, and transportation; restart the economy by committing to mobilizing \$10 trillion in green stimulus and infrastructure investments over 10 years that will create tens of millions of good jobs of the future; and commit to take on and prosecute the fossil fuel executives and lobbyists who have criminally jeopardized our generation.

**Gun violence prevention:** Take an intersectional, comprehensive approach to preventing gun violence with the goal of reducing gun deaths by 50% in ten years. In addition to the policies laid out in your plan, you should also include the following from the Peace Plan for a Safer America: call for a federal licensing program; hold the gun industry accountable by directing the IRS to probe the NRA’s non-profit status. Expand federal funding and resources for community based violence intervention programs. Adopt Julian Castro’s People First Policing Plan and acknowledge that police brutality is gun violence.

**Immigration:** Commit to immediate executive actions to expand DACA and other policies to protect people from deportation and hold ICE and CBP accountable. Executive actions must also close the vast and cruel web of detention camps and not replace it with a practice of tagging people with electronic monitors or surveillance sold by big money corporations. Commit to ending the collaboration between local police and ICE and the use of racial profiling by deportation agents and local police that pulls people into the deportation pipeline. Commit to providing guaranteed access to counsel for all while making immigration courts independent and free of political manipulation. Commit to repealing 1996 immigration reform laws and creating citizenship pathways for all undocumented people with harmful provisions. Amidst the current Covid-19 pandemic, it is clear that all people, including undocumented immigrants, must be included in any health care reform as viruses do not discriminate on the basis of immigration status.

**Health care:** Support the Affordable Drug Manufacturing Act to allow the government to manufacture generic versions of drugs and dramatically lower prescription drug prices. Support Medicare for All, especially in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Champion the repeal of the Hyde Amendment and people’s ability to access abortion care regardless of their income or zip code.

**Criminalization:** Champion comprehensive reform of our criminal legal system. Incentivize states to cut their incarcerated population by 50 percent while supporting massive investment in housing, drug treatment, diversion, educa-

tion and health programs. End the War on Drugs and support the equitable legalization of marijuana based on proposals laid out by Senator Booker, Senator Warren, Senator Sanders, Secretary Castro, and others.

**Education:** Support free undergraduate tuition for public colleges, universities, and vocational schools for all students, regardless of income, citizenship status, or criminal record. Provide economic relief to 45 million Americans and stimulate the economy by addressing the student debt crisis and canceling the entire \$1.7 trillion in student loan debt.

**Wealth Tax:** Support an annual tax on the extreme wealth of the wealthiest 180,000 households in America who are in the top 0.1 percent based on proposals laid out by Senator Sanders, Senator Warren, and Tom Steyer.

**Foreign policy:** Commit to seek Congressional approval on any authorization of war and support repeal of 2001 and 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force.

**Democracy:** Support the elimination of the filibuster and the expanding of the Supreme Court. Call for the adoption of strong anti-corruption reforms laid out by Senator Warren and Senator Sanders. Champion a voting system that works for all Americans. Every citizen should be automatically registered to vote, get to cast their ballot in a secure, accessible way that fits their needs, and never have their right to vote taken away for any reason. Get big money out of politics and make the passage of HR 1 a top priority.



## Personnel and Future Administration:

Commit to appointing progressive elected officials who endorsed Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren as Transition Co-Chairs, such as Representatives Ro Khanna, Pramila Jayapal, Ayanna Pressley, or Katie Porter.

Pledge to appoint zero current or former Wall Street executives or corporate lobbyists, or people affiliated with the fossil fuel, health insurance or private prison corporations, to your transition team, advisor roles, or cabinet.

Appoint a trusted progressive to lead the White House Presidential Personnel Office to ensure that the entire administration is free of corruption and staffed with public servants committed to advancing a progressive agenda.

Commit to put trusted voices on issues of importance to our generation on your campaign and transition team’s policy working groups, such as Governor Inslee’s policy team on climate; Senator Warren’s policy team on financial regulation; Aramis Ayala, Bryan Stevenson, and Larry Krasner on criminal justice; Bonnie Castillo of National Nurses United and Dr. Abdul El-Sayed on health care; and Mary-Kay Henry, Sara Nelson, and Senator Sanders’ policy team on jobs and the economy.

Commit to appointing advisors, such as Joseph Stiglitz, to your National Economic Council and

Office of Management and Budget who believe in the principles of the Green New Deal and a rapid transition to a 100% clean and renewable energy economy

Appoint a National Director of Gun Violence Prevention in the White House who will oversee the policy platform, coordinate across agencies, and incorporate a survivor-centered approach. Commit to appointing an Attorney General who will re-examine the Heller decision.

Appoint a DHS Secretary committed to holding ICE and CBP agents accountable and dismantling ICE and CBP as we know them.

Create a White House Commission to represent the voices and needs of immigrants who can work together to ensure that executive actions and legislative solutions address the needs of immigrant communities.

Create a Task Force on Young Americans at the White House focused on the many issues unique to the next generation’s health, wellbeing, and economic stability. The leadership of the office should directly report to the President and work regularly with the Domestic Policy Council, National Economic Council, and Office of Public Engagement. Taskforce representatives from each agency should be appointed by and report to respective Secretaries and taskforce leadership and focus on policy and administrative action that directly affects every aspect of young people’s lives. This office should engage directly with young people across the country and ensure representation from youth movement leaders in its ranks.

In addition to these policy and personnel commitments, you and your campaign must demonstrate a real passion and enthusiasm for engaging with our generation and its leaders. It’s not just about the policies and issues, but also about how you prioritize them, how you talk about them, and how you demonstrate real passion for addressing them. You must demonstrate, authentically, that you empathize with our generation’s struggles.

Calling for solutions that match the scale, scope, and urgency of the problems we are facing is not radical. If nothing else, this moment of crisis should show that it is the pragmatic thing to do. We want results and we’re leading some of the movements that will help deliver them.

The organizations below will spend more than \$100 million communicating with more than 10 million young members, supporters, and potential voters this election cycle. We are uniquely suited to help mobilize our communities, but we need help ensuring our efforts will be backed-up by a campaign that speaks to our generation. Our generation is the future of this country. If you aim to motivate, mobilize, and welcome us in, we will work tirelessly to align this nation with its highest ideals.

*Alliance for Youth Action*

*Justice Democrats*

*IfNotNow Movement*

*March for Our Lives Action Fund.*

*NextGen America*

*Student Action*

*Sunrise Movement*

*United We Dream Action*



# In praise of print

## Deep River

by Karl Marlantes

Veronica Atkinson

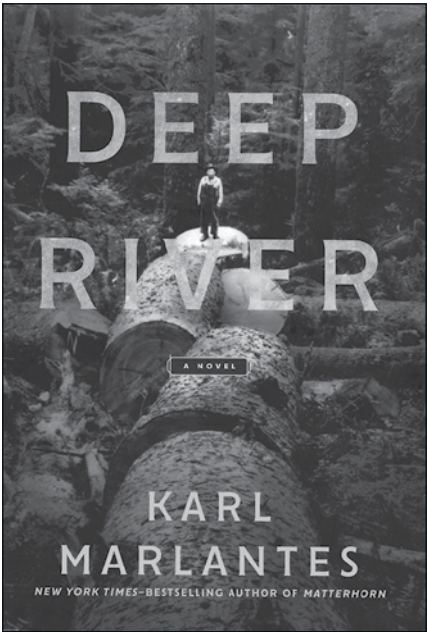
Deep River is a story rich with historical detail spanning the decades of the early 20th century in America and told through the eyes of three siblings, immigrants from Finland, who settle in a logging community in southern Washington. At over seven hundred pages, Marlantes has time to give the reader a long view of each character's development and their intertwined relationships over the years. The book addresses Finnish culture and the immigrant experience but primarily shines a light on the labor movement in the Pacific Northwest.

The novel begins in Finland at the time of imperial Russian rule. The eldest brother, Ilmari, flees Finland to avoid being drafted into the army. In Washington he acquires a plot of land and starts a blacksmithing business, providing a steady base for the family throughout the story. Four years later the youngest brother, Matti, escapes to America after an altercation with a Russian soldier and finds work in the logging camp near his brother's home. Their sister, Aino, whose early exposure to Marxist theory and subsequent activism with a Finnish resistance cell results in a prison term, is the last to arrive in the Pacific Northwest. She rejects her brother's efforts to secure her future by way of marriage to a neighbor and sets off to the logging camp, finding work with a group of women in the company's cookhouse.

The descriptions of the landscape, rivers, and old growth forests give a vivid picture of these early settler's lives. Marlantes details the techniques of toppling the huge firs, the mechanics of cutting and moving the timber, the massive saws, the thick steel cables, and the harsh and dangerous work of the men in the trees and operations around the machinery.

Working “dark to dark” six days a week for less than two dollars a day, the loggers are put up in bunkhouses with only straw to make beds and allowed “all you can eat” although a fee for room and board are deducted from their pay. As the owner pushes them to work faster, accidents happen. A gruesome death occurs. From this point the novel depicts Aino's development as a labor activist. She practices her English language skills by making speeches and organizing the workers to come together in asking for better conditions and fair wages. Early success in this first endeavor propels her to take the message to surrounding towns, crossing paths with Joe Hill along the way and eventually becoming a prominent speaker for the IWW.

Interspersed with Aino's story are actual accounts of the struggles and successes of the labor movement at the time in Washington and across the nation, including the impact of the first world war. Many businessmen and politicians saw the war as a way for the country to expand business abroad but there was also broad support for



staying neutral. Once in the war, the government imposed mandatory conscription but opposition voices continued to rise leading to the establishment of the Espionage Act of 1917. While the intent of the law was to silence and persecute antiwar activists, it also proved to be an effective way to quash the burgeoning labor movement. By painting labor unions as unpatriotic and claiming strikes were being financed by German spies, the workers were labeled as “traitors” thereby sanctioning harassment, imprisonment, physical violence and worse. On the heels of this tactic, the government enacted the Sedition Act which effectively negated freedom of speech, making it a federal offense to speak, write, or publish any opinion considered as opposition to the government, the American uniform or the flag.

Of particular local interest, Marlantes recounts the Centralia Tragedy through the eyes of his characters, some as labor organizers and others as soldiers returned from the war. Also known as the Centralia Massacre and the Armistice Day Riot, the confrontation was the culmination of years of hostile skirmishes between some town leaders and the IWW. During the Armistice day parade on November 11, 1919 a gun battle broke out between the American Legion and union members which resulted in deaths, a lynching, and the imprisonment of many IWW members. With each side claiming the other fired first, the telling of this history ignites emotions to this day. The stories of the characters' lives, their families and children continue into the early 1930's, highlighting the labor movements' efforts to achieve worker's rights.

Viewed through such a long lens, the progress of the labor movement is evident although the progress is often “two steps forward, one step back”. The present social division, the push against unions, the wealth inequality, the disinformation campaigns and extreme nationalism parallels the past, illustrating that even after a century the struggle for social justice continues to be a work in progress.

Veronica Atkinson is a retired Registered Nurse, avid reader and advocate of worker's rights.

## I’m not asking why

I’m not asking why but I’m asking what now and what next?

This is global a matter of high volume and limited capacity

like how traffic used to be on I-5 or the security lines at the airport systems have jams and breaking

points. So much is broken cracked, beyond capacity this now though is liminal time

space. Let's watch as the CO2 curves flatten as the air and canals clear. Clarity to organize and re

organize our lives against the domination of the capitalist system

What we don't need cruise ships frequent flyers

elders in contained homes children in confined classrooms my own brother's job

to arrange promotions for processed and packaged food. He's got nothing to do

as he works from home.

Teachers on the other hand are re-tooling learning Zoom and Screencast-omatic

rewriting curriculum to be relevant for our students' lives now in pandemic

in isolation and holding hope in the kids who aren't getting sick

but will know this time in memory. Keepers of history and future. Why, is not

a question for me, but What?

we need farmers in the neighborhood a new kind of learning

A knowledge born of solidarity not of individualism or identity.

re-distribute the wealth re-imagine the future re-tool for the new world

evolving from the old one.

Kathleen Byrd

## Prison

From page 4

demic has precipitated the release of many held in prison with no effect on public safety. After all, if prisons reduced crime, the United States would be the safest country in the world, but this is far from true.

For Maple Lane to be converted to a women's prison, Thurston County was asked to amend the zoning to allow for a correctional facility. In July, 2019, DOC signed a contract with Thurston County to fund an analysis of a draft Development Code Amendment to do just that. The zoning change has been on Thurston County's radar since the DOC first proposed it in 2015, and was on the “docket” (list of projects they are working on) in 2017, but was never completed.

Over the past several months, No New Women's Prison has encouraged opponents to contact the County Commission. Sarah Nagy, staff attorney at Columbia Legal Services, wrote in her public comment “...we believe there is an

opportunity for the Commission to take a step back and consider the broader implications of this proposal before deciding whether to include it in your agenda... Moreover, we ask that you take time to more closely examine the impacts that the construction of a prison has on the local community and the communities of those who are housed in prisons. In summary, we ask that you choose not to add the DOC zoning request.”

On April 22, County Commissioners rejected the rezone, acknowledging strong opposition from the Rochester community, the facility's proximity to Rochester schools. They also recognized the strong arguments that activist groups had sent in opposition.

It is not certain what next steps the DOC might take. But we will continue to pursue our goal of ending excessive incarceration of women.

Lea Kronenberg works as a re-entry case manager and instructor for people in prison. She is the daughter of WIP contributing writer Esther Kronenberg.

No New Women's Prison is also seeking allies to help with communications, outreach, research and connecting with incarcerated people. Contact them via their website NoNewWomensPrison.com, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

To comment on the proposal: Governor Jay Inslee—360-902-4111

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# Healthcare

## From page 1

lay off staff, drive up executive compensation. Consolidation of hospital systems has produced executive compensation in the multi-millions, while pay and respect for workers who provide the service is always under threat. [See sidebar]

The law of profit is unforgiving. If consolidation doesn't offer attractive rewards, closure can. In Philadelphia, a hedge fund purchased a busy academic safety-net hospital and then closed it in order to sell the land for development Hospitals in rural areas and smaller cities aren't options for merger—they struggle merely to stay afloat, cutting staff and providing less care. Hundreds of rural hospitals have closed in recent years, leaving millions of people without necessary health services.

Hospital billing practices are also shaped by profit concerns. Rates for the same treatment vary wildly across the US and the actual amount charged is a function of who is paying. Hospital billing is an art-form that accounts for 18% of hospital costs—and allows for differential collections from Medicare, Medicaid, private insurers and individuals. Hospitals—including non-profits—pursue unpaid bills aggressively, even putting liens on patients' homes. Not surprisingly, medical expenses are the leading cause of bankruptcy in the US.

A recent development in hospital management is the advent of “physician staffing companies” who, in effect, rent out doctors to hospitals—for a profit. About a third of hospital emergency rooms are staffed by doctors on the payrolls of two companies owned by Wall Street investment firms. (The Bellingham doctor fired for speaking to the press was an employee of one of these companies.)

### Doctors

Given the role of money outlined above, it shouldn't be surprising that the US medical industry skews toward specialties, not general practitioners. Most medical school graduates in the US practice as specialists. About 33% become primary care physicians, a number that has declined over time.

Orthopedic and plastic surgeons are at the top of the medical specialty income scale with earnings at almost \$500,000 annually. Public health preventive medicine and family practice are at the bottom, earning around \$200,000 or less. The availability of primary care is further limited by the uneven distribution of practitioners; by lack of insurance to help pay for visits; by lack of coverage for preventive care; and by practices that are not open to new patients because those patients have government insurance.

### Insurers

Our private/public/employer system of “insurance” as a way to pay for all of the above (and more) isn't working. As more entities enter the medical arena, more cost and more profit is built in, and insurance premiums go up. Private insurers constantly redesign their “products” to limit coverage and refine their administration of benefits to reduce payouts.

Insurers spend 20% of their premium dollars on administration—determining eligibility, utilization controls (e.g., prior authorization of particular procedures), claims processing, and negotiating fees with

each and every physician, hospital, surgical centers among other facilities. By comparison, Medicare and Medicaid have administrative costs in the 2-3% range.

### More expensive but not better

We are told that our system is more expensive than any other country because it's better. In the recent words of President Trump, “the virus won't have a chance against us... we have the most advanced healthcare.” Not true. The US now has more confirmed deaths from the coronavirus than any other country. Beyond the crisis, the US ranks below most developed countries in terms of key health indicators.

Repeated studies by the Commonwealth Fund put the US last or near last of 11 democracies in health access, efficiency and equity. Life expectancy in the US is lower than that of many other countries and infant mortality, notoriously, higher. Disaggregated by race, US infant mortality rates are even worse.

We are told that we spend more than any other country because we overuse the healthcare system. Again, not true. Turns out that we make fewer doctors' visits than peer countries.

### Another world is possible

We can identify the elements of a health care system that would serve us better than the medical industry we rely on now. Health care would not be marketed as a consumer good, but provided as a public good. That's what the coronavirus has made clear: all members of the society benefit from every member having ready access to care that will keep them healthy. A health care system would prioritize health; it would not ration care by price; and it would be widely accessible.

There are indications that pursuing healthcare as a public good is becoming possible. Obama care as originally proposed included a standard set of benefits to be included in all insurance coverage; it provided for universal coverage; it included a “public option” that could have been a first step toward a single-payer system.

In 1996, Congress created Federally Qualified Health Centers, community-based clinics that provide comprehensive primary care and preventive care, including health, oral and mental health/substance abuse services to everyone regardless of age, ability to pay or health insurance status. These could become the center of a system that supports health and the people who deliver care.

*Bethany Weidner served as Deputy Commissioner for Health Policy in the Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner from 1993 to 2000, and as manager of Seamar Clinic, an Olympia-based FQHC from 2000–2004.*

**Sources.** Sources consulted for this article include *The AMA Journal of Ethics* (“A Single-Payer System Would Reduce U.S. Health Care Costs,” Ed Weisbart, MD; *Boston Review*, “What the Healthcare System Gets Wrong,” Adam Gaffney, MD; The National Center for Biotechnology Information; “An Overview of the Medical Device Industry,” The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission among many others. The Lown Institute, a nonpartisan think tank advocating and acting for a just and caring health system is especially worth a visit for the variety and excellence of the information presented there: [www.lowninstitute.org](http://www.lowninstitute.org)

# It's about the money

## Even life and death matters can't override the profit dynamic

Around 2007 federal officials decided to ensure that the US medical stockpile would have the ventilators needed in a predictable epidemic. They wrote specifications for an easy-to-use device that would cost \$3000 each. In 2008, Newport, an independent company in California won the contract, expecting to sell 40,000 ventilators to the government and more on the commercial market, where the standard ventilator then cost about \$10,000.

Things went smoothly with officials from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) monitoring progress. Newport shipped 3 working prototypes in 2011. The plan was to apply for clearance from the FDA to sell the device in 2012.

That didn't happen. In May of 2012, Newport was bought by Covidien, a multibillion dollar device company. Covidien shelved the project (“unprofitable”) and was released from the contract in 2014.

In 2015, HHS tried again, this time contracting with the subsidiary of a multibillion dollar Dutch company, Phillips. A \$3280 ventilator was approved for market in July 2019 and HHS ordered 10,000.

None of those have been delivered. Instead, Phillips began selling a commercial version of the ventilator developed with federal funds, for about \$17,000 per unit.

And in April, the Trump Administration signed a new contract with Phillips to buy 2,500 of the ventilators at \$15,000 each. They also signed a contract with General Motors to buy 30,000 ventilators for \$16,000 each—to replenish the national stockpile, probably in August.

*This story was uncovered by ProPublica and appears in detail at [www.propublica.org](http://www.propublica.org).*

## It's not “profit,” it's “executive compensation”

St Peter's in Olympia is a not-for-profit hospital managed by the Sisters of Providence until 1979. As the community grew smaller, the nuns found outside management but kept the hospital's commitment to service.

That changed in 2012, when Dr. Rod Hochman moved over from Swedish Hospital to head the Providence System.

Hochman oversaw the affiliation of Swedish (which was having financial difficulties) with Providence and then arranged a merger with California-based St. Joseph's Hospitals.

With that Hochman embarked on a cost-cutting campaign that included layoffs—but Hochman and 14 other top executives in the Providence System gave themselves raises: Hochman's compensation jumped from \$4.1 million in 2016 to \$10.5 million in 2017. Total compensation for 14 executives increased by \$14 million, or 59 percent.

Like other businessmen, Providence's leaders have their venture capital fund, their investment portfolio, and their place on blue-ribbon commissions telling us that labor costs are a problem and we are to blame for out-of-control health.



# Rethinking everything

## Lesson #10: Another world

In Cuba, health care is considered a human right for all citizens and is therefore a national priority. Cuba's health policy emphasizes prevention, primary care, services in the community, and the active participation of citizens. The backbone of the system is the community-based polyclinic, each of the 498 nationwide serving a catchment area of between 30 000 and 60 000 people. The polyclinics act also as an organizational hub for 20 to 40 neighborhood-based family doctor-and-nurse offices, and as accredited research and teaching centers for medical, nursing and allied health sciences students.

This system has produced an impressively high ranking on major health indicators, despite economic handicaps. The Cuban experience challenges the assumption that high-quality care for all citizens requires massive financial investment and suggests that the equitable distribution of health care services in the United States requires a national health insurance and service delivery system.

—Quoted from the World Health Organization and from *PubMed*. a publication of the US National Library of Medicine



# The bigger picture behind the virus

Jonathan Cook

*This article originally appeared on April 2, 2020 in Consortium News and is reprinted in WIP with express permission from the author.*

Things often look the way they do because someone claiming authority tells us they look that way. If that sounds too cynical, pause for a moment and reflect on what seemed most important to you just a year ago, or even a few weeks ago.

Then, you may have been thinking that Russian interference in western politics was a vitally important issue, and something that we needed to invest much of our emotional and political energy in countering. Or maybe a few weeks ago you felt that everything would be fine if we could just get Donald Trump out of the White House. Or maybe you imagined that Brexit was the panacea to Britain's problems—or, conversely, that it would bring about the UK's downfall.

### Still feel that way?

After all, much as we might want to (and doubtless some will try), we can't really blame Vladimir Putin, or Russian troll farms spending a few thousand dollars on Facebook advertising, for the coronavirus pandemic. Much as we might want to, we can't really blame Trump for the catastrophic condition of the privatised American health care system, totally ill-equipped and unprepared for a nationwide health emergency. And as tempting as it is for some of us, we can't really blame Europe's soft borders and immigrants for the rising death toll in the UK. It was the global economy and cheap travel that brought the virus into Britain, and it was the Brexit-loving prime minister Boris Johnson who dithered as the epidemic took hold.

### The bigger picture

Is it possible that only a few weeks ago our priorities were just a little divorced from a bigger reality? That what appeared to be the big picture was not actually big enough? That maybe we should have been thinking about even more important, pressing matters—systemic ones like the threat of a pandemic of the very kind we are currently enduring.

Because while we were all thinking about Rus-siagate or Trump or Brexit, there were lots of experts—even the Pentagon, it seems—warning of just such a terrible calamity and urging that preparations be made to avoid it. We are in the current mess precisely because those warn-ings were ignored or given no attention—not because the science was doubted, but because there was no will to do something to avert the threat.

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If we reflect, it is possible to get a sense of two things. First, that our attention rarely belongs to us; it is the plaything of others. And second, that the “real world”, as it is presented to us, rarely reflects anything we might usefully be able to label as objective reality. It is a set of po-litical, economic and social priorities that have been manufactured for us.

Agents outside our control with their own vested interests—politicians, the media, busi-ness—construct reality, much as a film-maker designs a movie. They guide our gaze in certain directions and not others.

Our current fear is an enemy to our developing and maintaining a critical perspective. The more we are frightened by graphs, by deaths, the more we are likely to submit to whatever we are told will keep us safe.

### A critical perspective

At a moment like this of real crisis, one that overshadows all else, we have a chance—though only a chance—to recognise this truth and develop our own critical perspective. A perspec-tive that truly belongs to us, and not to others.

Think back to the old you, the pre-coronavirus you. Were your priorities the same as your cur-rent ones?

This is not to say that the things you prioritise now—in this crisis—are necessarily any more “yours” than the old set of priorities.

If you're watching the TV or reading newspa-pers—and who isn't—you're probably feeling scared, either for yourself or for your loved ones. All you can think about is the coronavi-rus. Nothing else really seems that important by comparison. And all you can hope for is the moment when the lockdowns are over and life returns to normal.

But that's not objectively the “real world” either. Terrible as the coronavirus is, and as right as anyone is to be afraid of the threat it poses, those “agents of authority” are again directing and controlling our gaze, though at least this time those in authority include doctors and scientists. And they are guiding our attention in ways that serve their interests—for good or bad.

Endless tallies of infections and deaths, rocket-ing graphs, stories of young people, along with the elderly, battling for survival serve a pur-pose: to make sure we stick to the lockdown, that we maintain social distancing, that we don't get complacent and spread the disease.

Here our interests—survival, preventing hos-pitals from being overwhelmed—coincide with those of the establishment, the “agents of au-thority.” We want to live and prosper, and they need to maintain order, to demonstrate their competence, to prevent dissatisfaction bubbling up into anger or open revolt.

### Crowded out by detail

But again the object of our attention is not as much ours as we may believe. While we focus on graphs, while we twitch the curtains to see if neighbours are going for a second run or whether families are out in the garden celebrat-ing a birthday distant from an elderly parent,

## Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons will meet online in May

The Olympia Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons will meet online during the Coro-navirus quarantine. Productive meetings hosted by Glen Anderson are held the 3rd Thursday of each month at 5:00 pm. Partici-pants for the Thursday, May 21 meeting will need a link to join. Contact Glen Anderson at 360.491.9093 or email Glen (360) 491-9093 glenanderson@integra.net in advance for link information.

we are much less likely to be thinking about how well the crisis is being handled. The detail, the mundane is again crowding out the impor-tant, the big picture.

Our current fear is an enemy to our develop-ing and maintaining a critical perspective. The more we are frightened by graphs, by deaths, the more we are likely to submit to whatever we are told will keep us safe.

Under cover of the public's fear, and of justified concerns about the state of the economy and future employment, countries like the US are transferring huge sums of public money to the biggest corporations. Politicians controlled by big business and media owned by big business are pushing through this corporate robbery without scrutiny—and for reasons that should be self-explanatory. They know our attention is too overwhelmed by the virus for us to assess intentionally mystifying arguments about the supposed economic benefits, about yet more illusory trickle-down.

There are many other dramatic changes being introduced, almost too many and too rapidly for us to follow them properly. Bans on move-ment. Intensified surveillance. Censorship. The transfer of draconian powers to the police, and preparations for the deployment of soldiers on streets. Detention without trial. Martial law. Measures that might have terrified us when Trump was our main worry, or Brexit, or Rus-sia, may now seem a price worth paying for a “return to normality”.

Paradoxically, a craving for the old-normal may mean we are prepared to submit to a new-normal that could permanently deny us any chance of returning to the old-normal.

The point is not just that things are far more provisional than most of us are ready to con-template; it's that our window on what we think of as “the real world”, as “normal”, is almost entirely manufactured for us.

### Distracted by the virus

Strange as this may sound right now, in the midst of our fear and suffering, the pandemic is not really the big picture either. Our attention is consumed by the virus, but it is, in a truly awful sense, a distraction too.

In a few more years, maybe sooner than we imagine, we will look back on the virus—with the benefit of distance and hindsight—and feel the same way about it we do now about Putin, or Trump, or Brexit.

It will feel part of our old selves, our old priori-ties, a small part of a much bigger picture, a clue to where we were heading, a portent we did not pay attention to when it mattered most.

The virus is one small warning—one among many—that we have been living out of sync with the natural world we share with other life. Our need to control and dominate, our need to acquire, our need for security, our need to conquer death—they have crowded out all else. We have followed those who promised quick, easy solutions, those who refused to compro-mise, those who conveyed authority, those who spread fear, those who hated.

If only we could redirect our gaze, if we could seize back control of our attention for a mo-ment, we might understand that we are being plagued not just by a virus but by our fear, our hate, our hunger, our selfishness. The evidence is there in the fires, the floods and the disease, in the insects that have disappeared, in the polluted seas, in the stripping of the planet's an-cient lungs, its forests, in the melting ice-caps.

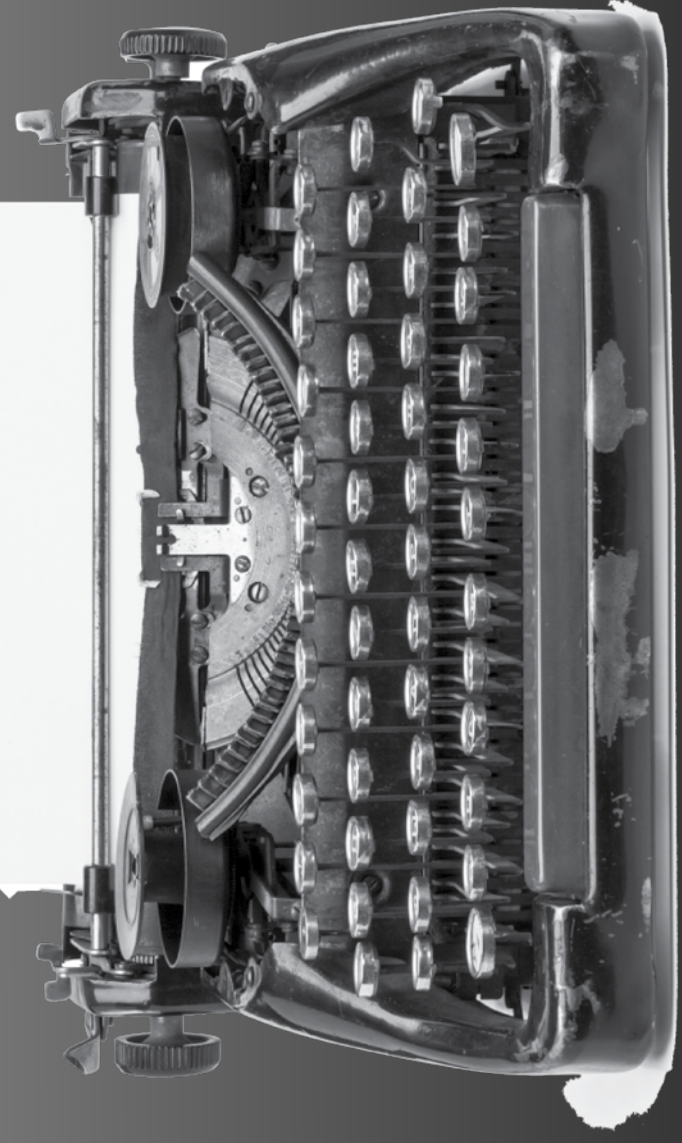
The big picture is hiding in plain sight, no longer obscured by issues like Russia and Brexit but now only by the most microscopic germ, marking the thin boundary between life and death.

*Jonathan Cook is a Nazareth-based journalist and winner of the Martha Gellhorn Special prize for Journalism. You can translate your appreciation of Jonathan's work into material support by making a donation in sterling, dollars or euros by visiting <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/supporting-jonathan>. Tell him you read his article in Works in Progress.*



grocery clerks & truck drivers  
medical professionals & hospital staff  
food processors & restaurant workers  
neighbors & friends  
warehouse workers  
farmers & farm workers  
letter carriers & mail sorters  
janitors and sanitation workers

*thank you*



Join the call for essential workers to get the  
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Free, take one!

¡Gratis, toma uno!

# Works in Progress

Happy 30th!



Advocating for social justice since 1990



Social distancing,  
Oly style

THIS ISSUE:  
Another world is possible