



625 Andover Park West, Suite 111  
Tukwila, WA 98188  
1-866-992-3892

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## Robby Stern showed us the way at the annual meeting! By Rosemary Thurston, Director



**Robby Stern**, President of Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA), at our annual meeting on May 14 in Tukwila talked at length about the state of Social Security and Medicare now – and what lies ahead for those programs.

He condemned **President Obama’s** offer in Social Security negotiations to change the calculation of the CPI to a “chained CPI” that would decrease the rate of inflation over time and thus result in a decrease in Social Security benefits.

As we are all aware, he said, “defined benefit pensions” are going away, which makes Social Security even more necessary now. Currently, the cap for paying into Social Security stops at \$113,700. Without any action, there would be a surplus up to 2033, and after that, he said, Social Security could continue paying out 75% of the benefits. If everyone paid the same 6.2%, however, higher earners would pay a fair share and strengthen Social Security.

In this regard, Robby suggested that if you haven’t seen “Scrap the Cap, We’re Moving In,” you should see it – it’s available on YouTube. This video advocates eliminating the income cap on earnings altogether.

The Social Security Death Benefit used to go to age 21 if a child were in college; it doesn’t now, Robby said. A surviving spouse receives about 50% of the deceased spouse’s benefits when one dies, and the surviving spouse must choose to keep his or her benefits or the spouse’s. Robby argued that a better choice would be 75% of the two benefits.

Ross Rieder, President  
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Roger Carlstrom, Editor

Merrilee Miron, AFTWA Staff Liaison

Regarding Medicare, Robby suggested several ways to make it more sustainable: continue deductions for those making more than \$48,000; negotiate the cost of drugs (the VA does this now and drugs cost less as a result in that program); change the reimbursement formula from billing for procedures to billing for best practices and outcomes; create penalties for readmission; and open Medicare to the 50- 55 year-old group, who would pay premiums lower than they

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Robby Stern

Carol Mungler

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would pay for private coverage. This last suggestion would benefit the Medicare program itself because generally that group is healthier than the current group that begins at age 65.

Robby is optimistic that these changes will come about. When asked the basis for his outlook, he cited societal changes over the past 40 years and Martin Luther King's notion that "The arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice."



Will Parry (1920-2013)



Lawrence Kenney (1930-2013)

*Photos courtesy of WSLC*

## In memory of Will Parry and Larry Kenney

*On May 13, 2013, the day before the chapter's annual meeting in Tukwila, **Will Parry** and **Larry Kenney** died in Seattle. Will, a long-time, highly respected and beloved union activist, was a founding member of the Puget Sound Alliance for Retired Americans (now the Puget Sound Advocates for Retiree Action) and editor of its newsletter, The Retiree Advocate. Larry was Research Director, Secretary Treasurer, and then President of the Washington State Labor Council.*

*Following are reminiscences about them from chapter members who knew them well.*

### Two fine human beings By Ross Rieder, President



On May 13<sup>th</sup> this year both **Larry Kenney** and **Will Parry** died. I don't expect many of you to know who they were. That's why I'm writing this.

In short, they were two fine human beings.

In the late 1960s and 70s, part of my duties as president of the Washington State Federation of Teachers was to lobby in Olympia. There I worked with them both. Larry was Research Director at the state labor council, later becoming president. Will was a lobbyist for the "Rebel" union, Associated Pulp and Paper Workers, a political activist from the 1930s on, and, in recent years editor and communications person for both the Washington Federation of Teachers and the

Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action.

The relation of Kenney, Parry and United Farm Workers is that both were supporters and active in promoting legislation in support of farm workers: things like protection from pesticides, elimination of child labor, support of all kinds.

I have a visual memory of driving to Yakima to march. We joined a few hundred UFW supporters to march from Miller Park to Highway 97 at Union Gap to meet hundreds of Yakima Valley farmworkers who were organizing down valley.

In 1977, a few weeks into the infamous King County Auto Trades Strike started, where the *only issue* that kept the auto trades out on strike for 14 months was the *union shop they'd had since 1937*, I was hired to organize community/union support for picketing at 52 car stores *every weekend* so the regular strikers could have a rest. Fortunately for me, Auto Machinists Local 289 recognized this wasn't a one-person job, and they hired Will

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Parry to join me. We must have visited 99% of the local union meetings in King County.

Even the ones like the Projectionists (IATSE) who met at midnight or 1.00 a.m.! I got to know Will well those months. And we recruited hundreds of ordinary citizens and supportive trade unionists for those Saturdays and Sundays.

Larry Kenney, had he lasted another 36 hours, would have been 83. Will Parry was 93. Larry Kenney and Will Parry – trade unionists and good human beings.

## Larry was a Renaissance Man By Al Brisbois



**Larry Kenney** was a Renaissance man. He had a deep knowledge of many different subjects and a deep appreciation of new things and change. His humor was self-

deprecating, and he was fond of telling good stories on himself. He was not without a sharp tongue, and he was very smart and impatient, almost to a fault, compulsively working beyond his limits (claiming there were smarter people than he, but no one could out-work him).

He was a very compassionate and caring individual, especially loving to his wife, **Phyllis Gutierrez**, and her children, and to his only daughter as well. He was especially fond of his older brothers and often spoke lovingly of a sister who succumbed to cancer as a young woman. He didn't suffer fools easily and demanded excellence of his staff. Larry was a great leader.

Larry's presidency of the Washington State Labor Council pursued a very progressive agenda

during his short tenure of eight years. He worked for women's rights in and out of the work place by organizing the first and only Washington Institute for Labor Union Women in the state; promoted several women to other WSLC staff leadership roles; and hiring the Council's first woman Political Action Director. He helped effect collective bargaining for higher education by supporting Eastern Washington University's faculty in negotiating its first contract without a state law and later by lobbying for a four-year college and university bargaining law.

Above and beyond the fight for women's rights, his administration worked very hard for and with the United Farmworkers of America. **Cesar Chavez** was a personal friend of Larry and Phyllis. Her family had been part of the Farmworker tradition, and the Farmworkers Union in this state was getting a strong presence. Together with Chavez, the Council raised thousands of dollars for the UFW and lobbied for collective bargaining and other farm legislation favorable to the UFW.

He hired top flight staffers, like **Jeff Johnson** who became Research Director and is currently serving as President of the WSLC. In addition, his administration hired a Rapid Response team that identified timber workers who had lost their jobs (estimated at 10,000 in 1982) to the Spotted Owl syndrome and helped enroll them in retraining programs.

Finally, the Council purchased a permanent home in 1992 and divested itself of its long-existing operation in the pension business.

His administration was indeed active and progressive. Larry served us well.

*Al Brisbois served as president of the Washington Federation of Teachers from 1975 until 1985, when he was elected as Secretary-Treasurer of the Washington State Labor Council. He succeeded Larry, who was elected president that year. They both served the WSLC in those capacities until 1993.*



## Thank you Will, so much By Susan Levy, Vice President



Garet Mungler

When I think of what Will meant to us in WFT (AFTWA) or in the Labor Movement or in the Women's movement or as a friend, I think of the person who

was always there and always willing to help.

If we needed someone to edit the WFT *Spotlight*, Will was there, ready and willing to help. If we needed someone to write the *Legisletter*, Will was there, ready and willing to help. When I needed someone to write my column "From Susan," Will was ready and willing to take my not-so-well-formed ideas and put them in a very clearly written column.

I recently looked through my columns from 1988, 1989, and 1990 and found headlines like: "Privacy Issues are union issues," "Confronting Health insurance costs," "Respecting Picket Lines," "Join the Crusade for Children," "An Injury to One is an Injury to all." And, as I read the columns written by Will, I realized again how skillful he was at understanding complex ideas, seeing what the problem was, and communicating in writing the important issues of the day. And, for Will, the message was always more important than the messenger. Our thinking, Will's writing and my byline was an okay way to get things done.

And, when I coordinated the Shoreline Community College Labor Studies program, Will was always there and willing to help. He taught a course called Union Communications in which he stressed the need for unions and union leaders to communicate with members and with the outside world. I was recently reminded by a student from the class about how he taught women to speak to

the back of the room instead of looking down at the floor.

And, personally, Will was always there and willing to help. If we needed a guest speaker, or if we needed another body at a meeting or convention, or if I needed help writing a speech, or whatever was needed, Will was there. I remember a time I was asked to give a speech at a large rally in Olympia. Will took my ideas and dull draft and turned them into a rabble-rousing presentation.

I wish he were here now. I'd like his help with writing a brief, exciting invitation to seniors on Vashon Island to come to the senior center to learn about and join PSARA. I'd like his help too in writing these 400 words for the *Retiree Newsletter!*

## Will's legacy is affection By Rachael Levine, Director



Yesterday, June 29, many words were both sung and spoken at the Memorial given for Will. The entire Labor Temple "Hall One" was filled with those who cared about Will, because he had cared so much for them as individuals

and the causes they had shared. From the energetic opening by the Filipino Youth Activities Drill Team to the final songs, "Good Night Irene" and "Solidarity Forever," we breathed some of the rarified air of Will's climb toward justice for all.

We also learned some things about Will's life that his own modesty hid. He was a fine athlete, who set a broad jump record that still stands.

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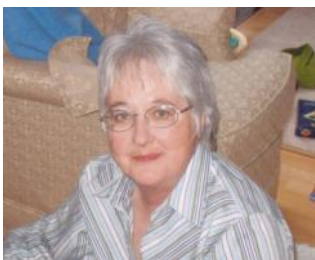
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His family and friends talked about his story telling and song leading at their famous "Family Camp." **Mayor McGinn** came to read his own proclamation along with City Council member **Nick Licata** and County Council member **Larry Gossett** who spoke of their own great respect and affection for Will.

Yet in my view, affection is finally the legacy of Will Parry. He had great affection for life in all its forms. In the final months of his life, he urged his beloved Labor Movement to embrace "Environment *and* Jobs – not Environment or Jobs" – "for my grandchildren and yours. And everybody's all around the world. I want them – all of them – to live out their lives on a vibrant, living planet. So do you. To make that future a reality, we have work to do" (*Retiree Advocate*, December 2012).

## Education posted gains in marathon legislative session

By Mary Hale



After months of gridlock that required **Governor Inslee** to call legislators back for two special overtime sessions, a new operating budget for the 2013-2015 biennium finally

passed, narrowly averting a partial state government shutdown. More than 24,000 state employees were notified during the last week of June not to report for work on July 1 if the legislature had not adopted an operating budget in time for the governor's signature on June 30 (the last day of this biennium). Many of you probably recall the days when the legislature completed its work--even during a budget-building year--within the regular session without the need for an additional

session, let alone two. Not anymore. . . .

Two areas of special interest to this newsletter's readers are undoubtedly

- The legislative response to the state Supreme Court's *McCleary* decision that K-12 education must be more fully funded (result: \$1.6 billion added over the biennium in targeted areas), and
- A 12% increase for higher education (result: \$137 million added over the biennium).

There was significant pressure from across the state from many different interest areas (educators, students, business people, civic leaders, unions, etc.) to stop the "bleeding" in higher education. Since 2009 the state has cut funding to its universities and 34 community and technical colleges by about 50%, resulting in unprecedented tuition increases. Tuition will be frozen for the 2013-2014 academic year.

**Endorsement recommended.** In late May AFT Washington COPE (Committee on Political Education) met to discuss a new matrix for scoring candidate questionnaires for the 2013 senate races in legislative districts 7, 8, and 26. On June 24 the committee met for two hours to discuss the two questionnaires returned to AFT Washington and voted to recommend endorsement of Senator **Nathan Schlicher** (District 26) to our union's Executive Board. Candidates in the other two districts did not respond.

## Notes from the annual meeting

At the annual meeting on May 14, the chapter membership amended the bylaws to broaden the definition of "member." Now, you don't need to have been a member of a local at the time of your retirement – upon application, you can become a member if you are retired and were *ever* a member of an AFT Washington local. You can become a member if you are retired and were ever employed by AFTWA/WFT/

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WSFT. You can become a member if you are retired and can demonstrate that you have had some association with an AFT local outside the State of Washington or with the national American Federation of Teachers.

By making these changes, the membership sought to broaden the base of our organization considerably. We're optimistic that such will be the result.

The membership also voted to establish a "program for soliciting voluntary contributions to the chapter . . . for the purpose of helping the chapter create a treasury of its own." You'll be hearing more about this next fall in our October/November issue of the *Retiree Newsletter*.

Finally, the membership re-elected the incumbent officers for new, two-year terms. They are listed on page one of this issue, in the lower left-hand corner. There is one vacancy – a director's position – which the executive board will seek to fill as soon as possible. *If you'd be interesting in serving, please let us know by sending a note to that effect to Merrilee Miron via email ([mmiron@aftwa.org](mailto:mmiron@aftwa.org)) or let her know by phone (206-432-8083).*

## Let's get Gen-X on board! By Phyllis Topham



**Robby Stern's** passionate talk at our May 14 annual meeting about strengthening Social Security and Medicare reminded me of several recent conversations with my Generation-X son who predicts that "Social Security won't be there for" him and sees a system of government that's broken. In a conversation with my dental hygienist, another Gen-Xer, I heard similar

comments. They are parroting headlines from popular media without seeking facts and not looking for ways to correct the situation as they see it .

I realized that we need to get these Gen-Xers educated and involved in working for improvements in these and other social issues.

Let's clarify the knowns. "Generation X" refers to people born from 1965 to 1980, give or take a year, during the Vietnam War or its aftermath. They became eligible to vote between 1983 and 2008. Then, Republican presidents preached the evils of government, and Democratic President Bill Clinton announced that the era of "big government" was over. That environment was much different politically and socially than mine. The presidents I remember were Eisenhower (today considered a liberal Republican) and Democrats Kennedy and Johnson.

Gen-Xers want a work/life balance. Many are well educated but earn less than their parents did at the same age. Others have families, and their earning power is growing. They are more diverse than previous generations and comfortable with social diversity. They can be considered independent, resourceful and self-sufficient; they like freedom and responsibility but aren't impressed by authority.

Gen-Xers can be cynical, are leery of "slick" marketing approaches, and prefer straight talk and evidence-supported arguments. They distrust big government and corporations. They are turned off by hype, overstatement, hypocrisy, and risk.

Here's what I suggest. Use a calm, safe approach. Make the cost/benefit message very clear – and authentic. Gen-Xers are comfortable with technology. They will look for our message on the Internet and in social media; glitz is not

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necessary. But make sure they can contact us 24/7.

Gen-Xers pay attention to brands but aren't often loyal to them. They use (shopping) lists and do a lot of online product comparison. Consider using Facebook, Twitter and Yelp to share our "product" with them.

They listen to the radio for information and read local entertainment publications – especially the free ones. We should consider these venues and simple, direct mailing to get our message out. A message that hits the wallet catches their attention.

*Phyllis Topham is now fully retired "probably," she says, after a lifetime of teaching, starting as a tutor while in high school (NJ). She has taught at the community college level in six states, and she taught computer applications and computer science at Shoreline Community College for 20 years, "retiring" in 2009. Following that, she taught math part time at Shoreline for 3-1/2 years.*

## Perhaps not just yet By Roger Carlstrom, Editor



It was a mix of my turning 70 late last year, a series of x-rays, an MRI or two, a CT scan, a bone scan, a diagnosis of severe degenerative lumbar-spine disease, and another diagnosis of an entrapped nerve

somewhere in my right buttock that led me to think I should ask my doctor if I were infirm enough for "geezerhood." But then I sought out the meaning of "geezer" and changed my mind.

My search led me to John Ciardi's *A Browser's Dictionary* (1980): "Commonly **old geezer**. . . . A queer old gaffer, especially one with eccentrically

antiquated views and manners." I haven't found a comparable term for the opposite gender.

My time to be a geezer will come. (Never mind that a friend or two might say I'm there already.)

I surely am not alone in fretting about changes in one's life brought about by changes in his health. Instead of thinking about possibilities, I find myself thinking of limitations. I catch myself doing "the math" about how long I've lived and how much longer I have to go. More and more the thought, "You better do this now because you don't know how much longer you have," keeps creeping in.

Of course, thinking like this would not be new to anyone who's thought about aging. It's just that thinking like this is new to me.

So, I make my list of things I *don't* want to be caught doing. I don't want to spend my time watching the likes of Oprah or Dr. Phil or Judge Judy or soap operas. (As a much younger man, I bragged that it took me four years to realize that General Hospital wasn't someone in the Pentagon; I'm slow now in recognizing that soap operas are apparently a thing of the past, but surely there are reruns. Or something like soap operas must be out there and can be found.) I don't want to be a victim of some scam or another, as "the elderly" often are. I don't want to lose my marbles, and I worry that if I do lose them, I probably won't know.

I can just hear some of you now: "Look, kid, just wait till you're 80!"

So I'll soldier on, mindful that additional infirmity is probably inevitable. "Geezerhood"? That's an *option*, one I hope not to choose.

For back issues of the Newsletter, go to <http://wa.aft.org/retirees/aft-washington-retiree-chapter-newsletter>

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