

DECEMBER 2020



Academic Year 2020-21 No. 2

psc-cuny.org/retirees.org

VIRTUAL CHAPTER MEETING. MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1 – 3 PM

Universal Health Care: Possibilities and Challenges in the aftermath of the election and with an impending Supreme Court decision on the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act. Our speakers are all leading advocates for single-payer health care.

The **Zoom link** will be sent out via email about a week before the meeting.



Speakers:

Oliver Fein: Professor of clinical medicine and clinical public health and a dean at Weill-Cornell Medical College; past president of Physicians for a National Health Program.

Len Rodberg: Professor emeritus, Queens College, where he was chair of the Urban Studies Department for 22 years; consultant for

NY Health Act.

Marva Wade: A vice president of the New York State Nurses Association and a leader in NYSNA's advocacy for Medicare for All and the New York Health Act.

SAVE THE DATE: MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 1 – 3 PM: A virtual chapter meeting on racial and social justice. Speakers to be announced.

WATCH THE NOV, 9 CHAPTER MEETING – A provocative, substantive retrospective on the 2020 elections by four excellent speakers: <https://www.psc-cuny.org/about-us/retirees#November>

RETIREE OPEN ENROLLMENT & CHANGE PERIOD FOR HEALTH PLANS, NOV. 1 - 30. Retiree members may make changes to their NYC Health Benefits Program health insurance coverage during the month of November. Members may switch plans and add dependents to their coverage. Members may also change their Welfare Fund dental providers. Changes will be effective January 1, 2021. **There are only a few days left.** The next change period is in 2022. For details, go to: <https://tinyurl.com/RetireeOpenEnrollment>

VOTE COPE is the political action committee of the PSC. The stakes are high for CUNY now and in 2021 when we vote for mayor and City Council. In the last month, we asked our state affiliate, NYSUT, to process a mailing to PSC retirees soliciting VOTE COPE contributions. Please consider contributing. Mail your checks in the pre-paid envelope provided by NYSUT. **The funds go to PSC VOTE COPE.**

EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTY RENEWING YOUR RETIREE DUES? For tips on paying your dues online (or the old-fashioned way by sending a check in the U.S., mail) go to: <https://www.psc-cuny.org/about-us/retirees#DUES>

THE RETIREES CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU!

So we are doing a survey: <https://www.psc-cuny.org/form/retiree-survey>

The Retirees Chapter, at roughly 2900 members, is the largest chapter in the PSC. The two dozen members of the Chapter's Executive Committee, besides representing retirees at the PSC Delegate Assembly and making our voices heard on the larger PSC Executive Council, are responsible for planning the programs at our monthly meetings and for publishing a regular newsletter. These two activities are vital for keeping our members engaged. The Chapter Executive Committee [EC] has worked hard to keep the content interesting.



Take our survey.

It is hard to know, though, if the programs that we on the EC feel are vital and interesting reflect what our members want to see and hear. Before COVID-19 we were always assured of a good turnout at chapter meetings because there was a core group of members who enjoyed regularly meeting together at 61 Broadway, and we could easily judge the success of the program by their response. Our Zoom meetings have also been popular. But both then and now there was no way to know if we would have had a larger audience if we had different topics. 2900 people can have an enormous range of interests that diverge sharply from the EC. If you've never been to a chapter meeting, what topic would compel you to attend one? Socially responsible investing? A CUNY professor discussing art history? Something totally different? Let us know!

Turning the Page, the newsletter of the Retirees Chapter, is sent to members—now during COVID-19 only electronically—almost every month. What articles would you like to see in it? What articles would you like to write for it? Want to review a great book you've recently read? Tell us in the survey what you would like to see in the newsletter. (Or, now that you're thinking about it, tell the editor what you would like to write about by emailing retirees@pscmail.org with 'Newsletter' in the subject line.)

The survey is your chance to tell the Executive Committee about the programs and articles you prefer. We've left plenty of space for comments about programs, the newsletter, or anything else that's on your mind at <https://www.psc-cuny.org/form/retiree-survey>

GEORGIA RUN-OFF FOR TWO U.S. SENATE SEATS

Nancy Romer, Brooklyn College

Georgia's run-off election for two U.S. Senate seats on Jan. 5 is probably the second most important election in our lifetimes—the first being the one on Nov. 3. Georgia election law requires a candidate for office to earn +50% of the votes or the election goes to a run-off between the top two candidates. That's what happened in the super-close Georgia elections on Nov. 3 for the two U.S. Senate seats. So off to a run-off we go with high hopes of winning both seats and then having a Democratic majority in both the Senate and the House. We could finally get some good policies through! But we have to have those two victories to make it all happen.

That's where we all come in. There are lots of ways for us to help win those two Senate seats. We can send postcards reminding Georgians to vote (hundreds of thousands of postcards are getting organized right now) and we can text and/or phone bank. I did a lot of phone banking in the general election and I *loved* calling Georgia voters. In general, they were much more polite than voters in other states and mostly VERY enthusiastic about

being able to vote and make their voices heard.

Here's what I say when I call a Georgia voter: "I'm calling to say thank you to Georgians for helping to elect Joe Biden and for being the deciding votes on flipping the senate from red to blue. Georgia has two great candidates for U.S. Senate: **Rafael Warnock and Jon Ossoff**. If they both win and the Democrats win the majority vote in the Senate, they will immediately pass a \$15/hour minimum wage and a generous COVID-19 relief bill that will help working families in these hard times." Of course you can follow the script they give you, but that's my favorite pitch.



There are lots of online platforms that you can plug into to help you get involved in the Georgia run-offs. Peter Hogness, former editor of PSC's *Clarion*, is now leading **Water4Grassroots.org**, which takes leadership from grassroots groups in Georgia and helps funnel people like you and me into support work. I hope the AFT will do some of this organizing too, but in the meantime, please do go to the [Water4Grassroots.org](https://water4grassroots.org) website and volunteer. Spanish speakers are particularly needed. If you plan to donate to the campaigns, please consider doing that right now when they need the money the most. Please be as generous as you can.

Here are the websites of the two candidates where you can learn about their platforms and you can donate: <https://warnockforgeorgia.com> and <https://election.com>.

Wouldn't it be great to have a Democratic President, House and Senate? We could actually get some things done! Let me know if you want further help in getting started on these important campaigns.

nancyromer@gmail.com

IMPORTANT LINKS:

Retiree Chapter:

<https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>

Health & Safety Watchdogs

<https://www.psc-cuny.org/about-us/environmental-health-and-safety>

Welfare Fund

<http://psccunywf.org/>

PROFILES IN ACTION

Belle Zeller Virtual Scholarship Award Ceremony

Marcia Newfield, BMCC

The Belle Zeller Scholarship Trust Fund Board of Trustees will be holding a virtual awards salute to 2020 scholarship winners and distinguished supporters on **Wednesday, December 7th, starting at 6:50 p.m.**

In addition to honoring scholarship recipients from Lehman, Brooklyn, CCNY, CSI, SLU, and John Jay, there will be nine special recognition awardees from Hunter, QCC, BMCC, Hostos and CUNY Graduate Center. The ceremony will include a keynote speech by CCNY Distinguished Physics Professor Myriam Sarachik and a musical offering by pianist Dr. Howard Meltzer and cellist George Dewar.

Barbara Bowen will receive a special tribute, as will Irwin Yellowitz and legislators Deborah Glick and Toby Ann Stavisky. Outgoing University Student Senate Chair Timothy Hunter will receive the 2020 Belle Zeller Award.

A minimum contribution of \$100 is recommended. Tickets are available at: <https://tinyurl.com/BelleZellerEvent>

Mark the date and join this worthy effort to support the fund and our amazing students.

IRWIN YELLOWITZ HONORED BY BELLE ZELLER AWARD

Steve Leberstein, City College



Growing up as a child in a working-class family in the Bronx, Irwin Yellowitz is an accomplished labor historian and also labor activist who worked his whole professional life at City College. His father died when Irwin was just 10, and his mother then went to work in a millinery loft. It was his mother's experience in that shop that showed both her, and Irwin, the value of labor unions. Inexperienced as a seamstress, her foreman tried to fire her on a day when the union organizer happened to be in the shop and witnessed her predicament. He threatened to shut down the whole shop if the boss fired Mrs. Yellowitz. The boss backed off, saving her job, and within a few weeks she became an ardent unionist and later an expert milliner. That taught young Irwin the importance of organized labor.

Irwin's education started like that of many other Bronx kids of the time. He attended DeWitt Clinton High School and then City College where he graduated in 1954. He pursued his interest in labor history in graduate school at Brown University, where he was able to delve deeply into U.S. labor history. He graduated with a Ph.D. in 1961.

With his newly minted Ph.D., he began teaching in the History Department at City College in 1961, first for a 5-year stint at what was then City's original location on 23rd Street (now Baruch College), and then to its Harlem campus. He retired in 1996. He was elected department chair twice, and was active in the Faculty Senate.

An accomplished labor historian, Irwin is the author of *Labor and the Progressive Movement in New York State, 1897-1916* (Cornell University Press, 1965), *Industrialization and the American Labor Movement, 1850-1900* (Kennikat Press, 1977), and author/editor of *The Position of the Worker in American Society, 1865-1896* (Prentice Hall, 1969), with Nathan Kaganoff the *Bicentennial Issue of American Jewish Historical Quarterly* on American Jews and the Labor Movement (March 1976), and *Essays in the History of New York City: A Memorial to Sidney Pomerantz* (Kennikat Press, 1978).

Always a union advocate, Irwin joined the United Federation of College Teachers (UFCT) early in his career. When the Professional Staff Congress was formed and absorbed the UFCT in 1972, Irwin took on an activist role as vice president for senior colleges, then treasurer, and later chair of the union's Retirees Chapter. (For his history of the origin of the PSC, see <https://tinyurl.com/PSCstory>.)

Irwin's belief in organized labor has been a feature of his entire career at CUNY, as much as a retiree as an active member. His account of the complicated merger of the UFCT and the PSC is an example of the keen appreciation of a labor historian for the organizations that were

so important in his own career and so important to those of my own later generation.

Irwin's time at City College coincided with great changes and turmoil. The '60s saw demands for student admission to reflect the racial composition of the City's public school system, and led to the occupation of City College in 1968 and ultimately to the Open Admissions policy. For many faculty, including Irwin, that early period was a challenge as much for them as for newly admitted students who had little institutional support for the new challenges which college presented to them.

During that time he served two terms as chair of the History Department, was active in the University Faculty Senate, as well as in the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) for its work defending academic freedom. He continues to offer his long-time defense of academic freedom as a member of the union's Academic Freedom Committee, as well as a member of the Retirees Chapter Executive Committee. Irwin also chairs the N.Y. Labor History Association, which sponsors public programs on organized labor.

In the mid-1970s, City College sought to expand its student body by welcoming older workers, beginning with an extension program, primarily for public employees, offering a small range of liberal arts courses in the evening at the Federal Building on lower Broadway. Sponsored by the Office of Personnel Management, which offered its own classroom space in the evening, faculty members volunteered to teach older but eager students, and a small volunteer staff took care of admissions, counseling and registration. As much as these new students, mostly public employees, enjoyed the courses, they wanted a path to a college degree.

The college responded by commissioning a planning committee for such a program, of which Irwin was a prominent member. That led ultimately to the founding of the Center for Worker Education in 1981. That program has thrived and owes much to Irwin's work, particularly interacting with the Teamster's and

in consolidating support at City College and helping to win the support of then new CUNY Chancellor, Joe Murphy. Murphy taught a course at the Center for a number of years until his tragic death in an auto accident in Ethiopia.

Upon the PSC's consolidation with the UFCT, Irwin became vice president for senior colleges (1972-1984), then treasurer (1984-1997), and finally Retiree Chapter chair (2000-2006). He remains active in the chapter to this day. His support for organized labor and respect for working people has been a constant in his life and career, beginning with his mother's experience as a brand-new millinery seamstress whose job was saved by the union shop steward. □

FROM OUR LIVES

I REMEMBER MY STUDENTS AND THE 2016 ELECTION

Doris Hart, BMCC



The last class I taught at BMCC was journalism during the run-up to the 2016 election. My 25 students, many of them immigrants from Central America, were both anxious and eager to discuss the coming election. I did not know who was undocumented, but so many of them were frightened of the results if Trump won.

First we discussed the responsibilities and powers of the President. Then they did background checks on Trump and Clinton. Their weekly assignment was to follow and write up both campaigns with class discussions every Thursday. They watched the candidates'

debates as if they were actual reporters and wrote news stories focusing on key issues, such as immigration and health care. The students were very involved, acknowledging how important the campaign was to their lives.

As the weeks went by and it seemed as if Clinton would be the next President, the students relaxed more. Even I was more hopeful. The last Thursday, before Election Day, November 8th, we did a secret ballot. All students, except one, voted for Clinton.

Several students were irate and wanted to know who voted for Trump. They looked around at the other students. "Who voted for Trump?" one shouted.

"No," I said, "This was a secret ballot and that person has a right to vote however he or she prefers."

At the end of class, we went home with great hopes. But *you* know the results, and I was in shock that Wednesday morning. I dreaded going into class on Thursday. When I entered the room, I saw students sitting silently in shock. Their expressions were painful to see. I told them how I was feeling and a few female students began to cry. I tried to reassure them that they would be safe. I pointed out that Governor Cuomo had issued a statement that New York would protect all immigrants. (Little could we foresee what would occur with detention and deportation of immigrants in the next four years.)

I hope the students and their families are well and safe. I wish I could celebrate the results of the 2020 presidential election with them. □

IN MY DOTAGE

Jim Perlstein, BMCC

One raw overcast early spring day in 1946, my mother kept me out of school and, joined by her buddy Rose Kryzak and her daughter Annie, my own close friend, and my 5-year old sister Linda, they ferried us all down to the huge Phelps-Dodge copper smelter on Newtown Creek.



Workers there had walked out as part of the strike wave that swept the country with the lifting of wartime wage and price controls and an end to the unions' no-strike pledge.

While Rose and my mom staffed the strike kitchen, Annie, my sister and I patrolled the plant gates handing out leaflets to strikers, scabs and passersby.

Next day, returning to P.S. 150, I got to lecture my 5th grade class on the History & Current Status of American Labor Relations. Fanny Malden was a very progressive public school teacher.

Sometime later, as the strike wave wound down, I asked my mom, "Did we win?" She gave me a radiant smile and replied, "No sweetheart. But we raised consciousness!"

And that has been, pretty much, the story of my life.

In my dotage, it occurs to me that an elevated consciousness and \$3.00 gets you on the subway. And even though I take some comfort in my eligibility for the senior discount, I still long for one really big win in the real world. □

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC: TRANSITIONS IN GERIATRIC CARE FOR MY MOTHER

Constance H. Gemson,
LaGuardia CC

Four years ago, my Florida-based uncle recommended moving my mother from New York City to an assisted living facility near where he lived. My mother had advanced dementia. My husband and I felt that warm weather would be welcome and her cost of living would be lowered. We were used to being the nearby caregivers. How would she manage in a new place?

We found a suitable facility. I hired two home health aides. The day aide cut my mother's grilled cheese sandwiches with geometric precision. The night aide texted me photos of my mother. She even put a family birthday song on her phone to play for my mother to remind her of home. My husband and I tried to visit Mom every other month. At first she was welcoming, but after a year, she just smiled, unsure who I was.

Soon nursing home care in NYC made sense, so we could visit her more often. The admissions process for nursing homes here required massive paper work, including medical history, hospital admissions, and medications. My mother's active past was not included.



Admission required massive paperwork

I heard positive feedback from colleagues about one city facility. I chose this nursing home based on my visit and its convenient location. Their volunteer program was active with many music programs for residents.

When checking out her health insurance, I called the middle school where she taught. The administrator told me, "I remember your mother. She was such a lively teacher." I replied, "Sue, she retired over thirty years ago. She is in her nineties now."

Finally, I organized the plane ride for my mother, husband and the home health aide. The aide and I packed her clothes for the trip. Mother seemed calm. She was not aware of her impending transition.

When we checked in with the airline, the three of us presented our photo IDs. An employee asked me, in his official tone, "Where is your mother's ID? We need to see that before she boards. Does she have a passport?" Quietly I became frantic. We had planned the trip as carefully as a wedding. We never thought of my mother's identification. Desperately hoping it would be enough, I showed the man my mother's Medicare card, and told him about my mother's Alzheimer's disease.

As we waited the representative called his supervisor. The minutes seemed endless as we glanced at our watches: waiting, waiting. Time was tight. Ten minutes later, the supervisor arrived. He smiled a grim smile. "Approved!" We could board. I was saved by my age and race, covered by the perception of being white. If I had been visually different or much younger, I might have needed to explain the situation and may not have been believed.

Finally, the four of us boarded the plane. Despite my worries, my mother found the trip pleasant as a lullaby and she slept throughout the flight.

After a long cab ride at the end of an exhausting day, we arrived at the nursing home. My mother was returning home. However her New York memories had vanished like chalk on a blackboard. Her confusion led to incomplete sentences, elusive as an ascending balloon outside on a sunny day. I hoped others would recall memories of this buoyant educator in the classroom, where all her students were respected.

Over five years ago, in a New York City discussion group, my mother and I encountered Jill, a successful student, who was now a doctor. “She was my teacher!” she said, as if my mother were a rock star. She remembered my mother’s warmth and enthusiasm for her students. I realized how my mother was more than her current medical paperwork, charting her pathology but missing her soul. Her teaching and her family defined her legacy. Her decades in the classroom were important. Fewer students know her now, yet I hope when they hear her name, they will remember....□

AROUND THE UNION

You Are a Member of NYSUT RETIREE COUNCIL 37-38!

Dave Kotelchuck, Hunter College



You may not realize it, but as a dues-paying member of the Retirees Chapter of PSC-CUNY you are also a member of NYSUT joint Retiree Council 37-38. These Retiree Councils (RC’s) are a network of 44 retiree groups with over 200,000 members across NY State from Montauk Point, Long Island to Jamestown, NY and north from Staten Island to the Canadian Border – plus one in Florida for our retired “snowbirds.”

We are represented by four retirees on the NYSUT Board of Directors. There and in our locals and in the NYS Legislature:

- We advocate and lobby for pension and taxation equity for our and all NYS retirees, as well as for other issues such as health care costs affecting NYS retirees;
- We actively work in local, state and federal elections for candidates supported by the PSC and NYSUT, such as the Biden-Harris campaign and

progressive Senate and House candidates this fall;

- We support our union locals in their contract fights and community struggles; and
- We are at all times, as Barbara Bowen often calls us, “daytime troops” for our union locals in NY City and Albany.

Sometimes the Retiree Councils take a leading role in important statewide struggles, as we did to defeat the proposed NYS Constitutional Convention on the ballot in 2017. While our active union colleagues were busy with their important day-to-day work on contracts, grievances, and school funding, the NYSUT Retiree Councils started working two years in advance learning about the threats posed by such a convention to our union rights, our tenure protections, our pensions and health care benefits. Our RC’s helped educate our active NYSUT brothers and sisters, and played a key role in helping build regional alliances to soundly defeat “ConCon.”

Not only do RC’s fight for our rights and for justice for all, but as RC members we are also provided important individual benefits from NYSUT membership, including legal and social services, access to supplemental insurance benefits such as extended term insurance and catastrophic coverage (in addition to the Welfare Fund plan). We also have access to discounted travel tickets, car rental and appliance purchases through the NYSUT Marketplace. (Note: If your PSC retiree membership expires, you lose access to these NYSUT services.) For more information about NYSUT Retiree Councils and benefits go to www.nysut.org/members/retirees.

Because of our large membership, PSC retiree members are enrolled in one joint retiree council RC 37-38. Dave Kotelchuck, member of the Retirees Chapter Executive Committee, is the president of this RC. He succeeded Irwin Yellowitz, who was RC 37-38 president for many years. Other elected delegates to RC 37-38, all of them PSC retiree members, are: Bill Friedheim, Cecelia McCall, Eileen Moran, and Marva Wade. Fran Brewer was vice-president of RC 37-38 and a delegate until her untimely

death in 2018. Alternate delegates, also all PSC retiree members, are: Judith Barbanel, John Hyland, Steve Leberstein, Jim Perlstein and Irwin Yellowitz. Miriam Balmuth was an alternate delegate as well until her death last year.

All current officers, delegates and alternates of RC 37-38 are serving three-year terms, which expire at the end of 2020. Due to the coronavirus pandemic we will not be able to have a regular RC election meeting in December, as in the past. Plans are currently being developed to conduct the RC 37-38 elections by mail ballot following a Zoom meeting on **January 11, 2021 at 3 p.m.** All members of RC 37-38 will be informed by mail of the meeting and after registering will receive a Zoom invitation. Further details will be included in the mailing.

HUNTER COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND FACULTY FIGHT FOR DIVERSITY

Glenn Kissack,
Hunter College Campus Schools



On September 18, I was one of several PSC members to attend a rally at Hunter College of more than 70 students, faculty, alumni and parents calling for a change in the way students are admitted to Hunter College High School, considered one of the top schools in the country. A diverse group of students at the school organized the rally and gave passionate speeches about the “diversity crisis” at the school: Of the nearly 1,300 students at the school, only 6.2 percent are Latinx and only 2.3 percent are Black, even though the NYC public

school population is two-thirds Black and Latinx.

Recognizing that integrated schools are better for all the students, the demonstrators chanted: “Reflect the city that we serve! We want the school that we deserve.”

Having taught mathematics at HCHS for eighteen years and watched the percentage of minority students steadily decline under the tenure of Hunter College President Jennifer Raab, I was thrilled to see so many students committed to achieving a change in the admissions process—a one-day, three-hour exam that favors students from more affluent backgrounds who have attended schools and prep academies that prepare them to take the admissions test. In June, 1,895 students, alums, parents and teachers signed a letter calling for a change that would lead to the student population becoming more diverse.

At the rally, we chanted: “Hey Hey, Ho Ho! The President has got to know! Hey Hey, Ho Ho! Segregation’s got to go!”

The students and their supporters called on President Raab to meet with the students and commit to a new admission policy. They noted that this is the perfect opportunity to do so, as it will be virtually impossible to have nearly three thousand test-takers and their proctors safely take the exam in January. As the student flyer notes: “[Admissions] Testing during the pandemic is unsafe and will only exacerbate [race and class] inequities because of the increased risk for COVID low-income black/brown communities face.”

The testimony from students at the rally was eloquent. A senior, Isaiah Register, reported he was one of just six Black students of over 200 in his grade. 1986 HCHS graduate Deepak Bhargava, who now teaches at the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies, observed: “The decline of the diversity of the students was not inevitable. It was the choices this administration made about how they were going to pursue admissions.” Senior Chloe Rollock observed about Raab: “She’s been

here for 20 years and diversity has only gotten worse under her.”

When I began teaching at the school in 1989, the HCCS Mission Statement said: “The HCCS are administered as an integral part of the program components of Hunter College with the mission to serve as an innovative and experimental educational center for the education of a student body that is both intellectually gifted and *representative of the social, ethnic, racial, and economic populations of New York City.*” It is clear that the school has not fulfilled its mission and must change. □

OP-ED IDEAS

THE ROLE OF MONEY IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Michael Frank, LaGuardia Community College

Primaries in American politics have often been referred to as "money primaries," meaning that big money determines who the final candidates are. The candidates who fall behind their competitors in attracting large sums of money are often forced to drop out of the race. Money has voted and had its say, and registered Democrats and Republicans get to choose from among those who have made it to the finish line.

NYU sociologist Vivek Chibber usefully distinguishes between the two competitions that make up the electoral process: the first competition is for money and the second is for votes. Each competition has its own audience: the wealthy for the first and the general electorate for the second. The pitches that candidates make are tailored to these specific audiences, with the electorate not being privy to the pitch made to the rich. Hilary Clinton in 2016, for example, refused to disclose the money she made for speeches to her Wall Street backers. The electorate gets to choose between those who have been pre-selected by the wealthy.

This is the way things normally work but recently there have been two significant

exceptions: Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump. Sanders relied on thousands of small contributions instead of big donors, and Trump reputedly relied on his own money, however acquired. Both managed to bypass the filters that would have screened them out in the past. The rise of both the democratic socialist and the lumpen capitalist was made possible by the political polarization and deep dissatisfaction with establishment politics in this country.



Generally the powers that be have two main means of determining who the candidates of both parties will be and swaying the final outcome in presidential elections: money and control of the media. Although typically they hedge their bets and contribute to both parties, there is usually a preference. In 2004 Wall Street's preference was for George Bush, in 2008 it was for Obama, in 2016 it was for Clinton and in 2020 it was overwhelmingly for Biden.

Although big money poured into the Democratic Party in support of Biden, Wall Street was not disappointed that the expected

"blue wave" did not take place. A Republican controlled Senate and the resulting gridlock in Congress can create an obstacle for higher taxes and more regulation on business.

This latest electoral cycle has afforded us additional insight into the role of money in American politics. Both parties rely on "bundlers," fund-raisers who gather large checks and then deliver them to the party campaigns. An internal document from the Biden campaign described how its bundlers were stratified depending on the amount of money they raised. A "Biden Victory Partner" had to raise \$2.5 million, a "Delaware League" \$1 million, a "Philly Founder" \$500,000, a "Scranton Circle" \$250,000, a "Unifier" \$100,000 and a "Protector" \$50,000. Donors get to meet with Biden's policy advisors and the biggest donors get access to Biden himself. The meetings are private.

Before the elections there was considerable concern among Biden supporters that the U.S. might be heading toward fascism if Trump won. I did not share this view. Formal or parliamentary democracy has served the country's elite very well. Despite the ever-increasing inequality in the distribution of wealth and income, the absence of a strong social safety net and endemic racism among other issues, the ability to vote for the president every four years and change the political party in office has been an important source of legitimacy for American capitalism. There is no reason for the elite to give this up. Historically, big business will opt for fascism under the conditions of a deep economic crisis when the existing political system and balance of power between classes make it impossible to implement measures that will restore profitability. That is not the case in the US today.

Finally, I would argue that the main interference in American presidential elections is from domestic wealth and not from foreign hackers. Whatever the choice of the electorate, the rich win, whether it's their first or second preference.

MILITARY BILLIONS OR A NEW WPA?

Santiago Villafane, Bronx EOC

The current United States military budget is stated to be \$738 billion dollars, a \$22 billion dollar increase in one year. At present, the United States of America has troops and military bases in 80 countries worldwide. Is this presence and expense justified? How many American taxpayers know and understand what the country's hidden empire costs us to maintain? As we enter the month of November, 2020 amid the carnage of COVID 19, it is time to reflect about what resources can be taken from the defense budget to fund activities that help our citizens, instead of squandering billions on the means to do violence to others.



\$22 billion could start a Works Progress Administration (WPA) for example, to rebuild the aging infrastructure which serves as a vital transportation link for a nation that spans the North American continent. The original WPA built New York City's LaGuardia Airport. In 2020 LaGuardia has the shortest runways of the three major air hubs that serve the New York City metropolitan area. Why not use Defense dollars to extend the runway distances and thus make LaGuardia a safer airport without the steep approaches and short stopping distances that demand extraordinary precision to accomplish safely?

A second use of a Works Progress Administration program could be the demolition of abandoned piers and docks that line both

the east and west shores of the Hudson River. These work projects could train unemployed individuals in riverine demolition and construction work, a well-paid occupation. Such large-scale construction project would remove dangerous navigation hazards to ships and ferry boats that bring millions of dollars to harbor operations on a daily basis. Thus, the investment of funds would ultimately bring a generous return in terms of trained talent, expertise and necessary waterfront infrastructure changes.

Third, a WPA-style construction of public hospitals in Brooklyn and Queens could help areas hard hit by the coronavirus with large populations where many hospital closures have taken a toll on health care facilities. Moreover, the hospitals would provide employment opportunities for borough residents making a long commute to “The City” unnecessary. Perhaps construction of a public hospital dedicated to the delivery of COVID-19 intensive care and rehabilitation services, including research on ways to treat the deadly virus, could be undertaken.

The military budget has grown exponentially since 1946. In my opinion, some of these military funds are necessary to care for our sick and dying, our unemployed, our hungry and impoverished citizens who need to be protected from COVID-19. I state this position as a six-year Air Force veteran who served during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. I seek no thanks or praise for my service that I owe to the republic as a citizen-soldier. I expect my fellow citizens to likewise support and uphold the constitution and serve the republic and the common good, not a partisan ideology. □

TURNING THE PAGE is a publication of the Retirees Chapter of PSC-CUNY, Local 2334 of NYSUT and the AFT. We welcome contributions from our several thousand members: articles of special interest to retirees, short essays on your activities during this period of politics and plague, and your comments on recent publications of interest. Our newsletter collective is made up of Michael Frank, Bill Friedheim, Joan Greenbaum and Dave Kotelchuck. Please write to us at retirees@pscmail.org, with ‘Newsletter’ in the subject line.

FOR THE LATEST ON THE RETIREE CHAPTER go to our web page at: <https://www.psc-cuny.org/retirees>

LIFE DURING WARTIME. Josh Brown, the retired director of the American Social History Project at the CUNY Graduate Center, has produced a series of weekly political illustrations, beginning in 2003 with the war in Iraq, called Life During Wartime. The entire collection, 2003- 2020, is online at: www.joshbrownnyc.com/ldw.htm.

