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'Text me you haven't died' — My sister was 42,010th person murdered in Gaza

By Ramzy Baroud



Dr. Soma Baroud was murdered by Israeli forces on Oct. 9 when the taxi she and other doctors were riding in was destroyed by a U.S.-supplied bomb.

Ramzy Baroud is a U.S.-Palestinian journalist and the editor of [The Palestine Chronicle](#). His articles regularly appear in People's World. His sister, Dr. Soma Baroud, still lived in Palestine, providing health services for besieged Gazans. After her husband was killed by Israel earlier this year, on Oct. 9 it was her turn. The taxi that she and other doctors were riding in was blown up by a U.S.-supplied Israeli bomb. In the first article below, Ramzy Baroud shares her last words of resilience and love in the face of unimaginable loss. The second article is by Dr. Soma Baroud herself, written in September after Israel destroyed her family's home.

"Your lives will continue. With new events and new faces. They are the faces of your children, who will fill your homes with noise and laughter."

These were the last words written by my sister in a text message to one of her daughters.

Dr. Soma Baroud was murdered on Oct. 9 when Israeli warplanes bombed a taxi that carried her and other tired Gazans somewhere near the Bani Suhaila roundabout near Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip.

I am still unable to understand whether she was on her way to the hospital, where she worked, or leaving the hospital to go home. Does it even matter?

The news of her murder—or, more accurately, assassination, as Israel has deliberately targeted and killed 986 medical workers, including 165 doctors—arrived through a screenshot copied from a Facebook page.

"Update: these are the names of the martyrs of the latest Israeli bombing of two taxis in the Khan Yunis area..." the post read.

It was followed by a list of names. "Soma Mohammed Mohammed Baroud" was the fifth name on the list, and the 42,010th on Gaza's ever-growing list of martyrs.

I refused to believe the news, even when more posts began popping up everywhere on social media, listing her as number five, and sometimes six in the list of martyrs of the Khan Yunis strike.

I kept calling her, over and over again, hoping that the line would crackle a bit, followed by a brief silence, and then her kind, motherly voice would say, "Marhaba Abu Sammy. How are you, brother?" But she never picked up.

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CONTINUING THE DAILY WORKER



For over a century, People's World and its predecessor publications have taken the side of the 99 percent and worked to promote the struggle for a sustainable environment, jobs, democracy, peace, and equality.

'Text me you haven't died'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

I had told her repeatedly that she does not need to bother with elaborate text or audio messages due to the unreliable internet connection and electricity. "Every morning," I said, "Just type: 'We are fine.'" That's all I asked of her.

But she would skip several days without writing, often due to the lack of an internet connection. Then, a message would arrive, though never brief. She wrote with a torrent of thoughts, linking up her daily struggle to survive to her fears for her children, to poetry, to a Koranic verse, to one of her favorite novels, and so on.

"You know, what you said last time reminds me of Gabriel García Márquez's 100 Years of Solitude," she said on more than one occasion before she would take the conversation into the most complex philosophical spins. I would listen, and just repeat, "Yes ... totally ... I agree ... one hundred percent."

For us, Soma was a larger-than-life figure. This is precisely why her sudden absence has shocked us to the point of disbelief. Her children, though grown up, felt orphaned. But her brothers, me included, felt the same way.

I wrote about Soma as a central character in my book *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter*, because she was indeed central to our lives, and to our very survival in a Gaza refugee camp.

The firstborn and only daughter, she had to carry a much greater share of work and expectations than the rest of us.

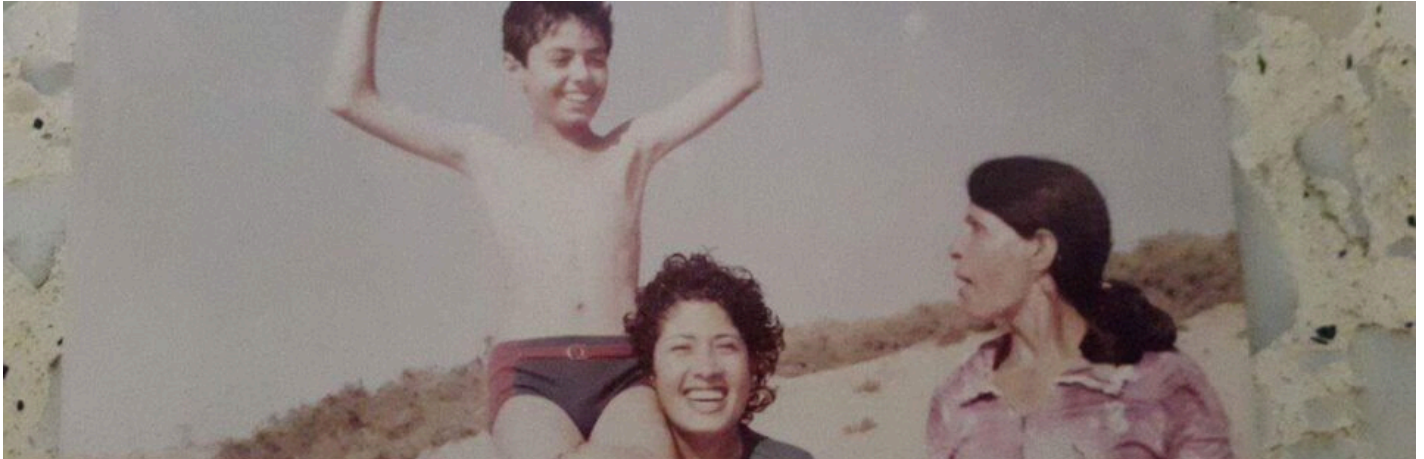
She was just a child when my eldest brother Anwar, still a toddler, died in a UNRWA clinic at the Nuseirat refugee camp due to the lack of medicine. Then, she was introduced to pain, the kind of pain that, with time, turned into a permanent state of grief that would never abandon her until her murder by a U.S.-supplied Israeli bomb in Khan Yunis.

Two years after the death of the first Anwar, another boy was born. They also called him Anwar so that the legacy of the first boy may carry on. Soma cherished the newcomer, maintaining a special friendship with him for decades to come.

My father began his life as a child laborer, then a fighter in the Palestine Liberation Army, then a police officer during the Egyptian administration of Gaza, then, once again, a laborer; that's because he refused to join the Israeli-funded Gaza police force after the war of 1967, [known as the Naksa](#).

A clever, principled man and a self-taught intellectual, my dad did everything he could to provide a measure of dignity for his small family; and Soma, a child, often barefoot, stood by him every step of the way.

When he decided to become a merchant, buying discarded and odd items in Israel and repackaging them to sell in the refugee camp, Soma was his main helper. Though her skin healed, cuts on her fingers, due to individually wrapping thousands of razors, remained a testament to the difficult life she lived.



Lives in ruins: Soma's son found this childhood photo of Ramzy on Soma's shoulders in the rubble of her house in Khan Yunis after Israel bombed it.

"Soma's little finger is worth more than a thousand men," my father would often repeat, to remind us, ultimately five boys, that our sister will always be the main heroine in the family's story. Now that she is a martyr, that legacy has been secured for eternity.

Years later, my parents would send her to Aleppo to obtain a medical degree. She returned to Gaza, where she spent over three decades healing the pain of others, though never her own.

She worked at Al-Shifa Hospital and at Nasser Hospital, among other medical centers. Later, she obtained another certificate in family medicine, opening a clinic of her own. She did not charge the poor and did all she could to heal those victimized by war.

Soma was a member of a generation of female doctors in Gaza that truly changed the face of medicine, collectively putting great emphasis on the rights of women to medical care and expanding the understanding of family medicine to include psychological trauma with particular emphasis on the centrality, but also the vulnerability of women in a war-torn society.

When my daughter Zarefah managed to visit her in Gaza shortly before the war, she told me that "when Aunt Soma walked into the hospital, an entourage of women—doctors, nurses, and other medical staff—would surround her in total adoration."

At one point, it felt that all of Soma's suffering was finally paying off: a nice family home in Khan Yunis with a small olive orchard and a few palm trees; a loving husband, himself a professor of law, and eventually the dean of law school at a reputable Gaza university; three daughters and two sons, whose educational specialties ranged from dentistry to pharmacy, to law to engineering.

Life, even under siege, at least for Soma and her family, seemed manageable. True, she was not allowed to leave the Strip for many years due to the blockade, and thus we were denied the chance to see her for years on end.

True, she was tormented by loneliness and seclusion, thus her love affair with and constant citation from García Márquez's seminal novel. But at least her husband was not killed or went missing. Her beautiful house and clinic were still standing. And she was living and breathing, communicating her philosophical nuggets about life, death, memories, and hope. That was before the latest war.

"If I could only find the remains of Hamdi so that we can give him a proper burial," she wrote to me last January when the news circulated that her husband was executed by an Israeli quadcopter in Khan Yunis.

But since the body remained missing, she held on to some faint hope that he was still alive. Her boys, on the other hand, kept digging in the wreckage and debris of the area where Hamdi was shot, hoping to find him and to give him a proper burial. They would often be attacked by Israeli drones in the process of trying to unearth their father's body. They would run away and return with their shovels to carry on with the grim task.

My Heart is Broken

By Dr. Soma Baroud

Sept. 1, 2024

To maximize their chances of survival, my sister's family decided to split up between displacement camps and other family homes in southern Gaza.

This meant that Soma had to be in a constant state of moving, traveling, often long distances on foot, between towns, villages, and refugee camps, just to check on her children, following every incursion and every massacre.

"I am exhausted," she kept telling me. "All I want from life is for this war to end, for new cozy pajamas, my favorite book, and a comfortable bed."

These simple and reasonable expectations looked like a mirage, especially when her home in the Qarara area, in Khan Yunis, was demolished by the Israeli army last month.

"My heart aches. Everything is gone. Three decades of life, of memories, of achievement, all turned into rubble," she wrote.

"This is not a story about stones and concrete. It is much bigger. It is a story that cannot be fully told, however long I wrote or spoke. Seven souls had lived here. We ate, drank, laughed, quarreled, and despite all the challenges of living in Gaza, we managed to carve out a happy life for our family," she continued.

A few days before she was killed, she told me that she had been sleeping in a half-destroyed building belonging to her neighbors in Qarara. She sent me a photo taken by her son as she sat on a makeshift chair, on which she also slept amidst the ruins. She looked tired, so very tired.

There was nothing I could say or do to convince her to leave. She insisted that she wanted to keep an eye on the rubble of what remained of her home. Her logic made no sense to me. I pleaded with her to leave. She ignored me and instead kept sending me photos of what she had salvaged from the rubble: an old photo, a small olive tree, a birth certificate.

My last message to her, hours before she was killed, was a promise that when the war was over, I would do everything in my power to compensate her for all of this. That the whole family would meet in Egypt or Turkey, and that we will shower her with gifts, and boundless family love. I finished with, "Let's start planning now. Whatever you want. You just say it. Awaiting your instructions..." She never saw the message.

Even when her name, as yet another casualty of the Israeli genocide in Gaza, was mentioned in local Palestinian news, I refused to believe it. I continued to call. "Please pick up, Soma, please pick up," I pleaded with her.

Only when a video emerged of white body bags arriving at Nasser Hospital in the back of an ambulance, I thought maybe my sister was indeed gone.

Some of the bags had the names of the others mentioned in the social media posts. Each bag was pulled out separately and placed on the ground. A group of mourners, bereaved men, women, and children would rush to hug the body, screaming the same shouts of agony and despair that accompanied this ongoing genocide from the first day.

Then, another bag, with the name "Soma Mohammed Mohammed Baroud" written across the thick white plastic. Her colleagues carried her body and gently laid it on the ground. They were about to zip the bag open to verify her identity. I looked the other way.

I refuse to see her but in the way that she wanted to be seen: a strong person, a manifestation of love, kindness, and wisdom, whose "little finger is worth more than a thousand men."

But why do I continue to check my messages with the hope that she will text me to tell me that the whole thing was a major, cruel misunderstanding and that she is OK?

My sister Soma was buried under a small mound of dirt, somewhere in Khan Yunis.

No more messages from her.

After losing my home, I felt broken. Humiliated. I have never experienced this feeling before.

For months we waited for the Israelis to leave Khan Yunis, so that we could sprint back home. But now, there is no home to run back to. Our mornings, which used to be filled with the potential of good news, are now empty. Our loss is complete.

My son never wanted to leave the house in the first place. He felt rooted there. His bond with the place was different from the rest. He cared for the trees daily, counting the days to olive harvest and the date season. He planted mint and basil. He protected everything he planted from the elements.

When the war started, he did everything he could so that we didn't feel compelled to leave the house and abandon the goats, the chickens, and the trees. He even managed to generate some electricity using solar panels and fetched fresh water from a nearby mosque.

But when the Israeli army took over Khan Yunis, we had no other option but to leave. We returned to the house every time we had a chance, only to see it deteriorate, day after day: Shells exploded in the backyard; olive branches shattered; dead chickens and goats; broken windows and doors.

Every time we returned home, I would fall into a deep depression. But then the children would remind me that all could be restored, as long as the house itself remained standing.

The last time we returned, it was in its worst shape yet. The doors were gone, the windows fully shattered or broken, and even the balconies had collapsed under the weight of the bombs. Our kitchen was destroyed, even our clothes were removed from the closets and torn to pieces. I couldn't sleep, but the kids kept reminding me to remain grateful, that our loss was not as bad as others, that there was still hope.

But now...what can I say? Oh, my heart aches. Everything is gone. Three decades of life, of memories, of achievement, all turned into rubble.

This is not a story about stones and concrete. It is much bigger. It is a story that cannot be fully told, however long I wrote or spoke. Seven souls had lived here. We ate, drank, laughed, quarreled, and despite all the challenges of living in Gaza, we managed to carve out a happy life for our family.

Here we celebrated birthdays and holidays, broke our fasts in Ramadan, and entertained friends. This was the same place from which our kids completed their studies, excelled in universities, and from which some of them left after celebrating their weddings. Some of them have succeeded in their lives, and others are still trying, but it all started from here, from this heap of rubble and broken dreams.

I know that life does not always go the way we plan or hope. But after all of this, this horrific war, all I had hoped for was to simply go home, and sleep. I mean truly sleep as I haven't slept for nearly a year.

I had kept everything that reminded me of the kids as they grew up. Scraps of old papers with their handwriting as children, old drawings, and even gift wrapping from past birthdays. It was all kept there, classified, categorized, cherished.

The very details of the life of my husband, who was martyred or remains missing, only God knows, were all there. I wanted to keep everything exactly where he left it before the war.

I told the children that no matter what happens, don't remove anything that reminds me of your father. Keep them exactly the way he placed them before he was gone.

Now, everything else is gone as well.

I want to stop. I don't know how.

Oh, how my heart is broken...

News Guild's Schleuss: Give big labor law breakers fines and jail terms

By Mark Gruenberg



The labor law panel at the Press Club, from the Press Club's Twitter/X feed. Left to right: Brian Petruska, General Counsel, Laborers Union Mid-Atlantic Region; Jennifer Abruzzo, NLRB General Counsel; Jon Schleuss, News Guild President.

WASHINGTON—Big labor law violators among corporate honchos should face “strong fines and potential jail terms” for their law-breaking, says News Guild-CWA President Jon Schleuss. He wants the Block brothers of Pittsburgh to feel that lash.

“We’ve got CEOs paying millions of dollars to attorneys to violate the law,” Schleuss said of the union-busters whom the likes of the Blocks, Jeff Bezos of Amazon, Howard Schultz of Starbucks, and the Walton clan of Wal-Mart routinely hire. The Economic Policy Institute calculates such union-busters reaped \$433 million in 2022, the last year for which figures are available.

Schleuss singled out the Block brothers, owners of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, as an example. The Guild’s Pittsburgh local and several other unions have been on strike against the Post-Gazette for two years and counting. And last year, The Guild set its modern record for strikes.

Most were one-day walkouts, from large chains of exploitative papers. Pittsburgh isn’t. The Blocks unilaterally imposed a more expensive and skimpier health plan on the paper’s unionists, after no raises for at least five years, and offered raises so small the higher premiums would eat them all up. That was the Blocks’s take-it-or-leave-it offer. The workers overwhelmingly rejected it and struck.

The Blocks are defying NLRB bargaining orders, with the board having ruled against the two. So it now seeks to wield its strongest tool, a federal court 10(j) injunction, citing irreparable harm to the workers and ordering the Blocks to both immediately take them back, restore the old health plan, and make them financially whole, including expenses workers incurred while being out. Otherwise, NLRB General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo demands the Blocks face the courtroom music.

“At the Post-Gazette, the actual cost” of settling with The Guild and the other unions, “is minuscule compared to what they’re spending” to fight the Guild and its allies, said Schleuss. It’s also minuscule compared to dragging out bargaining at their other paper, the Toledo Blade, for 17 years.

Their conduct is so bad that if the Blocks defy the injunction, too—whenever Abruzzo gets it—“it’s not out of the realm of possibility for the board to call U.S. marshals” to arrest them, Schleuss said.

Since then, another corporate scourge has hit newspapers, Schleuss added: Secretive hedge funds, answerable to nobody, who swoop in on newspapers, buy them cheap, fire dozens of staffers, destroy local coverage and accountability, sell off their real estate, then either close the papers or leave them as hollow shells, in news deserts, and with devastated staffers’ lives.

Exhibit A in that group is Alden Global Capital, which bought the Tribune Company’s papers and other media, led by its flagship Chicago Tribune. Alden carried out all those moves and the staff of the paper, whose owners had been virulently anti-union for more than 125 years, unionized with the Chicago Guild. Other papers whose staffers are battling Alden include the Denver Post, the Hartford Courant, and papers in Florida and the mid-Atlantic region. The Baltimore Sun was until it was sold.

After six years of bargaining, the two sides—the Guild, the Tribune’s staff and its suburban papers’ workers on one side and Alden’s managers on the other—are on the verge of a first contract. With talks done, Alden’s General Manager fired the union’s most-veteran worker and its lead bargainer, by abolishing her position.

Sequences like that prompt labor’s campaign for the Protect The Right To Organize Act, which would help return to a level playing field between workers and management, said Schleuss and Brian Petruska, the General Counsel for the Laborers Mid-Atlantic region, at a press conference in D.C. on October 15. NLRB General Counsel Abruzzo, the board’s top enforcement officer, joined them.

All three agreed the NLRB is vastly understaffed. Schleuss advocated doubling its budget, too. The shortage of both people and dollars makes it hard to enforce the law, Abruzzo said. “We’ve lost 62% from our field offices” where most cases get heard and settled “since 2011.”

But bosses and union-busters, whom the law calls “persuaders,” aren’t the sole on-the-job problems workers trying to organize face. Abruzzo said another is “non-compete” contracts, with “stay or pay” variations forcing workers to repay exploitative employers tens of thousands of dollars if they want to leave before their pacts are up.

That means if they do leave, Abruzzo added, they can’t find jobs in the same industry. And non-competes even stretch down to road workers holding up “slow” and “stop” signs for traffic as colleagues spread tar or pour cement, Petruska said. Employers declare the workers with the signs could be privy to proprietary information about the road work, he explained.

And really nasty construction bosses “shake road workers down for part of their paychecks” especially migrant workers, whom the bosses threaten with deportation if they speak up.

The same day as the session, Democratic President Joe Biden hailed an enormous increase in union organizing drives during the prior fiscal year. Abruzzo, one of Biden’s first appointees to a sub-Cabinet post, in January 2021, announced the hike during the press conference.

Number seeking unionization doubled

“The number of workers filing for union representation doubled since the start of my administration—the first administration in five decades to have an increase in union petitions,” Biden said. “I am proud to have secured the NLRB’s first budget increase in almost a decade, and I will continue fighting for more funding so the board can empower workers on the job.”

That hike is needed, Abruzzo told the D.C. session. In the last decade and a half, the NLRB has lost almost half of its workers and couldn’t replace them due to a funding freeze for more than a dozen years. It still needs more money and more workers, regardless of who’s in the White House the next four years, Abruzzo said.

It needs more workers, she declared, to carry out the objectives of labor law, to level the playing field for workers against companies. It wasn’t level during the Republican Donald Trump regime, added Biden—who appointed Abruzzo, a top Communications Workers counsel but also an NLRB veteran.

If Trump comes back, Abruzzo told one questioner, “We’re here to enforce the law and we’re not going to stop.” Trump, who is notoriously anti-union, as are his corporate backers and the GOP, faces Biden’s VP, Kamala Harris, in this fall’s election.

“We are a government of the people, by the people and for the people,” Abruzzo said, quoting a pro-worker Republican president, Abraham Lincoln. “We will do whatever is possible to protect workers’ rights. If you’re on the job, you do the job and you enforce the statute.

“After the previous administration sided with big corporations to undermine workers—from blocking overtime pay protections to making it harder to organize—my administration has supported workers, including restoring and extending overtime pay protections, holding employers accountable for union-busting, and calling on Congress to pass the PRO Act. Because when unions do well, all workers do well and the entire economy benefits,” the president said.

Even though a Republican Senate filibuster threat, backed by a looming multimillion-dollar corporate disinformation campaign, killed the PRO Act, there are other good signs on the horizon besides the big jump in union organizing, Abruzzo and the others said.

One is the NLRB has signed agreements with other federal enforcement agencies handling workers’ issues, including the Federal Trade Commission, the Justice Department, the Labor Department’s Wage and Hour Division, and its Occupational Safety and Health Administration, for cross-training and cross-enforcement. Abruzzo explained an NLRB labor law violator is likely to have broken other labor laws, too.

“We are talking to one another, connecting and co-enforcing,” she added. One example, though Abruzzo did not mention it, is that the recent trial in Portland, Ore., pitting the FTC against the monster Kroger-Albertson’s merger, saw FTC lawyers emphasize the impact of that proposed monopoly not just on food prices and lack of competition there, but on workers’ wages and lack of competition there, too.

And there’s another reason for the rising organizing, Abruzzo added.

“Workers in underserved populations are now realizing their voices can be heard. And that they can be more empowered to organize in different ways, and in different sectors of the economy.” And she added, for workers, the NLRB is it. “They now realize they have no private right to sue.”

‘The Paper Bag Plan’: Working class hero!

By Michael Berkowitz



*Oscar Martin is a single parent raising a wheelchair-bound paraplegic son Billy. He is the driving force of Anthony Lucero's moving new film *The Paper Bag Plan*.*

Oscar Martin is a single parent raising a wheelchair-bound paraplegic son Billy. He is the driving force of Anthony Lucero's moving new film *The Paper Bag Plan*.

Oscar is not tortured by existential grief. He doesn't spend hours with his therapist trying to figure out his purpose in life or coming to terms with guilt and original sin. He's not a trust fund guy or corporate titan trying to extend his financial empire. Nor is he an assembly-line Marvel Universe superhero whose charge is to save the world.

Oscar Martin is a common working-class father with one job and he is diligent about it. His job is to provide a life and prepare a future for his disabled 20-something son Billy.

In his 107 minutes of screen time, writer-director Lucero reveals little about either Oscar or Billy's past. They live in a modest home. Oscar is an appliance delivery person. We don't know what happened to his wife. She seems long gone from his and Billy's life. Oscar persists in wearing a wedding band although he never mentions her. Lucero is determined to keep us focused on telling us this story!

What we do know is that Oscar is a closet alcoholic. Billy knows that, too, prodding his dad that if he can get a job, Oscar must stop his secret bingeing. Oscar has also been quietly consulting with his doctor about what turns out to be cancer. He won't readily discuss it. When Billy gently confronts him, Oscar downplays it, mostly in dismissive complaints about medical care.

But it must be bad enough so that Oscar has begun preparing Billy for a life without him. He pushes Billy toward a job so that he can become self-sufficient.

At first, Billy resists. But Oscar wisely concocts a plan based on the familiar, their grocery shopping expeditions, and pushing out into the larger world around them. Oscar will help train Billy to become a grocery bagger at their local market. To do this, Oscar engages the neighbors in simulating market conditions. He purchases and gets donated a wealth of groceries.

They are assembled on shelves in his living room. Neighbors are invited to "shop," selecting groceries which they must bring to Billy's "counter" so he can practice the mechanics of bagging. The reluctant owner of the neighborhood market must also be persuaded to hire Billy once he demonstrates the required skills.

Much as he did in his last film, the award-winning [East Side Sushi](#), Lucero tells a spare tale of working-class life. Through action he reveals character. The narrative deftly sketches out the challenges of what it means to be not rich in America. Lucero is so good at working with actors that the performances appear seamless. Lance Kinsey as Oscar and Cole Massie as Billy are nothing less than superb. Their interactions define this tiny at-risk family. And as with *East Side Sushi*, he sets his characters in the gritty East Bay neighborhood where they shop, take BART, and go to the Oakland Athletics game.

The Paper Bag Plan is a deceptively simple story which lets us assemble what we know of contemporary life into a moral tale of real love and heroism. As John Lennon musically observed some years ago, "a working-class hero is something to be!"

As soon as you're born, they make you feel small

By giving you no time instead of it all

Till the pain is so big you feel nothing at all.

They hurt you at home, and they hit you at school

They hate you if you're clever, and they despise a fool

Till you're so fucking crazy, you can't follow their rules

If you want to be a hero well just follow me.

Presidency, U.S. Senate, and House control could be determined in Nebraska

By John Bachtell



Dan Osborn, the independent pro-labor candidate for U.S. Senate in Nebraska has the backing of the AFL-CIO and is running slightly ahead of his Republican MAGA opponent. If he wins and he caucuses with Democrats in the Senate he could be decisive in giving them a working majority after the November election. | Nikos Frazier/Omaha World-Herald via AP

Unlike in Las Vegas, one can never be certain that what happens in Nebraska will stay there. On Election Day, who becomes president and what party controls the Senate and possibly even the House may hinge on what the people in one Nebraska congressional district do three weeks from now.

Despite being a deeply “red” state, Nebraska’s election laws and its history of relative fairness, pragmatism, and independence make it a wild card.

If Kamala Harris wins the state’s “blue dot” and prevails in the Midwest “blue wall,” she’ll reach the 270 electoral votes needed to win. If Independent pro-labor U.S. Senate candidate Dan Osborn wins in Nebraska, he could caucus with Democrats, giving them a workable majority on critical issues. And if Democrat State Sen. Tony Vargas wins the 2nd Congressional District race in the state, it could help Democrats win the House majority.

Such victories would underscore the existence of an anti-MAGA, pro-democracy majority, even in a place like Nebraska, including Republican [Nikki Haley voters](#) who can’t bring themselves to vote for Trump. In addition, Nebraskans will also be voting to amend the state constitution to [enshrine abortion rights](#), one of ten states with reproductive rights on the ballot, which could drive turnout.

Nebraska, like Maine and unlike any of the other 48 states, distributes electoral votes to the winner of each Congressional District. The “blue dot” is the 2nd CD which is expected to vote Democratic despite the rest of the state voting deeply red. The Harris campaign is investing heavily in the “blue dot” and expects to win, even though Democratic presidential candidates haven’t always in the past. Biden won the “blue dot” in 2020 despite Trump winning the state by 20%.

The 2nd CD is very racially and economically diverse. The district covers Omaha and Lincoln (500,000 of the state’s 1.9 million population live in Omaha), is heavily working class, and is centered on meat packing and manufacturing with a vibrant trade union movement.

The district has substantial African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American populations, two large universities and medical facilities, global finance corporations, a small business network, and a rising tech center dubbed “Silicon Prairie.” It also includes suburban and rural communities.

Politically, Democrats and independents dominate urban areas and are competitive in suburban areas, while Republicans dominate the rural counties.

Organized labor, social justice movements, independents, and the Nebraska Democratic Party have been building power through broad coalition politics in the 2nd CD and across the state over the past decade.

Didn’t come out of nowhere

“This just didn’t come out of nowhere,” [says](#) Nebraska Democratic Party chair Jane Kleeb. “We’ve been working for ten years building down the ballot, our block captain program, voter guides, aggressive vote by mail program. So, we feel prepared to meet the moment and we’re glad it’s here.”

LULAC, Fuerza Latina, and El Poder del Voto Latino are among the groups organizing the rapidly growing Latino population. Nebraska chapter president Juan Carlos Garcia said they’re partnering with other Latino groups to register and turn out voters.

“Even speaking to people out on the street, every time I’m out here, I’m talking to people like ‘Are you registered to vote?’” said Garcia.

Trump and MAGA know most Americans oppose their policies. So, they have to resort to every trick in the book to deny the will of the anti-MAGA majority, including [voter suppression](#), voter purges, stacking election boards with MAGA appointees, and changing election rules.

Republicans have attempted 17 times to repeal the state law dispersing electoral votes by Congressional District since the state adopted the method in 1992. Understanding that a close election could come down to one electoral vote, Trump attempted to eliminate the “blue dot” by changing Nebraska’s election law to make it “winner take all.”

Trump’s all-out pressure scheme failed when GOP State Senator Mike McDonald opposed the change. Democrats and Republicans intensely pressured McDonald, but he ultimately declined to support it.

McDonald’s opposition reveals the complexities of Nebraska politics. McDonald was a decades-long Democrat until January when he left the party over abortion and trans rights. However, McDonald, a former labor leader, still has ties and many shared values with Democratic lawmakers and wants to run for mayor of Omaha next spring. McDonald knows he needs Democrats, independents, moderate Republicans, and a multi-racial coalition to win.

McDonald’s opposition also reflects fractures within the state and county GOP, taken over by MAGA extremists led by the plutocrat Ricketts family, prominent backers of Trump. MAGA fascists are turning off many moderate Republicans, and during last spring’s primary election, all five statewide GOP candidates [defeated](#) MAGA fascists despite themselves being extremely conservative.

The Omaha Congressional District also features a competitive House race pitting Vargas against incumbent U.S. House Republican Don Bacon, a Christian nationalist who supported Nikki Haley but now supports Trump. Vargas is a former public school teacher backed by a multi-racial coalition, especially the growing Latino population, Nebraska AFL-CIO, faith-based leaders, reproductive rights, and other social justice groups.

Few saw the tight U.S. Senate race coming between the independent pro-labor Dan Osborn and Deb Fisher, an unpopular incumbent MAGA GOP senator. Osborn, a steamfitter by trade, rose to national prominence, leading the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers, and Grain Millers International Union during a successful 77-day strike against Kellogg's in 2021. The unions representing railroad workers first approached Osborn to run.

Wants to pave the way

"I want to pave the way for nurses, teachers, plumbers, carpenters, and other working people to run for office. I want to show that you don't have to be a self-funding crypto billionaire to run," says Osborn.

Nebraska Democrats initially decided not to field a candidate in 2024. But when Osborn decided to run, Democratic Party County and local organizations helped him get on the ballot and chose not to run a write-in candidate.

The Nebraska AFL-CIO is going all out to elect Osborn "because we know he will be a champion for working people," said Lori J. Meyers of the Nebraska State AFL-CIO. "Osborn has proven that he will fight to ensure that workers have a voice in the workplace, protect, and strengthen labor standards and expand employment protections."

Osborn supports reproductive rights and worker's rights and champions the concerns of family farmers but is more conservative on immigration and gun safety issues. He is backed by an energized, broad coalition and raised more campaign funds, primarily small-dollar donations, than any independent candidate in Nebraska's history.

"We believe a cross-partisan coalition is going to pull Dan Osborn over the finish line," said Kleeb. "Fisher has been non-existent, younger voters don't know her, rural voters are pissed at her over property rights and water rights. Osborn has a path to victory."

Nebraska votes approximately 45% GOP, 35% Democrat, and 20% Independent. Circumstances have forced progressives to build broad, diverse, cross-partisan, multi-racial, urban-rural coalitions to advance their agendas.

Non-partisan politics run deep in Nebraska's history, including its non-partisan unicameral state legislature. Even though Republicans dominate state politics, its pragmatic, independent politics often defy conservatism. For example, Nebraska settles more refugees per capita than most states and is the only state where electric utilities are all public entities.

United, broad, and diverse coalitions have racked up some impressive wins. The victories included defeating the Keystone XL pipeline, which united a coalition of environmentalists, Native Americans, and farmers concerned that a burst pipeline would impact the Ogallala Aquifer.

Coalitions won passage of statewide Medicaid expansion, a higher minimum wage, and driver's licenses for Dreamers, outlawed the death penalty (later reversed through a ballot measure engineered by MAGA Governor Ricketts), and defeated restrictive voter ID legislation and cuts to the state university system.

"We believe the reason we won is that Democrats have opened our doors to Independents and Republicans who don't like the extremes of a Trump or Tea Party," said Kleeb. "A deep sense of fairness is at the core of America's rural communities. Progressive and populist roots run deep in rural communities," said Kleeb.

Populist hatred of agri-business corporations runs deep among Nebraskan family farmers, meatpackers, and communities, like the one in the rural Sand Hill region where Democrat Vice Presidential candidate Tim Walz hails from.

"This coalition is why Harris and Walz will win the Blue Dot and Tony Vargas will win the 2nd CD. Dan Osborn is in a close competitive race. We've built a cross-partisan coalition on issues not parties," said Kleeb.

Ypsilanti, Mich. citizen initiatives on tenants' rights, police budgets, election reform all rejected

By Brian Coburn



Canvassers from the Ypsi Ballot Initiative Group (YpsiBIG) gather back in the summer. | YpsiBIG via Facebook

YPSILANTI, Mich.—A group of local activists who set out to give Ypsilanti residents three transformative ballot proposals this November were sent reeling when the city told them that—despite surpassing the 870-signature barrier on each initiative—none of the measures will appear on the ballot.

The Ypsilanti Ballot Initiative Group (Ypsi BIG) collected signatures for initiatives that would have greatly expanded tenants' rights, allowed residents to vote on proposed increases to the police budget, and made all city election races nonpartisan.

The group was told on July 19 that the tenants' rights initiative, which garnered the most signatures of all, would not be a ballot proposal based on the city's interpretation of a state law, but they kept collecting signatures anyway and expected the other two measures to be accepted on the ballot when they submitted signatures at the July 30 deadline—at least that's what they thought was the deadline.

According to longtime activist Brian Geiringer, who spearheaded BIG and collected the majority of its signatures, the city said it had no legal obligation to turn the initiatives into proposals for the November ballot unless the signatures were submitted and accepted by July 1. Geiringer felt the city's messaging on signature deadlines was never transparent.

Later, after the city validated enough signatures for the police budget and election reform measures, the city clerk, Tracey Boudreau, missed an Aug. 13 deadline to submit verified documents to the county for ballot printing. She told the media she believed the deadline was Aug. 15 and said, "Election law can be confusing."

"The clerk [messed] up real bad," Geiringer said, referring to Boudreau, who did not respond to requests to be interviewed for this story. Geiringer also named the city's attorney, John M. Barr, as culpable for the mishap and said the group would be calling for Barr's resignation from a position he has held since the 1980s.

"He was obstructive throughout the entire process," Geiringer said of Barr. "In other places, the city attorney works with people on how to get these things done, but with him, it was the total opposite."

Ypsi BIG, which formed in February and had dozens of canvassers, is in discussion on how to proceed but doesn't expect that Ypsi voters will have a chance to see these initiatives on a ballot until 2026 at the earliest.

The initiatives represented what would have been bold, sweeping changes. In a city where 73% of residents are renters, the tenants' rights initiative was arguably the most important. It would have banned rental application fees; put all city rental properties in a publicly viewable database that listed owners, managers, prices, occupancy status, and eviction history; and, significantly, the tenant being offered a chance to buy the home they are renting should a landlord bring it to market.

The city informed the group that the initiative would not be turned into a ballot proposal no matter how many signatures were submitted (BIG says they had 1,193 valid signatures supporting the measure) because Michigan state law does not allow for a city charter to be amended if a proposal is not confined to one subject. BIG argues all the issues written in the initiative revolved around the same subject: tenant-landlord relations.

Eastern Michigan student Colton Ray worked with BIG and used his experience in student government to help Geiringer draft the language in the initiatives and believes the clerk's rejection was likely a political decision.

"We were somewhat surprised because it's not uncommon to see proposals with overarching themes and different components," Ray said. "But you see it all over. Voters in San Francisco passed a vacancy tax, but landlords fought to keep it off the ballot."

Geiringer said there may be a push get the tenants' rights idea through via city council, as two councilmembers, Desiree Simmons and Michelle King, publicly endorsed the initiative, as did Amber Fellows, who had a surprise win in the Aug. 6 primary over incumbent Evan Sweet in Ward 3 and is running unopposed in November. That would constitute three of the necessary four votes to pass an ordinance, although this would not amend the charter (effectively the constitution of Ypsilanti), as the group originally intended.

Canvasser Shannon Bacheller, who moved to Ypsi from Texas last year, said she always started the conversations with the initiative around tenants' rights, which enthused renters and even had modest support among homeowners:

"I explained to homeowners that 70% of Ypsi residents rent and even if this doesn't help you directly, this is a chance to increase home ownership in the city and benefit the neighborhoods," Bacheller said.

She recounted a story where one resident who signed the police and nonpartisan initiatives but wouldn't sign the one for tenants' rights because he said he was "the biggest landlord in the city." According to Bacheller, that resident was the well-known and controversial Stewart Beal.

The police initiative was inspired by the city amending its budget in 2021 to add three new police officers, Geiringer said. There was no public oversight and then-councilmember and current Ypsilanti Mayor Nicole Brown acknowledged it was a "controversial amendment" even though she supported it.

"They understand they need to be sheisty to get these things through," Geiringer said, adding that police budgets being approved by voters is not a radical approach and something that is common in townships, citing Pittsfield as a local example.

The nonpartisan initiative was conceived to decide races in high-turnout general elections, not low-turnout August primaries, since the city is dominated by Democrats who often run unopposed by Republicans or other parties.

Ypsi BIG plans to make a public statement on its intentions soon.

Israeli Communist lawmaker warns Netanyahu government implementing final ethnic cleansing of northern Gaza

By Zo Haderekh

TEL AVIV—The Israeli occupation forces ordered Palestinians in the northern Gaza towns of Beit Hanoun, Jabaliya, and Beit Lahiya to evacuate to the Israeli-designated “humanitarian zone” in the Strip’s south. The army said it was expanding the size of the zone ahead of plans to operate in northern Gaza and evacuate all Palestinians from there.

“IDF forces are currently operating with great force in the area. For your safety, you must evacuate these areas immediately,” Col. Avichay Adraee, the army’s Arabic-language spokesman said, publishing a map of the areas Palestinians were ordered to flee.

According to Aida Touma-Suleiman, a member of the Knesset from the Israeli Communist Party:

“While most attention is on Lebanon and Iran, it appears that Israel is enacting what was named ‘The Generals’ Plan’ in northern Gaza, which includes the displacement or starvation of all people still in the northern Gaza Strip.

“This is the plan for ethnic cleansing and sets the scene for permanent Israeli occupation of all the northern Gaza Strip. It could also open the way for the vision held by many in the government—of resettling Gaza with Jewish settlers. The world must act to stop this new and dangerous escalation in Gaza.”

Touma-Suleiman was referring to a proposal for permanent Israeli occupation made by former National Security Council chief Giora Eiland, a retired Major General of the Israeli army, together with a group of hundreds of mid-level reservist officers. This “Generals Group” has been pushing in recent months to completely empty northern Gaza of its Palestinian occupants.

The newest order from the IDF appeared to be an in-between position, expelling a significant portion of the 150,000–250,000 Palestinian civilians who remain in northern Gaza without going “all the way” with the Eiland plan, yet.

In November 2023, Eiland, a current advisor to the defense minister, decided to spell out genocide more explicitly. In a Hebrew article on the printed edition of Yedioth Ahronoth titled “Let’s not be intimidated by the world,” Eiland clarified that the whole Gazan civilian population was a legitimate military target and that even “severe epidemics in the south of the Gaza Strip will bring victory closer.”

His bottom line leaves no doubt as to his view: “Israel is not fighting a terrorist organization but against the State of Gaza.” Therefore, according to Eiland, “Israel must not provide the other side with any capability that prolongs its life.”

Tucson marcha contra el ataque racista de la Propuesta 314 de los republicanos contra los inmigrantes

By Joe Bernick

TUCSON—Afrontando temperaturas de tres dígitos el viernes, más de 120 personas se manifestaron y marcharon en Tucson contra las propuestas electorales racistas y el aumento de los ataques racistas antiinmigrantes en los medios de comunicación por parte de los republicanos de ultraderecha durante la campaña electoral de 2024.

Los manifestantes caminaron desde el Centro de Trabajadores Josefina Ahumada hasta un mitin en Armory Park y de allí al Parque El Presidio para otro mitin con la alcaldesa de Tucson, Regina Romero. Los patrocinadores de la acción incluyeron la Red Nacional de Jornaleros, la Coalición de Empleos con Justicia de Arizona, el Colectivo Stop the Hate de Tucson y otros grupos locales.

La Proposición 314 racista y antiinmigrante de Arizona está generando una amplia oposición en todo el estado. La propuesta, llamada “Ley de Seguridad Fronteriza” por la legislatura controlada por el Partido Republicano de Arizona, se incluyó en la boleta electoral para alentar la participación de los votantes racistas de extrema derecha que esperan que también voten por Trump y otros candidatos de MAGA.

También pretende infundir miedo en las comunidades inmigrantes y fronterizas, promover la discriminación racial y permitir una vigilancia policial excesiva y racista de determinadas comunidades.

La Propuesta 314 es simplemente otra versión de la draconiana y racista SB1070, que fue aprobada por la legislatura en 2010 desafiando la oposición masiva dentro del estado y los llamados a boicotear a Arizona desde todo el país. La mayor parte de la SB 1070 fue finalmente derogada por inconstitucional por los tribunales estatales y federales, pero ahora los republicanos están de nuevo en acción.

Si se aprueba, la Propuesta 314 permitirá a la policía local arrestar a las personas que sospeche que han cruzado la frontera “ilegalmente” entre los puertos de entrada si estas personas no pueden demostrar su ciudadanía o residencia legal. “Cualquier persona sospechosa” generalmente significa cualquier persona de piel oscura o negra, incluida la gran población mexicano-estadounidense de Arizona y los indígenas estadounidenses cuyas familias han vivido aquí durante miles de años.

La propuesta no tiene ninguna disposición que regule cómo la policía puede determinar a quién se puede detener y pedir documentos.

La medida ha sido criticada por los dos obispos católicos de Arizona, líderes religiosos de muchas denominaciones, la Asociación de Educación de Arizona, la AFL-CIO, funcionarios electos demócratas y funcionarios encargados de hacer cumplir la ley de las comunidades fronterizas.

En su intervención en la manifestación de Tucson, la organizadora Isabel García señaló que “son las políticas antihumanas de nuestro gobierno de apoyar guerras, sanciones económicas y el cambio climático las que impulsan a la gente a inmigrar”.

El líder de Arizona Jobs with Justice, Steven Valencia, alentó una lucha organizada para derrotar la Propuesta 314 y enfatizó que los trabajadores que pueden no tener derecho a votar aún tienen el poder del movimiento laboral.

Otros oradores destacaron el peligro que representa la Propuesta 314 para la economía estadounidense, que necesita un aumento en la oferta laboral y no medidas desestabilizadoras de trabajadores.

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