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Vanishing act: The culture wars make small Michigan towns smaller

By G. V. Bourgeois and Noah Dollar

ALPENA, Mich.—“There was a lady who would take pictures of the library staff, put the pictures online, called them groomers,” said Diane O’Connor, a resident of Alpena, a little Michigan town situated right on the coast of Lake Huron. She told *People’s World* that this woman would sit outside the town’s library almost every day in a van plastered with signs that accused the staff of “Library Grooming” and depicted them passing off books labelled “X-Rated” to young children.

The money and manpower fueling these intimidation tactics come from the [NE MI League of Conservative Education](#). While this organization sounds like it would be right at home in a town where straight party ticket votes for Republicans outnumber Democrats by [over 2-to-1](#), their calls to shutter the community library have earned them few friends.

[74%](#) of the Alpena Public Library’s annual budget rests on a local tax levy, which provides the town with essential services. “There are homeschoolers that totally depend on the library for educational materials,” continued O’Connor. Once the League’s “Vote NO on Library Grooming” signs popped up in a few yards across town, alleging that the library did not deserve to keep their funding if they would not ban books that the League frowned upon, (namely works that mention sex and/or reproductive health), O’Connor and other concerned citizens canvassed with the Friends of the Alpena Library to oppose the three-quarter budget slash.

The Friends’ efforts paid off, and the millage preserving the Library’s funding [passed](#) with 59% of the vote. Diane and her colleagues were overjoyed. “Our library is outstanding, it’s like a jewel in our town, and people recognize that,” she said. “Although it’s very conservative here [in Alpena], there is a bridge too far.”

This display of bipartisan support did not deter the League; [League member Monica Dziesinski](#) currently sits on the local Board of Education and uses her position to propose and endorse seemingly outlandish measures, like adopting a [Fairview Area Schools policy](#) that would dictate student bathroom usage based on “the biological condition of being male or female as determined at birth based on physical differences, or, when necessary, at the chromosomal level.”

Students, parents, and other community members made their concerns for the measure known, as well as their concerns for what was left off the docket. At a March school board [meeting](#), local high schooler Colin Hainstock characterized the bathroom initiative “more as a political stunt than a genuine effort to improve student well-being.”

Resident Diane Bower seemed to speak for many when she said, “There’s been no reports of problems from administrators, you’ve been told many times that there are gender neutral bathrooms available to anyone [who] wants privacy ... when are you going to start talking about student achievement and measurable outcomes?”

Resident Ryan French stressed Bowers’s final point with a few of his own. “What are we talking about tonight?,” he asked. “Bathrooms and locker rooms. And what does last month’s agenda have? Banning books.



Every second we debate these subjects is a second not spent debating how to prepare our children for college or a job after school, or improve the reputation of our schools for recruiting businesses to our community.”

After the repeated and urgent calls for community welfare, board member Monica Dziesinski suggested [tabling the discussion](#) for their next workshop meeting.

Southwest Michigan

Alpena is not the only small Michigan community fighting initiatives such as these; across the state, at the Indiana border, residents of a town called Niles are battling away [Moms for Liberty](#) and the 1776 Project as they fight to control the local schools and legislature.

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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.

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Michigan towns smaller

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Moms for Liberty describes itself as an advocacy group for parents, while the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) states the organization is “a far-right organization that engages in anti-student inclusion activities and self-identifies as part of the modern parental rights movement.” The 1776 Project PAC states on its website that it supports “reform-minded conservatives who oppose political indoctrination.”

“They’ve been attacking the public school system through the school boards, trying to ban books in the Brandywine school district and other smaller districts,” said Angela Jones, who recently ran for office as the Representative for Michigan’s 37th district. “They were successful and then they weren’t—the parents fought back.”

Jones lost her race to sitting Representative Brad Paquette, who calls library books about transgender teenagers “pornographic materials” and has tried to make gender-affirming care a felony—two positions among many that ignore his own constituents’ views.

Another recent display of Paquette’s constituent neglect involves HB4140, his proposal seeking to repeal the “Extreme Risk Protection Order Act.” This Act, commonly called a “red flag law,” allows courts to accept petitions from family and police that would declare someone a danger to themselves or others and restrict their access to guns for an established period of time.

The legislation he’s trying to repeal is incredibly popular; polling conducted by the APM Research Lab in 2019 indicated that over 75% of Americans supported family-initiated ERPOs, and Gallup polling from 2023 showed that only 12% of Americans supported deregulating guns in any capacity.

In what could be seen as another direct attack on popular sentiment, Paquette joined with nearly a dozen Republican lawmakers in Michigan to petition the U.S. Supreme Court to declare several successful ballot measures on election laws unconstitutional because they were approved via direct vote rather than Representative votes.

Paquette broadcasts neither his fight to repeal incredibly popular gun control legislation, nor his efforts to strip Michiganders of their rights to participate in the legislative process. His very active Twitter page is instead full of declarations like “Gender theory is a legitimate threat to every Christian and conservative family as it seeks to divide parents and their children.”

Jones had some thoughts on Paquette and his style of politicking: “It is so enraging to hear these ‘solutions’ to problems that don’t exist. It’s a smokescreen, so we’re not paying attention to them systematically dismantling our protections, our constitution. It’s a distraction.”

Who loses?

With such pressing issues as books and bathrooms, it is easy to overlook the fact that both Alpena and Niles saw major production plant closures within a month of each other.

When Decorative Panels International closed in Alpena in February of 2024, they laid off more than 150 employees overnight. Security escorted workers out of the plant at around 4:00 am and barred those who had not yet heard about the layoffs from entering the next morning.

In March of that same year, the National Standard production plant in Niles closed and laid off 84 people, 51 of whom were AFL-CIO union laborers.

A business owner next door to National Standard maligned the shutdown by telling WSBT, “Every time we lose an industry around town, it affects our bottom line. That’s more income that’s just not available to people ... I think it’ll have a drastic effect on a little town here.”

Rather than addressing this blow to the town’s economy, Paquette posted about an unrelated bill attempting to bar minors from accessing pornographic websites. It is no wonder that the AFL-CIO gave him a rating of 3.8%.

Union members aren’t the only Michiganders unhappy with Paquette’s priorities; recently, the politician faced contention at some town-hall-style library gatherings where, by his own admission, “most were worried about cuts at the federal government.”

Ryan K, a Niles resident who attended one of these gatherings, told *People’s World*, “Rent is almost double of what I was paying when I moved here in 2008, and it’s becoming difficult to afford living in the area. Many people at the town hall agreed with me on this, but Brad didn’t speak to it at all.”

This coming election will see Paquette defending his seat against two opponents: Gerik Maverick, a newcomer, and Angela Jones, a second-time runner. Neither candidate is backed or financed by a major party, but both desperately want to address the community concerns that the incumbent routinely ignores.

Maverick put it bluntly: “Government, when it’s working well, is representative of working people and their views and wants and needs ... When it comes to jobs going away, or workers’ rights, Brad doesn’t have an answer.”

This unresponsiveness is, seemingly, by design. Far-Right politicians in small towns across the country work to divide people based on superficial markers like race or gender identity, and while neighbors fight amongst themselves for who deserves to live undisturbed and who needs to be monitored, large private companies quietly cut losses, pack up, and move onto bigger, more profitable ventures.

“I thought people needed to know what the hell is happening,” said Jones to *People’s World* about her first campaign. “I focused on educating on policy and the whys: why is the cost of housing going up? These are the policies that, while we’re fighting a culture war, allow private equity to suck up all the resources in small communities.”

Jones’s ambitions touch on what is becoming a national trend: public services are defunded in the name of public good; businesses close once the infrastructure meant to support their workers and clientele falls apart; community wealth dries up alongside the jobs; landlords vying for their last chance at a return on investments hike up the rent in their properties until people are priced out of their neighborhoods altogether.

Entire towns get scrapped for parts, all in the name of squeezing more money and more power into fewer places and fewer pairs of hands.

How to win

Perhaps Diane O’Connor, friend of the Alpena Library, best described the situation: “...these extremist views are the minority. But they’re vocal, and they’re funded and they’re well-organized, and the more moderate people don’t react to them soon enough—everybody has to speak out.”

It could be argued that fledgling small-town organizers and initiatives could learn from larger groups in larger cities, like United Auto Workers (UAW); reporters at *People’s World* have documented the group’s successes in negotiating with Stellantis, a car manufacturer that has agreed to keep production in Detroit rather than outsourcing to Canada, reopen a plant in Belvidere, and reinvest in existing facilities in Indiana and Ohio.

It would seem that the culture war is not a battle, but a magic show. Like a beautiful assistant, it distracts the audience while ultra-conservatives hide doves in their shirts and pretend to produce them out of thin air.

The UAW’s efforts and organizing tactics have now revitalized thousands of jobs across the Midwest. UAW President Shawn Fain makes their strategy clear:

“We fight for a political program that serves humanity, not the inhumane interest of the wealthy and corporate greed.

Part of that means not falling for division...they act like how you live your life or your gender identity is a threat to the person on the assembly line next to you or the work site next to you.

They talk about who you love, who you marry, which bathroom you use, so they don't have to talk about who you work for, where the profits go, and who benefits."

Trump's racist terror campaign must end now!

By Immigrant Rights Subcommittee Of The Political Action Commission, CPUSA

Immigrants, whether documented or undocumented, are facing summary deportation and imprisonment without judicial recourse. The Communist Party USA condemns these attacks in the strongest possible terms and stands with all people resisting the Trump injustices — especially with immigrant workers, students, and their communities, which are the focus of the attacks today. We call on everyone to engage in a determined struggle to bring Trump's racist terror campaign to an abrupt end.

Trump and MAGA's lawless campaign against immigrant communities and student activists represents something new and extremely dangerous in the life of this country. It is the opening salvo of the administration's wider goal: to do away entirely with due process, rule of law, and all democratic rights won through struggle, including the constitutional rights and freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment. Unless rebuffed by a powerful, working-class-led mass movement, it will be followed by wider attacks on union organizers, civil rights leaders, peace and environmental activists, and all those involved in struggles for inclusive democracy, equality, and economic security for working people — citizens and non-citizens alike.

Trump, MAGA, and their fascistic billionaire backers imagine that by trampling on the rights of those with the least legal protections, they will be able to begin the process of eliminating the legal rights of all. This highlights the danger that racism and national chauvinism have always represented throughout the history of this country.

The administration is attempting to hide the lawless nature of its attacks with an appeal to an irrelevant 18th Century law. The Alien Enemies Act of 1798 was part of the Alien and Sedition Acts passed during the presidency of John Adams, which gives the president power to detain non-citizens during times of war, invasion, or predatory incursion. Trump's appeal to this law is a ruse: while the U.S. is engaged in various aggressive actions against other countries around the world, Congress has not declared war on any country of the Americas or anywhere else, nor is the U.S. undergoing an invasion.

When Tom Homan declared, "I don't care what the judges think," and when Trump said he would like to be able to send U.S. citizens to the concentration camp in El Salvador, they made clear with their own words the contempt this administration has for people's democratic rights and the U.S. Constitution.

The sending of Kilmar Abrego Garcia to El Salvador, allegedly by mistake, and the refusal of the administration refusal to correct its "error" on the grounds that this would violate Salvadoran sovereignty further demonstrates the administration's criminality — to say nothing of its hypocrisy, given how the U.S. has treated the national sovereignty of so many countries in the past.

The rounding up of Rumeysa Ozturk by plainclothes masked officers — in a word, by secret police — on the streets of Somerville, Mass. for exercising her right to free speech further demonstrates this criminality. So does the case of Khalil Mahmoud, a green card holder abducted from his apartment building in New York, held in detention and now ordered deported.

Together with the targeting of immigrant farmworker and organizer Alfredo "Lelo" Juarez Zeferino, these cases also highlight the administration's intent to initiate wider repression against all those engaged in workplace, community, and campus struggles for workers' rights, civil rights, equality, and peace.



Further, the Trump administration has ICE accessing tax documents of undocumented immigrants who filed with a special Tax ID number (ITIN) provided to them by the government itself. Will the DACA community be next? DHS is already threatening people to self-deport. On April 11, thousands of people, many still in immigration court processes, got an email or text telling them to report themselves and leave the country, using the fear of detention and fines.

We have heard the idea expressed by Marco Rubio that the government can arrest and deport people because their ideas are "aligned" with those of a terrorist organization, e.g. Hamas. Who is next? "Aligned" can mean anything the government claims it means, such as expressing favorable opinions about a country that the U.S. has defined as a "state sponsor of terrorism," or for espousing socialist or communist ideas. Given MAGA's history of defining even the likes of Biden and Harris as socialists and Marxists, this is a net wide enough to disappear anyone involved in actions of resistance. Meanwhile, we hear Rubio's accusation that certain people can be deported if their presence here is an obstruction to the goals of U.S. foreign policy.

These many examples show the urgency of the situation in the U.S. What can we do? Ten national unions have [issued](#) a joint statement demanding the release of immigrant workers snatched by ICE. This is a development which must be supported and which we can build on.

Here are some action steps for CPUSA Districts and clubs:

- Unite with labor, socially conscious religious congregations, and NGOs. Have a 'Here is what every club should do' list.
- Become aware of what's going on in your area.
- Find out what immigrant rights organizations and coalitions are doing in your area and what you can do to help.
- Make a list of pro bono lawyers in your area and meet with them.
- Liaise with NLG's [National Immigration Project](#), [ACLU](#), [Quakers](#) / [AFSC](#), and [AILA](#).
- Bolster sanctuary city work.
- Encourage clubs to work on breaking 287(g) agreements, which allow the Department of Homeland Security to enter into agreements with local law enforcement, deputizing police to act as ICE agents.
- May Day events: encourage organizing and participation.

Cuba tackles energy crisis by promoting power of the sun

By Daniel Delgado

Cuba is much more than a victim of U.S. economic attacks. Rather than accepting its victimization at the hands by fossil fuel monopolies putting the squeeze on all aspects of life on the island, it is aggressively pursuing a transition toward renewable energy sources.

The national plan prioritizes solar, wind, hydroelectric, and biomass energy to reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels and stabilize the energy system. The energy stabilization program also includes the repair of the country's thermoelectric plants, which have been the backbone of the current national system.

In an interview, Minister of Energy and Mines Vicente de la O Levy detailed a comprehensive strategy that combines short-term projects with a long-term vision.

The economic burden of relying on imported fossil fuels is a primary driver behind Cuba's accelerated push toward renewable energy. The decline in domestic oil production—which dropped drastically in 2024—and the deterioration of thermoelectric plants make the expansion of renewable sources even more essential.

"We have always been dependent on fuel imports, to the point that the oil bill is Cuba's largest; more than food, more than medicine, more than everything," explained Minister de la O Levy.

By the end of 2020, Cuba had nearly 300 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy. Chinese and Cuban authorities signed an investment agreement to jointly implement a project to expand the use of renewable energy.

In the short term, the investment project consists of installing 1,000 MW of solar photovoltaic energy by 2025, distributed across 46 solar parks throughout the country. By 2025, 200 MW of battery systems will be installed to store solar energy, key to stabilizing the grid. Containers are already in Cuba, awaiting assembly.

"Why are the panels becoming the largest project? First, because the investments are less expensive, because they are completed more quickly, because they can be distributed throughout the country... If we build 21 MW parks and distribute them across 15 provinces, at an average of three per province, then it's an economic effort that can be made territorially... and that's what's happening right now, an open investment process throughout the country," the minister said.

The second 1,000 MW contract, extended until 2032, and the investment in technical training for high-tech repairs ensure the project's sustainability and long-term maintenance.

Consumed quality fuel from former Soviet Union

"Cuban thermoelectric plants, by design, consumed excellent-quality fuel, mostly from the former Soviet Union... And when the Soviet Union disappeared, we lost all of that fuel overnight," the minister explained.

The Torricelli Act, passed by the U.S. Congress, was signed into law by former President George Bush on October 23, 1992.

In the commercial sphere, the Torricelli Act established a ban on trade between subsidiaries of U.S. companies established in third countries and Cuba, and a ban on ships entering Cuban ports for commercial purposes from calling at ports in the United States or its possessions for 180 days after leaving the Cuban port.

"It was conceived as the final blow to the Cuban Revolution, an extremely opportunistic maneuver to suffocate the people at the precise moment they faced the challenge of surviving as a nation," said former editor of Granma Internacional, Raúl Antonio Capote. Its general objective was to overthrow the Revolution in the context of drastic changes in Cuba's economy because of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.



"We were forced to begin converting the thermoelectric plants, with a completely Cuban innovation, so they could consume domestic crude oil. That saved us, but it came at a great sacrifice," commented O Levy.

Cuban crude oil has very high sulfur and vanadium contents. When burned in boilers, they generate sulfuric acid, which accelerates corrosion. For this reason, "the lifespan of the thermoelectric units was shortened," he said.

The decline in oil production and the lack of finance to import the millions of tons needed by the economy make it "inexorable to move forward with reducing the consumption of this fuel."

"That's when we decided to move forward with photovoltaic solar panels, and more than with panels, with expanding plans for the use of renewable energy sources," since it was not viable "to make investments that require more fuel; although increasing fuel production is also a priority," stated de O Levy.

"What's certain is that when we install 1,000 MW of renewable energy, we'll be saving fuel, which we can use for generation at night," he explained.

According to China's ambassador to Cuba, Hua Xin, this project will help reduce fossil fuel consumption by approximately 18,000 tons per year.

Includes variety of initiatives

The national plan encompasses a wide variety of initiatives. Plans to complete the construction of the Herradura I wind farm in Las Tunas, where 22 of the planned 33 generators (33 MW) have been installed, point to progress towards diversification. "We think we will have wind turbines operating this year and complete everything pending in the first quarter of next year," O Levy said.

There are approximately 170 hydropower generation units in the country that "have a level of availability that isn't bad." Some of the large ones need repairs, "but that has been a resounding success; especially because the people who directly benefit from them take care of them... the truth is that there is a high percentage of availability. And that serves many homes in the country," said the minister.

He also mentioned that the repairs will be addressed as part of the system's recovery process and the transition to renewable energy sources, ensuring that hydropower will continue to be a front for expansion in the coming years.

"With the inputs from the Herradura 1 wind farm, the resources will be provided to complete the small hydroelectric plant at the Alacranes dam," he said.

In addition to investment in renewable energy, this year there is a process in place for recovering thermal power plants and investing in expanding natural gas generation.

Cuba tackles energy crisis by promoting power of the sun

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Challenges posed by Blockade

The minister acknowledged obstacles on the path to renewable energy and maintenance of the national electricity system, such as delays in the arrival of materials due to shipping restrictions imposed by the U.S. blockade.

In April 2019, Washington sanctioned two companies and 34 vessels transporting Venezuelan oil to Cuba.

Cuban journalist and researcher Raul Capote explained that on June 4, 2019, the administration of President Trump announced an additional package of measures “with which it reversed the incipient thaw between Washington and Havana that occurred during the final stages of Barack Obama’s administration.”

“Due to the strict application of the Helms-Burton Act, in April 2020, four shipping companies were sued in Miami for using Cuban port facilities nationalized after 1959. In 2019 alone, 53 vessels and 27 companies from different countries were blacklisted for bringing oil to Cuba,” Capote explained.

The hostility of the United States government has made maritime transportation to Cuba more expensive due to the extension of itineraries. Expenses have also increased because carriers are demanding higher freight rates due to the pressure exerted on them by the US authorities.

“Containers bound for Cuba disappeared... there was no way to acquire containers to bring in the merchandise. We had to go out and buy containers.

And after we found that solution, there were no ships that called at Cuban ports, and we had to hire and lease ships, and have our own ships, so as not to halt this investment process,” the minister explained regarding the materials and resources needed to advance the project of renewable energy sources.

All this logistical complication delayed the arrival of resources to Cuba, but “between the resources currently in Cuba and what is at sea, it amounts to 100% of what was planned for these projects,” said de la O Levy.

“These measures have led to a low availability of vessels for transporting cargo to Cuba, but they have not managed to break the spirit of the Cuban people,” Capote said.

The internal schedule remains in place: six new solar parks were synchronized in March, and the Carlos Manuel de Céspedes thermoelectric plant in Cienfuegos will restart operations this month.

Cuba will exceed its official goal for 2030, according to O Levy. More than 24% of the electricity produced in the country will come from renewable energy sources.

However, he warned, “this does not mean that blackouts will be completely eliminated. This is a gradual, costly, investment-intensive process for which there is light at the end of the tunnel.”

The energy transition not only seeks to mitigate the electricity crisis but also free up resources for social programs. In a context of sanctions and shortages, the plan reflects Cuba’s determination to move toward energy sovereignty despite a path fraught with challenges.

As GOP cheers, Trump throws student loan borrowers to financial wolves

By Mark Gruenberg

WASHINGTON —To the cheers of the House’s ruling Republicans, who hated forgiving student loans—and thus taking money out of financiers’ hands—even during the coronavirus-caused depression, GOP President Donald Trump will throw an estimated five million student loan borrowers to the financial wolves.

The decision, to be implemented starting May 5, says borrowers who are behind on their payments will start receiving collection notices from the U.S. Treasury. If they still stay behind—even if they’re paying something—Treasury will garnish their wages, yank tax refunds and cut Social Security benefit offsets.

And then it’ll throw them on the “mercy,” or lack of it, of debt collectors.

Trump’s action is directly opposite of what Democratic President Joe Biden tried to do administratively until Republican-named federal judges in deep-red states said he couldn’t: Forgive the loans to students who, due to the pandemic and through no fault of their own, fell behind because they had lost their jobs.

With Pell Grants, the other major form of federal college and university student aid, not keeping up with the rising costs of college and graduate schools, more and more students have been forced to borrow instead. The coronavirus depression put them in the financial crunch.

Trump, and the congressional GOP, thinks the students who are behind are ripping taxpayers off. Billionaires who don’t pay their fair share of taxes are, in their estimation, not a problem at all.

Senator steps forward

One top lawmaker, Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., former chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and now the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee—which is actually supposed to help decide student loan spending—say the students are not cheating taxpayers. So does Mike Pierce, executive director of the Student Borrower Protection Center.



“Trump is robbing Americans of the promised student debt relief they are owed under law while he demands trillions in tax cuts for billionaires like himself. It’s as outrageous as it is un-American,” said Murray.

Her statement also covers another student loan forgiveness program Trump is deep-sixing, forgiving debt for graduates who go on to public service careers as Teachers, Fire Fighters and EMTs.

Pierce not only denounced Trump’s edict, his center noted Trump’s Education Department is slow-walking current student loan forgiveness applications.

Left unsaid: Trump, through his chainsaw-wielding multibillionaire Elon Musk, fired half of the department’s headquarters staff. Many of them processed loan applications.

“For five million people in default, federal law gives borrowers a way out of default and the right to make loan payments they can afford,” said Pierce. “Since February, Donald Trump and Linda McMahon”—a GOP big giver who’s Trump’s Education Secretary—“blocked these borrowers’ path out of default and are now feeding them into the maw of the government debt collection machine.

This is cruel, unnecessary, and will further fan the flames of economic chaos for working families.”

Pierce’s center explained that beginning in February, Trump “chose to block access to affordable student loan payments by removing the Income-Driven Repayment (IDR) and consolidation application” students used to seek forgiveness. It also “secretly ordered student loan servicers,” the financiers, “to halt all application processing.

“Prior to the Trump Administration’s decision to remove IDR applications and halt application processing, more than a million borrowers remained in a backlog waiting for their application to be processed.

Only after pressure from a lawsuit filed by SBPC and on behalf of the Teachers/AFT did the administration restore the application.

“To date, the administration has yet to begin widespread processing of IDR applications, which has forced borrowers to remain in economic limbo.”

The Republican attitude towards Trump’s move was summed up by House Education and the Workforce Chairman Tin Walberg, R-Mich. He wrapped himself in the mantle of taxpayers’ protector.

“The Biden-Harris administration’s misguided student loan policies forced hardworking taxpayers to cover the cost of the loan repayment freeze—even if they never went to college or took out student loans. Congress mandated payments resume in 2023, but the Biden-Harris administration willfully and unconstitutionally ignored this mandate, creating chaos in the student loan repayment system and abusing Americans’ tax dollars,” Walberg charged, without evidence.

“It is time for repayment to resume while we work to address skyrocketing, opaque college costs and restore stability in the student loan repayment system. President Trump is getting back to the letter of the law,” Walberg proclaimed.

Earth Day features marches, teach-ins, opposition to Trump EPA cuts

By Special to People’s World

WASHINGTON—Earth Day 2025 is marked today in the U.S. with marches and teach-ins nationwide, many sponsored by the Sunrise Movement against the oligarchs and millionaires who activists say are poisoning the planet. They are calling out what they say are the pro-pollution policies of the Trump administration.

The theme of the marches is denunciation of what organizers say is an “assault on our climate.” The Sunrise movement posted a graphic showing Trump with a “see-no-evil” blindfold and flanked by billionaires, including Tesla czar Elon Musk and Amazon owner Jeff Bezos.

“Donald Trump just took office, and once again he’s giving the richest people in the country even more money and even more power, while they jack up the rent and burn the planet. It’s time to take down the oligarchy,” Sunrise said, urging people to sign up for teach-ins.

And while Trump issued a proclamation about Earth Day, he couldn’t resist saying at the end that “Economic growth enhances environmental protection.

“We can and must protect our environment without harming America’s working families,” he piously proclaimed—while, unions and environmental advocates said, he’s doing the opposite. “My administration is reducing unnecessary burdens on American workers and American companies, while being mindful that our actions must also protect the environment.”

“Unnecessary burdens” are code words for “environmental regulations.”

Trump also praised “rigorous science,” to combine those goals, without mentioning that his own Environmental Protection Agency just fired most of its scientists as part of the Musk-Trump cuts of government workers and programs.

But if Trump oozed hypocrisy on April 22, the Government Employees, which represents all EPA workers, called him out on it the day before. Joyce Howell, vice president of AFGE Local 238 particularly noted Trump and his EPA chief, former Long Island GOP Rep. Lee Zeldin, chose that eve of Earth Day to eliminate the agency’s Office of Environmental Justice.

That office, she explained, was created to ensure the low-income communities, many of them communities of color, most hurt by ecological disasters and pollution—think the “cancer alleys” south of New Orleans and from Houston to Galveston, Texas—got special attention for cleanups and anti-pollution controls.

“The Office of Environmental Justice was established to ensure no community is left behind, and no one is subjected to an unsafe environment simply because of their zip code,” said Howell.



“Decimating our agency and Environmental Justice workforce goes against our oath to protect human health and to keep our planet healthy and habitable for future generations.

“This is not just a ‘reduction in force. This is a reduction in our ability to keep Americans safe. Many Americans who are impacted most by environmental dangers live in lower-income areas, where they face higher exposure to air pollution and environmental contaminants.

“Eliminating jobs that ensure these communities get the same access to clean air and clean drinking water afforded to others goes to show this administration has no interest in protecting the American people.

“We demand Zeldin stand by the oath he took and support the very people who are doing the work to keep Americans healthy and safe.”

The BlueGreen Alliance, a coalition of green groups and unions, led by the Steelworkers, castigated Trump two weeks before Earth Day for an executive order saying his administration would move against states, notably California, with tougher environmental controls. Those controls “address climate change, environmental justice, carbon or greenhouse gas emissions, cap and trade or carbon tax initiatives, and more,” the alliance said.

“This latest action in the seemingly unending string of blatantly unconstitutional moves by the Trump administration is a direct attack on the will of voters nationwide,” said BlueGreen Executive Director Jason Walsh.

“Trump is trying to impose a one-size-fits-all energy policy designed with the sole intention of making the rich richer and everybody else sick and poor. Trump’s plan would eliminate local jobs, decimate the environment, and have devastating impacts on public health.”

Sunrise and other movements aren’t waiting for politicians to act. Indeed, one goal of the movement is to push officeholders, including may Democrats, into taking tough stands for the environment and against pollution.

Protesters marched not just for Earth Day but against the congressional Republicans’ budget blue print, which would obliterate the pro-green programs of the prior Biden administration. Doing so would “roll back the very clean energy policies that have proven so transformational to unlocking the next generation of the United States’ economy,” the Union of Concerned Scientists said.

Earth Day activists noted Biden’s clean energy legislation created “280 clean energy projects across 44 states, generating \$282 billion in investments and nearly 175,000 jobs.” Many are in Republican-led “red” states.

The Earth Day activists also demanded defense of workers and democracy, lower costs for communities, making polluters pay—meaning higher taxes on oil companies—and investing that revenue into clean energy.

As for Trump, his executive order earlier in the month put restoration of coal production atop his energy list. Environmentalists note coal, is the leading source of greenhouse gas emissions that produce global warming.

Under the radar, Trump wages war on children

By Eli Hager

The clear-cutting across the federal government under President Donald Trump has been dramatic, with mass terminations, the suspension of decades-old programs and the neutering of entire agencies. But this spectacle has obscured a series of moves by the administration that could profoundly harm some of the most vulnerable people in the U.S.: children.

Consider: The staff of a program that helps millions of poor families keep the electricity on, in part so that babies don’t die from extreme heat or cold, have all been fired. The federal office that oversees the enforcement of child support payments has been hollowed out. Head Start preschools, which teach toddlers their ABCs and feed them healthy meals, will likely be forced to shut down en masse, some as soon as May 1. And funding for investigating child sexual abuse and internet crimes against children; responding to reports of missing children; and preventing youth violence has been withdrawn indefinitely.

The administration has laid off thousands of workers from coast to coast who had supervised education, child care, child support and child protective services systems, and it has blocked or delayed billions of dollars in funding for things like school meals and school safety.

These stark reductions have been centered in little-known children’s services offices housed within behemoth agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice, offices with names like the Children’s Bureau, the Office of Family Assistance and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. In part because of their obscurity, the slashing has gone relatively overlooked.

“Everyone’s been talking about what the Trump administration and DOGE have been doing, but no one seems to be talking about how, in a lot of ways, it’s been an assault on kids,” said Bruce Lesley, president of advocacy group First Focus on Children. He added that “the one cabinet agency that they’re fully decimating is the kid one,” referring to Trump’s goal of shuttering the Department of Education. Already, some 2,000 staffers there have lost or left their jobs.

The impact of these cuts will be felt far beyond Washington, rippling out to thousands of state and local agencies serving children nationwide.

The Department of Education, for instance, has rescinded as much as \$3 billion in pandemic-recovery funding for schools, which would have been used for everything from tutoring services for Maryland students who’ve fallen behind to making the air safer to breathe and the water safer to drink for students in Flint, Michigan. The Department of Agriculture, meanwhile, has canceled \$660 million in promised grants to farm-to-school programs, which had been providing fresh meat and produce to school cafeterias while supporting small farmers.



At the Department of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the agency’s secretary, has dismissed all of the staff that had distributed \$1.7 billion annually in Social Services Block Grant money, which many states have long depended on to be able to run their child welfare, foster care and adoption systems, including birth family visitation, caseworker training and more. The grants also fund day care, counseling and disability services for kids. (It is unclear whether anyone remains at HHS who would know how to get all of that funding out the door or whether it will now be administered by White House appointees.)

Head Start will be especially affected in the wake of Kennedy’s mass firings of Office of Head Start regional staff and news that the president’s draft budget proposes eliminating funding for the program altogether. That would leave one million working-class parents who rely on Head Start not only for pre-K education but also for child care, particularly in rural areas, with nowhere to send their kids during the day.

Some local Head Start programs are already having to close their doors, and many program directors are encountering impediments to spending their current budgets. When they seek reimbursement after paying their teachers or purchasing school supplies, they’re being directed to a new “Defend the Spend” DOGE website asking them to “justify” each item, even though the spending has already been appropriated by Congress and audited by nonpartisan civil servants.

Next on the chopping block, it appears, is Medicaid, which serves children in greater numbers than any other age group. If Republicans in Congress go through with the cuts they’ve been discussing, and Trump signs those cuts into law, kids from lower- and middle-class families across the U.S. will lose access to health care at their schools, in foster care, for their disabilities or for cancer treatment.

The Trump administration has touted the president's record of "protecting America's children," asserting in a [recent post](#) that Trump will "never stop fighting for their right to a healthy, productive upbringing." The statement listed five examples of that commitment. Four were related to transgender issues (including making it U.S. government policy that there are only two sexes and keeping trans athletes out of women's sports); the other was a ban on COVID-19 vaccine mandates at schools that receive federal funding.

The White House, and multiple agencies, declined to respond to most of ProPublica's questions. Madi Biedermann, a Department of Education spokesperson, addressed the elimination of pandemic recovery funding, saying that "COVID is over"; that the Biden administration established an "irresponsible precedent" by extending the deadline to spend these funds (and exceeding their original purpose); and that the department will consider extensions if individual projects show a clear connection between COVID and student learning.

An HHS spokesperson, in response to ProPublica's questions about cuts to children's programs across that agency, sent a short statement saying that the department, guided by Trump, is restructuring with a focus on cutting wasteful bureaucracy. The offices serving children, the statement said, will be merged into a newly established "Administration for Healthy America."

Programs that serve kids [have historically](#) fared the worst when those in power are looking for ways to cut the budget. That's in part because kids can't vote, and they typically don't belong to political organizations. International aid groups, another constituency [devastated by](#) Trump's policy agenda, also can't say that they represent many U.S. voters.

This dynamic may be part of why cuts on the health side of the Department of Health and Human Services — layoffs of doctors, medical researchers and the like — [have received more political and press attention](#) than those on the human services side, where the Administration for Children and Families is located. That's where you can find the Office of Child Support Services, the Office of Head Start, the Office of Child Care (which promotes minimum health and safety standards for child care programs nationally and helps states reduce the cost of child care for families), the Office of Family Assistance (which helps states administer direct aid to lower-income parents and kids), the Children's Bureau (which oversees child protective services, foster care and adoption) and the Family and Youth Services Bureau (which aids runaway and homeless teens, among others).

All told, these programs have seen their staffs cut from roughly 2,400 employees as of January to 1,500 now, according to a shared Google document that is being regularly updated by former HHS officials. (Neither the White House nor agency leadership have released the exact numbers of cuts.)

Those losses have been most acutely felt in the agency's regional offices, five out of 10 of which — covering over 20 states — have been closed by the Trump administration. They were dissolved this month without notice to their own employees or to the local providers they worked with.

It was these outposts that had monitored Head Start programs to make sure that they had fences around their playgrounds, gates at the top of their stairs and enough staffing to keep an eye on even the most energetic little ones. It was also the regional staff who had helped state child support programs modernize their computer systems and navigate federal law. That allowed them, among other things, to be able to ["pass through"](#) more money to families instead of [depositing it in state coffers](#) to reimburse themselves for costs.

And it was the regional staff who'd had the relationships with tribal officials that allowed them to routinely work together to address child support, child care and child welfare challenges faced by Native families. Together, they had worked to overcome sometimes deep distrust of the federal government among tribal leaders, who may now have no one to ask for help with their children's programs other than political appointees in D.C.

In the wake of the regional office cuts, local child services program directors have no idea who in the federal government to call when they have urgent concerns, many told ProPublica.

"No one knows anything," said one state child support director, asking not to be named in order to speak candidly about the administration's actions. "We have no idea who will be auditing us."

"We're trying to be reassuring to our families," the official said, "but if the national system goes down, so does ours."

That national system includes the complex web of databases and technical support maintained and provided by the Office of Child Support Services at HHS, which helps states locate parents who owe child support in order to withhold part of their paychecks or otherwise obtain the money they owe, which is then sent to the parent who has custody of the child. Without this federal data and assistance, child support orders would have little way of being enforced across state lines.

For that reason, the Trump administration is making a risky gamble by slashing staffing at the federal child support office, said Vicki Turetsky, who headed that office under the Obama administration. She worries that the layoffs create a danger of system outages that would cause child support payments to be missed or delayed. ("That's a family's rent," she said.) The instability is compounded, she said, by DOGE's recent unexplained [move to access](#) a highly confidential national child support database.

But even if the worst doesn't come to pass, there will still be concrete consequences for the delivery of child support to families, Turetsky said.

The staff members who've been pushed out include those who'd helped manage complicated, outdated IT systems; without updates, these programs might over- or undershoot the amount of child support that a parent owes, misdirect the money or fail to give notice to the dad or mom about a change in the case.

When Liz Ryan departed as administrator of [the Department of Justice's juvenile division](#) in January, its website was flush with opportunities for state and local law enforcement as well as nonprofits to apply for federal funding for a myriad of initiatives that help children. There were funds for local police task forces that investigate child exploitation on the internet; for programs where abused children are interviewed by police and mental health professionals; and for court-appointed advocates for victimized kids. Grants were also available for mentoring programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

But the Trump administration removed those grant applications, which total over \$400 million in a typical year. And Ryan said there still hasn't been any communication, including in what used to be regular emails with grant recipients, many of whom she remains in touch with, about whether this congressionally approved money even still exists or whether some of it might eventually be made available again.

A spokesperson for the Office of Justice Programs within the DOJ said the agency is reviewing programs, policies and materials and "taking action as appropriate" in accordance with Trump's executive orders and guidance. When that review has been completed, local agencies and programs seeking grants will be notified.

Multiple nonprofits serving exploited children declined to speak on the record to ProPublica, fearing that doing so might undermine what chance they still had of getting potential grants.

"Look at what happened to the [law firms](#)," one official said, adding that time is running out to fund his program's services for victims of child abuse for the upcoming fiscal year.

"I never anticipated that programs and services and opportunities for young people wouldn't be funded at all by the federal government," Ryan said, adding that local children's organizations likely can't go to states, whose budgets [are already underwater](#), to make up the funding gap. "When you look at this alongside what they're doing at HHS and the Department of Education and to Medicaid, it's undercutting every single effort that we have to serve kids."

Chicago: Union leaders say capitalism doesn't like worker safety

By Brandon Chew

CHICAGO—Union representatives in Chicago are denouncing the Trump administration's gutting of a health agency that helps keep workers safe nationwide.

President Donald Trump's administration recently laid off about 850 of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's 1,000 employees. The layoffs have negatively impacted NIOSH programs, such as a firefighter cancer registry and a lab that certifies respirators. NIOSH is a part of the National Institutes of Health.

On April 21, the SEIU Healthcare in Chicago hosted a public discussion featuring several union representatives on how gutting NIOSH will impact not only workers in their respective industries but the wider public as well.

"The job these workers perform impacts workplaces everywhere. Their job is to keep us all safe," said James Connolly, the second vice president of the Chicago Federation of Labor.

"If we start rolling back science and the responsibilities that NIOSH has, if we take away critical research from NIOSH, we handcuff OSHA, those are people's lives," Connolly said. "They're either their lives right now, or they're lurking dangers that we're not looking to create solutions for going forward."

AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond opened the session by stressing the importance of putting "a human face" to job cuts with these public discussions.

"It's workers who wake this country up every morning and tuck this country to sleep at night. And we run programs and services with dedication and pride," Redmond said.

Telling their story

"It's important that workers tell their story to put a human face to the cuts and explain the work we do. These haphazard cuts, unthought of cuts, cuts that have not been vetted, cuts that have not been thought through, how these cuts reach far beyond the individual workers and their families, but ripple out and hit every sector of our society," Redmond said.

The public discussion included union leaders representing firefighters, construction workers, nurses, and more.

Patrick Cleary, the president of the Chicago Fire Fighters Union Local 2, encouraged people to contact their legislators and demand that NIOSH workers and their programs be reinstated.

Cleary said NIOSH has conducted studies to better understand how long firefighters can battle a fire while wearing certain personal protection equipment (PPE) without "baking" or "suffocating" as a result.

"These are very important programs that we use. When we want to change our gear, we use these studies to prove that what we're saying is correct," Cleary said.

Along with their concerns about NIOSH layoffs, speakers also voiced support for the work done by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

OSHA offices have come into the crosshairs of the Department of Government Efficiency's (DOGE) cuts in federal spending. DOGE recently announced it will close 11 OSHA field offices, including one in an area of Louisiana filled with fossil fuel and petrochemical plants nicknamed "Cancer Alley" for its impacts on workers and nearby residents.

DOGE is an initiative from President Trump to cut federal spending characterized as "waste, fraud, and abuse." It is headed by Elon Musk, the richest man on earth and a senior advisor to the president.



"I like efficiency as [much] as the next person. Who doesn't?" said Carlos Ginard, the assistant manager of the Chicago and Midwest Regional Joint Board of Workers United, a Service Employees sector.

"Instead of simply streamlining processes, the changes we are seeing have led to significant cuts to the federal workforce and vital support programs that many Workers United union members rely on," Ginard said.

"If something happens to firefighters, that directly affects my members, immediately," Ginard said. "With NIOSH and OSHA, all of our factories are safe because of the work you guys do. Capitalism does not like safety, it's too costly."

Ginard's sentiment that "capitalism does not like safety" was echoed by Anne Igoe, the director of the hospital division for [SEIU Healthcare Illinois](#).

Igoe highlighted the importance of NIOSH in that, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, "the likelihood of injury or illness resulting in days away from work is higher in hospitals than in construction or manufacturing."

Igoe said "chronic short staffing has worsened" this issue, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Hospital Health System leaders learned the wrong lesson during the pandemic, that they can further maximize profits when they cut staffing," Igoe said. "The lesson they learned during the pandemic is that when they had fewer healthcare workers, when it was harder to get healthcare workers, they saw profits."

Shortly after the discussion ended, Fred Redmond sat down with People's World for an interview. Along with collecting "testimony" from workers impacted by NIOSH cuts, Redmond told People's World he made plans to travel to Davenport, Iowa, to speak with workers about the Trump administration's immigration policies.

"We are in uncharted waters. We're at a place in this country where we have never been. This is the promotion of white supremacy to its highest levels," Redmond said of the Trump administration's immigration policies, specifically in regard to the deportation of [SMART union member Kilmar Abrego Garcia](#).

In his closing remarks, Redmond emphasized the importance of uniting working-class Americans regardless of political affiliation.

"Forget about your political party, whether you're a Democrat or a Republican. This is about right versus wrong," Redmond said.

"We have to hold America to its promise," Redmond said. "And we have to be willing to do whatever we need to do to make sure that we don't witness, in our lifetime, the destruction of democracy and the remaking of America [to] a country for billionaires by the billionaires. So that's our mission, to uphold the integrity of this country."

The community discussion was organized as part of Chicago Jobs with Justice's "Civil Servants Speak Out!" series.

The crime in Yemen is the U.S. bombing, not the leaks

By John Wojcik

The corporate media features stories this week about how Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth gave out top secret plans for bombing of Yemen to people unauthorized to hear them. Those same media fail, however, to mention the big issue involved—the fact that the U.S. bombing itself is a crime.

The war on Yemen, including the U.S. airstrikes and the humanitarian crisis they are causing, has obliterated the country's health care system and forced millions from the homes they received during the short-lived socialist years of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen from 1967 until the 1980's.

Since the U.S., Saudi, and Israeli-backed attacks and sanctions against the young republic resulted in the destruction of socialism, the Yemeni people have paid an awful price. The latest rounds of U.S. bombings are worsening the crisis in that country.

The bombing of Yemen blocks humanitarian aid, as did much of what Israel did, with U.S. supplied weapons, in Gaza. Bombings cut off fuel and water to the people. Children die when bombing raids create both starvation and disease in Yemen.

The bombing campaigns also cripple water treatment facilities that need electrical power. This hampers the ability to treat water that supplies the cities in South Yemen. Essentially the water available to the people then becomes poisonous. Having no choice, people drink it or ingest it in other ways, including when cooking food. The inability to treat water causes a flow of feces and sewage into the cities and towns, intensifying the outbreaks of disease.

The struggles of the Yemeni people continue, however. They can be expected to resist attacks from the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Israel and any of the NATO countries that join in the bombing and war-making against them.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is clearly a dangerous, lying man to have in charge of the Pentagon. Who can blame the Yemeni people, however, for considering as irrelevant whether Hegseth leaked information about what U.S. bombers were about to do.

For them, the critical truth is that the bombing by the U.S. and its allies must come to a halt. The job of the media in the U.S., a job they have not yet done, is to share that truth with the people of the U.S.

CHC sobre los vuelos de deportación ilícitos

By Especial para Mundo Popular

Washington, D.C. – Respecto a los reportajes recientes que indican que la administración Trump está por deportar a otro grupo de inmigrantes venezolanos a El Salvador bajo los auspicios del Alien Enemies Act, violando su derecho al debido proceso, el presidente del Caucus Hispano del Congreso (CHC por sus siglas en inglés), el Rep. Adriano Espaillat (NY-13) emitió el siguiente comunicado:

“Es vergonzoso que la administración actual siga ignorando a nuestras cortes – incluida la Suprema Corte. La administración le sigue negando el derecho a solicitar remedios legales a los individuos que busca deportar,” dijo el Rep. Espaillat.

“Para cumplir con las órdenes de la Suprema Corte, la administración debe detener cualquier vuelo de deportaciones bajo el Alien Enemies Act que tenga como destino El Salvador hasta que todos los pasajeros reciban su debido proceso. Nuestra constitución es clara: toda persona en este país tiene derecho al debido proceso. Las deportaciones sin debido proceso deben acabarse inmediatamente.

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