

Health, Democracy, and Dignity at Work: How Communities of Color Can Transform Society and the Workplace

Good morning, and thank you to Jessica and all the organizers of today's memorial for the opportunity to offer a few reflections in honor the workers who died on the job over the past year. These workers were our neighbors, members of our faith communities, sons, daughters, husbands, wives, parents, and grandparents who should not be forgotten.

One lost life on the job is a tragedy, and the awareness and work of the School of Occupational Health Sciences, Department of, OSHA, and organized labor make a huge difference in preventing future deaths.

WA State is facing rapid growth. Even as Seattle became whiter last year, our region and state has been facing huge demographic changes for over a decade. Already, in our kindergarten classrooms, we have become a majority multiracial society. Many of our children of color live in parts of Seattle, South King County and Pierce County where the adults in their lives are expected to live 8-12 years less than adults in Queen Anne or Issaquah.

As Mother's Day approaches, it is important to note that all mothers by definition are working moms whether they are paid a just wage for their toil or not. And in Tacoma black mothers are more than twice more likely to suffer the death of an infant than white mothers. The loss of one black child's life is a tragedy.

In occupations, like agriculture, child care, domestic work that were historically excluded from the full benefits of organized labor, collective bargaining, and legally protected labor standards—Blacks, Latin@s, immigrants, refugees, and women have always been disproportionately employed and exploited.

But zip codes, race, and gender should not define life expectancy or access to economic prosperity of Washington's five year olds. And it will not if we have anything to say about it. At least that is what motivates me to serve as the Executive Director of an organization like Puget Sound Sage. And that is why Sage is part of # 2by2 campaign to improve the lives of 2million people in 2 years, a campaign led by our national network the Partnership for Working Families-- and we are more than halfway there.

At Puget Sound Sage we believe lasting change for racial equity and social justice takes place when people of color, women, and immigrants united in multi-racial, multi-sector coalitions shape, lead and enforce community benefiting policy and labor standard wins. We believe that workers are healthier and safer when they exercise their right to collectively bargain, and our nation's democracy is stronger when people have an opportunity to exercise their voice and vote where they spend most of their time-- the market place. We believe when workers are healthier and safer on the job, our neighborhoods and communities are healthier and safer for everyone. We believe this because our research and experiences in coalition organizing and local policy campaigns provide evidence.

I honor the deceased by offering up 2 pieces of research and 3 stories of health, democracy and hope.

University of WA MSW Graduate Jennifer Hagedorn for her capstone project partnered with Sage to research the correlation between collectively bargained contracts and social determinants of health. Her analysis of over dozen local contracts covering thousands of WA workers showed significant positive impacts to social determinants of health that could close the zip code opportunity gaps in our state.

Last year, Sage produced a report on for hire driver industry, providing evidence that drivers' with a voice can increase safety, not only for the drivers, but also for customers and the public at large. This report supported local drivers' organizing with Teamsters Local 117 to get city council to successfully pass an ordinance that creates a pathway for-hire drivers to collectively improve their workplaces and sets a national precedent.

For years a group of immigrant workers in a Georgetown warehouse suffered under intolerable work conditions. Their only water source for hand washing and drinking came from a rusty water spigot. Their break room was filthy and unsafe so workers went home in their dirty clothes exposing their children and families unnecessarily to workplace contaminants. Thanks to Teamsters and Interfaith Economic Justice Committee Efren Náme, and his co-workers felt the support they needed to organize and collectively confront their employer. As a result, they won their demands for cleaner and healthier workplace and in the process of gained dignity and confidence.

After over three years of community and coalition organizing led by Got Green and their jobs committee, which was made up black unemployed construction

workers, the City of Seattle passed a priority hire ordinance that includes Project Labor Agreement. This campaign was initially sparked when the City of Seattle built the RB Community Center without employing a single resident of the neighborhood that has 4 times higher unemployment rate than the rest of the city. Now RB residents have more opportunities to secure paid apprenticeships and construction careers. The community labor win sets a new standard for Community Work Force agreements, including actually funding enforcement, and sets a model and an opportunity for organizing other jurisdictions locally and nationally.

Lastly, Seatac Prop 1. set the precedent for our current statewide labor standard people's led initiative by raising the minimum wage, guaranteeing paid sick days, and including worker retention language. Unfortunately, Sea-tac workers continue to fight for full implementation of Prop 1 because of lawsuits led by Alaska Airlines. Throughout the multi-year struggle, Sage's Interfaith Economic Justice Committee leaders have faithfully stood by the workers' side. Most recently, we celebrated with 700 Seatac concession workers' precedent setting contract with their employer. The contract guarantees them employer provided family medical benefits, \$15/hour, equaling \$400-\$500 more in their monthly paycheck for some of the workers. Every dollar a lower-wage worker earns stimulates \$2.5 dollars in the local economy. Guranteed paid sick and safe time allows workers to stay home rather than increasing risk for workplace injury or infecting others. Affordable comprehensive family medical and dental means that workers and their families can invest in preventative care and spend more time healthy and active in their schools and neighborhoods.

Health and Hope for Safer Work Places and Democratic Institutions abounds when we center on communities of color and in work sectors and occupations historically left for blacks, immigrants, and women to do at low or no wages. Examples and opportunities for changing the outcomes for today's kindergarteners and the future of work in WA State are all around us.

Let' us honor the dead by taking action today—the following speakers will offer many opportunities. The ones I leave with you today is to pledge your support to the Seattle Hospitality Initiative filed by UniteHere8, and liking their campaign on facebook, and please like Puget Sound Sage while you are at it.

