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The national debt: Another path is possible!

By Marilyn Bechtel

In his State of the Union speech, President Obama articulated a soaring vision of a United States claiming world leadership in fields vital to humanity in the 21st century: biomedical research, information technology and especially, clean energy technology. A million electric cars, vehicles powered by sunlight and water, high speed rail spanning the country, solving the hardest problems in clean energy.

The president emphasized the urgency of creating more jobs, improving public education and modernizing the country's infrastructure.

And then he turned to the national debt: the "legacy of deficit spending that began almost a decade ago." That debt now stands at over \$14 trillion, and the Congressional Budget Office predicts it will rise \$1.5 trillion this year.

Acknowledging that his proposed cuts come mostly from annual domestic spending that's just one-eighth of the total budget, the president projected freezing that spending for five years.

Obama was careful to add, "We need to make sure that we're not doing it on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens." But as both population and costs grow, it is hard to see how both a freeze, and the projected new investments in innovation, could take place without irreparable harm to just those "most vulnerable citizens." And Republicans



are calling for far deeper cuts.

Meanwhile, 15 million workers remain unemployed and almost 85 million have had their hours or pay cut.

There is another path, one that could not only make a major dent in the national debt, but would also save many lives and put our country on the road to a new international policy of cooperation and mutual problem solving.

That path is to make major cuts in military

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spending.

The president moved in that direction when he referred to "\$10s of billions" in cuts agreed to by the Secretary of Defense. To do more, of course, would mean overcoming immense opposition from Republicans and the military establishment. But

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it could mean the difference for saving urgently needed domestic programs.

The New Priorities Campaign, points out that the current U.S. military budget of more than \$700 billion per year, amounts to 43 percent of global military spending. The Campaign notes that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have so far cost over \$1 trillion in borrowed money - to say nothing of the thousands of U.S. and NATO soldiers, and the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans, killed and injured.

"Our nation needs foreign and defense policies that serve the authentic needs of maintaining our security in a world where the use of force should be the last resort, not the first response," the Campaign says in its Declaration of Principles.

Such an approach could help greatly to turn around the ever-climbing federal debt and eliminate the need to freeze social programs while the need for them continues to grow.

The impact of a federal freeze will be felt at all levels - states, counties, cities and towns.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, says that because revenues are down due to the financial crisis, at least 46 states and the District of Columbia have cut state services in areas including health care, services to the elderly and disabled, and higher education, while at the same time more families are facing economic difficulties.

California is struggling to overcome a \$25 billion plus budget gap. In New Jersey the gap is \$10.5 billion, in Illinois it's \$15 billion and in Texas, \$13.4 billion.

Taking a new path toward a national security based on the economic development, education, health and general wellbeing of people at home and around the world won't be easy. It will take powerful movements that oppose the extreme right and the military-industrial complex, as well as support for President Obama's moves toward a broader concept of security. It can be done.



Marilyn Bechtel is a writer for the People's World

State of the Union, openings for progress

By PW Editorial Board

President Obama's State of the Union speech should be seen as a product of a political moment defined by the migration of independent voters to the Republican column in the fall elections, the tenacity of right-wing ideology on still too many voters, and the refusal of the business community to cooperate with the administration on many matters. The speech is also a product of the lack of political and organizational capacity of the labor and people's movement - something that AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka spoke of a week before the president's address.

That the president didn't make any concessions on Medicare and Social Security in his State of the Union speech is a plus. The pressure on the administration to do so is enormous and it comes from congressional Republicans, some in his own party and administration, and sections of transnational corporations.

According to former Wall Street executive and Secretary of the Treasury in the Clinton adminis-

tration Robert Rubin, who speaks for Wall Street, entitlement and budget reform is an imperative.

It is fair to say that the message of Rubin and his crowd of parasites is simple: "reform" Social Security and Medicare and trim domestic spending or we will invest our money elsewhere and throw the economy into another dip downward.

Debt is a problem to our economic future to be sure. And economic growth alone is not a solution to the debt buildup. But, debt is not at catastrophic levels, and hollowing out of Social Security and Medicare.

The speech framed the struggle in the coming period. In some instances the president framed things to the people's advantage; in other instances he made concessions to his opponents.

No one should expect him to present a left alternative given the balance of class forces and his own political sensibilities. All we can ask is that the speech provides labor, progressives and allies some openings to push forward on. And it did. It's up to the labor and people's movements now.

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Troops line up to stop GOP attack on government

By John Wojcik

Senate Democrats came out swinging Jan. 26 against a GOP budget plan they said risks the loss of 1 million jobs.

They argued that GOP plans to cut \$4 billion in business loans would cost 161,000 jobs, that eliminating federal support for Amtrak would cost 160,000 jobs and that choking off funds for health care reform could slash 400,000 jobs.

In a special report the Democratic Senators issued in response to a proposal from the conservative Republican Study Committee, the lawmakers also said 4,000 FBI agents, 3,000 food safety inspectors and 6,000 nuclear safety workers would lose their jobs, endangering national security, if the GOP plan were adopted.

At a Capitol news conference Democratic senators said the plan would "shut down the country's economic growth."

The fight back followed passage of a resolution by the Republican-controlled House a day earlier calling on House appropriations subcommittees to cut their budgets to 2008 levels or below.

The battle intensified just as the Congressional Budget Office provided ammunition for the President in the debate over spending and size of government.

The CBO blamed the record \$1.5 trillion deficit on December's tax deal, which extended the Bush-era tax rates for two years and will add almost \$400 billion to the deficit, bolstering President Obama's argument in the State of the Union address that those serious about deficit reduction would not extend tax cuts for the richest tax payers.

In his speech the President pushed hard for modernizing the nation's infrastructure, including



the construction of high-speed rail transportation networks.

Almost immediately, supporters of high-speed rail projects cautioned that the inspiring vision of a modernized transportation network laid out by the president is threatened by proposals to freeze or cut federal spending.

By 2035 the high-speed rail project the president mentioned could take 41 million people out of cars and generate \$3 billion annually in income for the government.

In an unusual move, the AFL-CIO joined with the pro-business U.S. Chamber of Commerce in releasing a joint statement in support of Obama.

"America's working families and business community stand united in applauding President Obama's call to create jobs and grow our economy through investment in our nation's infrastructure," the statement read.

"With the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO standing together to support job creation, we hope that Democrats and Republicans in Congress will also join together to build America's infrastructure."

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Single payer still alive in California

By Gail Ryall

Single payer legislation has passed the California legislature three times already, but was vetoed each time by former Republican governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger. Now activists hope the fourth time will be a charm.

About 1,000 people demonstrated in support of statewide single-payer health care legislation at the California State Capitol on Monday, Jan. 10.

Led by members of the California Health Professional Student Alliance, who had traveled from all over the state, then marched through the city to lobby state legislators, the enthusiastic crowd chanted non-stop, except when scheduled speakers came to the podium.

State Sen. Mark Leno, author of the single-payer health care bills currently before the California State Legislature, SB 810, pointed out that whether or not the bills get to Democratic Governor Jerry Brown's desk, and whether or not he signs them, the ultimate decision will be made by the voters.

If Brown signs, the insurance companies will propose an initiative to repeal the act; if he doesn't sign, an initiative will be put forward by single payer supporters, who are, said Leno, "the fastest growing grassroots movement in the state of California."

Leno introduced State Assemblyman Tom Ammiano, D-San Francisco, as "the father of single payer in San Francisco." San Francisco has a unique health care plan that provides coverage to low-income families and all uninsured children and young adults in the city.

Ammiano characterized lifelong universal health care as "sperm to worm."

Elecciones en México

Por Emile Schepers

El 3 de julio elegirán los votantes del estado central de México, en la República Mexicana, a un nuevo gobernador para suceder a Enrique Peña Nieto del Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Pero hay más en juego que una sola gobernatura de los 31 en este país de 108 millones de habitantes. Está en juego también la suerte del principal partido centroizquierdista, el Partido Democrático Revolucionario, PRD.

El estado de México es el más grande de los estados de la República, con más de 15 millones de habitantes. Incluye a gran parte del antiguo Imperio Azteca, y circunda la Ciudad de México por el norte, el este y el oeste. Contiene grandes suburbios de la Ciudad de México, entre ellos Ciudad Netzahualcoyotl, Ecatepec y Texcoco, además de Toluca, capital del estado. Tiene una gran concentración de industrias, y por eso, una clase trabajadora bastante numerosa.

El PRD fue fundado en 1989, reuniendo a disidentes izquierdistas del PRI, ex militantes del viejo Partido Comunista de México, y otros. Durante la campaña presidencial de 1988, la mayor parte de la izquierda apoyó la candidatura de Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, hijo del legendario presidente Mexicano, Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (1934-1940). Ganó Cárdenas, pero se le robaron las elecciones y el candidato del PRI, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, fue impuesto como presidente. Decidieron los partidarios de Cárdenas integrar a varios partidos

existentes a la nueva estructura del PRD.

Pero la combinación de ex-comunistas con ex-priistas ha resultado problemática, y ha habido mucho oportunismo en el seno del PRD. En las elecciones presidenciales del 2000, dos de los principales dirigentes del PRD, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo (ex dirigente del PRI) y Jorge Castañeda (ex comunista), abandonaban al abanderado del PRD y prestaban su apoyo a Vicente Fox, del derechista Partido Acción Nacional (PAN). Dijeron ellos que quisieron apoyar al candidato más apto para poner fin a los 70 años de dominio del PRI. Pero Fox acabó con llevar a México aun más lejos hacia las políticas neoliberales de mercados libres que sus antecesores priistas.

En las elecciones presidenciales de 2006, el candidato del PRD y aliados fue el ex gobernador regional del Distrito Federal, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Ganó López Obrador fácilmente el D.F., pero el candidato del PAN, Felipe Calderón, fue declarado presidente. López Obrador y sus partidarios reclamaban fraude y se negaban a reconocerle a Calderón como presidente legítimo, pero también se quejaban que algunos dirigentes regionales del PRD no se levantaban ni un dedo para ayudarlos.

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