



Democratic Socialists of America

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Wal-Mart Defeated in Southfield

By Sam Stark

The people were united, and Wal-Mart was defeated.

That's how the story went Jan. 28 when THE corporate poster child for the low-wage road to higher profits ran smack into an organized movement of community residents as the company sought a rezoning of property at 12 Mile and Southfield Roads.

A rezoning by the Southfield City Council would have allowed Wal-Mart to build a 130,124 square foot superstore where a closed Catholic church, St. Bede, has stood for five years.

The nation's largest private employer was stopped dead in its tracks when the council voted 5-1 (with one abstention) after a five-hour long public hearing attended by an overflow crowd of 270 Southfield and Lathrup Village residents. Out of the 79 residents who stepped up to the microphone, 73 spoke out against the rezoning.

The "No Wal-Mart" campaign began as a grassroots movement after a Jan. 14 City Council meeting drew so much community opposition to the rezoning that Council President Ken Siver called for a special one-item agenda hearing in two weeks to allow every resident the opportunity to speak "even if we stay here all night," he said.

Four long-established homeowner associations organized house meetings with less than one week remaining before the hearing. Linked by cell phone, the separate groups banded together with assistance provided by Metro Detroit AFL-CIO organizer, Ken Whittaker. A combined strategy meeting took place two days later at Southfield's Peace Lutheran Church.

While no love was lost for an immoral corporation that pays workers so low many are forced to rely on food stamps and Medicaid, the residents decided on a strategy

that zeroed in on planning-related issues -- traffic, intensity and density -- rather than Wal-Mart's business practices.

"If Wal-Mart can make a case that they are being targeted for their behavior and not for these zoning issues, we could give them legal grounds for suing the City and winning their rezoning," explained meeting chairperson, Stephanie English.

The community also adopted rules of decorum against disruptions of any kind, with expressions of approval shown by the universal deaf symbol for applause -- arms raised with wiggling fingers pointing up -- a la Occupy Wall Street.

Reflecting Southfield and Lathrup Village's racial, ethnic and economic diversity, including union electrical workers, UAW retirees, teachers, other professionals and small business owners, the committee mobilized quickly, effectively using person-to-person and social media techniques.

Southeast Michigan Jobs with Justice supported these efforts by calling on its 1,000 e-mail and 410 Facebook activists, urging them to telephone and send messages to all council members and the Mayor.

At one point during the hearing, Siver noted that this was one of the largest turnouts for a rezoning hearing he had ever seen. He then held up a folder full of emails he had received that day as proof of widespread opposition to Wal-Mart's presence in Southfield.

Afterward, Siver and Mayor Brenda Lawrence invited residents to work with the City to help develop an alternative plan for the 12 Mile/Southfield property.

Democratic Socialists of America Greater Detroit

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The Debt Ceiling Debate

By Alice Audie-Figueroa

The debt ceiling debate isn't really about the debt ceiling. Of course it isn't. It is another segment from the "if we create enough fear and chaos, we will prevail" Republican playbook. It appears, however that President Obama is finally showing up for this debate, declaring in January that: "We are not a deadbeat nation...and (the Republicans) will not collect a ransom in exchange for not crashing the economy."

So what is the debt ceiling? What's all the fuss about, and why should we care?

By statute, the debt ceiling limits the amount of debt the federal government can incur. In practical terms, it is the money the country has borrowed to operate and meet existing obligations. The country borrows the money by issuing bonds and Treasury bills. Up to World War I, debt was issued for targeted purposes. The law came about in response to the unpredictability of the costs of the war causing more frequent Congressional action on the debt than was efficient. Creating the ceiling gave the Treasury Department some discretion as to the mix of securities needed to finance participation in a far-flung war.

The debt ceiling does not set any limits on future government spending. It is all about meeting current obligations; those to which Congress has already made a commitment. Failing to raise the ceiling does nothing to restrict future government spending. What it does do is fail to honor debts already incurred.

So, what's the debate about? Doesn't simple integrity require us to meet our self-imposed financial obligations? Or is raising the debt ceiling irresponsible and exacerbate

bad spending habits? The Congressional Research Service reports that since 1962, debt-ceiling increases have been enacted 76 times with 11 of those coming since 2001. So, on the face of it, raising the ceiling seems fairly painless.

And why now? Are the Republicans just being difficult? Glenn Kessler, in a Fact Checker article, relays a story told in the Journal of Finance about Democratic Senator Harry Byrd using the debt ceiling as a strategy to limit then-President Dwight Eisenhower's program to build a national highway system. (Further demonstrating that there is little new in politics.) For the most part, debt-ceiling debates are not terribly exciting because it has not often been used as a bargaining ploy in pursuit of conflicting agendas.

That, in turn, is the case because there is widespread recognition that failing to raise the debt ceiling could create global economic havoc. If the United States defaults on its obligations, there is a multiplier effect as economies and financial instruments rely on the stability of our financial system. In particular, interest rates would rise for private debt as well as public debt. Instability is the hallmark of economic turmoil, and having the U.S. default on its obligations would lead to massive instability.

There appears to be general historical consensus that taking no action to raise the debt ceiling is dangerous. Consider Ronald Reagan's position in the mid 80s: "The full consequences of a default — or even the serious prospect of default — by the United States are impossible to predict and awesome to contemplate." More recently, Paul Krugman pointed out: "A failure to raise the debt ceiling would have threatened chaos in world financial markets."

The last time there was a debt ceiling crisis was in 2011 with many of the same players as in today's debate. The Republicans threatened to default on the nation's debt by refusing to raise the debt ceiling unless the President agreed to draconian cuts in the budget. (Yes, you are remembering correctly-- the deficit is not affected by the debt ceiling. That's not the point.) The President did not show up in full force to that debate, instead agreeing to the Budget Control Act, which is being played out now as the sequester disaster. Many believe that in addition to the downgrade of the U.S. credit rating, those 2011 events led to a slowing of the then-fragile recovery as well.

Why does this ruse have traction? A recent Associated Press-GfK poll (as reported by Alan Fram and Jennifer Agiesta in the Huffington Post) has good news and bad news. The good news is that most Americans believe that if the debt ceiling is not raised, there will be a major economic crisis. Before you get lulled into thinking that that means Americans believe the ceiling should be raised, consider the bad news. When asked in a separate question if the debt ceiling should be raised, only about 30 percent thought so. Moreover, about 40 percent think that deep budget cuts should accompany any increase in the debt ceiling.

So it appears that some of the traction comes from confusion fed by rhetoric linking the debt ceiling to spending and the deficit. One pundit posed the analogy that people think that by limiting the debt ceiling, we are "cutting our credit cards up" when in reality, we are just burning the credit card bills.

Why should we care? There are two distinct, but related key reasons.

First, the formulation of the argument feeds into the coordinated, on-going smear campaign against civil discourse. It does so by suggesting that spending is out of control and

that politicians [read those interested in an equitable, caring society] can't be trusted with the "credit card". It is intentional to blur the two concepts so that people end up believing that voting against raising the debt ceiling is equivalent to forcing a reduction in the deficit or the debt.

If the goal is deficit reduction, we should have an honest, candid discussion about the hows and whys. Civil discourse becomes trivial and meaningless if waters are deliberately muddied. It threatens an underpinning of democracy --the free flow of information.

The second reason we should care is the related campaign against government playing a role in social and economic justice. A reduction in government spending --especially now -- is likely to push the economy back into recession. The costs of doing so will be borne disproportionately by the most vulnerable. This is unacceptable.

The questions of should we take on debt and how much to take on are reasonable ones. Certainly an argument could be made to invest in the future, even if it has to be financed with debt. The recent discussion on early learning prior to Kindergarten is one such example. Longitudinal studies demonstrate that \$1 in public investment in a 3 or 4 year-old can reap \$7 return. I would borrow to make such an investment. Much of our debt comes from military expenditures. Whether those dollars were wisely invested can certainly be debated. But the time to debate expenditures is before you make the commitment; not when it comes time to pay.

The debt ceiling is a mechanism by which we honor our financial commitments. The debt ceiling debate is far more complicated and mirrors the divide the country must face: what kind of society do we really want? And what are we willing to do to create it?

Martin Luther King's Warning About Right-To-Work Legislation

In 1961, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. made the following comments about the real purpose of right-to-work legislation:

"In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans, such as 'right to work.' It is a law to rob us of our civil rights and job rights."

"It's purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining by which unions have improved wages and working conditions of everyone... Wherever these laws have been passed, wages are lower, job opportunities are fewer, and there are no civil rights."

Agenda for the DSA General Membership Meeting on March 2, 2013

Join us for Detroit DSA's general membership meeting on March 2nd. Our speakers are State Board of Education Member Michelle Fecteau who will discuss the threat to public education posed by Governor Snyder's proposal to expand Michigan's Educational Achievement Authority (EAA) and Steve Babson of the Detroit Eviction Defense Committee who will discuss a petition campaign on behalf of a moratorium on evictions.

1. Speaker: **Steve Babson** on "**Moratorium on Evictions**"
2. Treasury Report
3. Report from Michigan Universal Health Care Access Network (MichUHCAN)
4. Report from Detroit Area Peace with Justice Network (DAPJN)
5. Report from Jobs with Justice (JWJ)
6. Report from Michigan Alliance to Strengthen Social Security and Medicare (MASSM)
7. Report on Michigan Democratic Party Convention
8. Report on Grassroots Economic Training for Understanding and Power (GET UP)
9. Support for Michigan Coalition for Human Rights Dinner
10. Speaker: **Michelle Fecteau** on **Educational Achievement Authority**

Calendar of Events

MARCH

Saturday, March 2—DSA general membership meeting from 10 AM until noon at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center (3500 Marais Avenue—near the intersection of Thirteen Mile and Crooks Roads)

APRIL

Sunday, April 7—DSA Executive Board meeting from 10 AM until noon at the home of David and Teena Green (28292 Harwich Drive, Farmington Hills)

Sunday, April 7th—Michigan Coalition for Human Rights 31st Annual Awards Dinner from 5:00 to 7:30 PM at Marygrove College, 8425 W. McNichols (East of Wyoming), Detroit. To purchase tickets or for more information, visit www.mchr.org or call 313-579-9071.

MAY

Saturday, May 4—DSA general membership meeting from 10 AM until noon at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center (3500 Marais Avenue—near the intersection of Thirteen Mile and Crooks Roads)

Get Involved With DSA!