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The 25 Best Progressive Victories of 2013

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Progressives are rarely satisfied. It is part of our political DNA. There's so much injustice in the world, it's sometimes hard to feel that we're making progress. But as Chinese philosopher Laozi reminded us, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

As I document in my book, *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame* (Nation Books, 2012), the radical ideas of one generation are often the common sense of the next generation. One hundred years ago, ideas like Social Security, the minimum wage and women's suffrage were considered radical. Fifty years ago, most African-Americans in the South couldn't vote, few women were welcome in politics and many professions, and all but a handful of gays and lesbians were locked in the closet. In other words, if we take a long view, we can see that things do often change for the better, sometimes in big leaps, but usually in incremental stages.

Many progressives equate the word "compromise" with "sell-out," but the strategic question is whether compromises are dead ends or stepping stones to further progress. In their book *Organizing for Social Change*, Kim Bobo, Steve Max and Jackie Kendall contend that activism is successful if it (1) wins real improvements in people's lives, (2) gives people a sense of their own power and (3) changes the structure of power so that people begin the next phase of movement-building with greater leverage.

Last year I offered my 25 best progressive victories. To make this an annual event, let's look back at 2013 and examine 25 significant accomplishments -- elections, ballot measures, court rulings, legislation, new waves of mobilization, and changes in public opinion -- that meet one or more of those three criteria.

1. **Ballot Box Triumphs:** New Yorkers elected progressives Bill de Blasio as mayor by a landslide, chose Letitia James as public advocate, and put a majority of progressives and liberals on the City Council, with pledges to address the city's widening inequality, gentrification, and police abuses. This progressive surge didn't just happen. It reflects a decade of patient and effective work led by the Working Families Party of New York. Minneapolis voters elected City Council member Betsy Hodges--a longtime activist with the progressive grassroots group Take Action Minnesota who called on people to "free ourselves from the fear that keeps us locked into patterns of

inequality"--as their new mayor. Another longtime Take Action Minnesota member, Dai Thao, became the first Hmong city council member in the St. Paul's history. In Boston, State Rep. Marty Walsh, a long-time labor leader, became the city's next mayor. Seattle voters elected socialist Kshama Sawant to the City Council. And in Bridgeport, the Connecticut Working Families Party and its allies took control of the School Board, ending the reign of privatizer-in-chief Paul Vallas.

2. **Labor on the March:** Union activists began talking seriously about strategies for rebuilding the movement and put some of those ideas into action in 2013. In particular, it dramatically accelerated its organizing work among low-wage workers. On Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving, the year's business shopping day), Walmart workers and community allies organized rallies in hundreds of cities, demanding a minimum salary of \$25,000 plus better working conditions and benefits. Within a week, employees at major fast food chain restaurants in over 100 cities held a one-day strike, pushing for \$15/hour starting pay. United Food and Commercial Workers and SEIU have played key roles in helping build this movement. Right before these protests, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that Walmart had unlawfully harassed and fired employees for protesting the previous year. Food service workers at Smithsonian won a union contract. Dining hall workers at Pomona College voted to join UNITE HERE, the hotel and restaurant workers union. DeKalb County (Georgia) sanitation workers won an historic organizing victory for union recognition. Forty-five years after Memphis sanitation workers struck in 1968 to win a union contract, safer conditions, better pay, and respect, the struggle in the South continues. The Supreme Court surprisingly sided with unions and workers' rights by refusing to overturn a lower court decision to allow card check agreements in *UNITE HERE Local 355 v. Mulhall*. Polls show that young workers are more pro-union than middle-aged and older workers, making a revival of the labor movement possible, if not inevitable.
3. **Minimum Wage Momentum:** In recent years, Americans have shown increasing support for boosting the minimum wage and for the idea that people who work full-time should not earn poverty-level wages. A poll conducted in July by Hart Research Associates, showed that 80 percent of Americans back hiking the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour and adjusting it for the cost of living in future years. Not surprisingly, 92 percent of Democrats voice support for this proposal, but so do 80 percent of independents, 62 percent of Republicans, 75 percent of Southern whites and 79 percent of people with incomes over \$100,000. (A November poll by CBS News found similarly widespread support for raising the federal minimum wage). The burgeoning protest movement among low-wage workers triggered increasing media coverage, including brilliant put-downs on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* of the conservative arguments against the minimum wage. All this has translated into changes in public policy. Even as New Jersey voters were giving conservative Republican Gov. Chris Christie a second term with 60 percent of the vote, they also approved, by the same margin, a constitutional amendment to raise the state's minimum wage by a dollar to \$8.25 an hour. The new law includes an automatic cost-of-living increase each year. California Gov. Jerry Brown signed legislation raising the state's minimum wage from \$8 to \$10 an hour -- a bill he had vetoed a year earlier. In November, voters in the Seattle suburb of Sea-tac embraced the Good Jobs Initiative' to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for workers at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and at airport-related businesses, including hotels, car-rental agencies and parking lots. The new law, sponsored by labor unions and other progressives, applies to more than 6,300 workers. (On the day after Christmas, ruling on a suit filed by Alaska Airlines and the Washington Restaurant Association, a King County judge barred its enforcement at the airport -- which is located in the city of Sea-tac but is owned and operated by a separate government agency -- but let it stand for the 1,600 workers employed at nearby hotels and parking lots).

Seattle's new Mayor Ed Murray supported the Sea-tac initiative and raised the possibility of doing the same thing in Washington's largest city. In New York City, one of De Blasio's key policy planks was enacting a living wage of \$11.75 per hour for workers employed by companies that get tax breaks and other subsidies from the city. Activists in Idaho, South Dakota and Alaska are gathering signatures to put minimum wage hikes on the ballot in 2014. Their counterparts in Maryland, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Hawaii are pushing state legislators to raise the minimum wages in their states, too. The momentum at the local and state levels is likely to put pressure on Congress to raise the federal minimum wage. In his State of the Union address last January, he proposed raising the minimum wage from the current \$7.25 to \$9 an hour. A week after the November elections, Obama announced that he supports hiking it to \$10.10 an hour, based on a bill sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and Cong. George Miller (D-CA). In August, Demos published a report, *Underwriting Bad Jobs*, that revealed that the federal government -- through contracting out and privatization -- is the largest employer of low wage, dead-end jobs. The think tank and its organizing allies urged Obama to issue a Presidential Executive Order raising the minimum wage for workers on all federal contracts.

4. **Occupy's Legacy: 99 to 1:** In September 2011, a handful of activists took over Zuccotti Park in New York, and then the movement spread to every city in the country. Although Occupy Wall Street was forced after a few months to disperse physically, its ideas have continued to resonate with the American public, including its slogan casting America's economic divide as the 1 percent versus the 99 percent. The Occupy movement changed the nation's conversation at dinner tables, workplaces and newsrooms. Language matters. This impressive linguistic ju-jitsu has helped reframe our national conversation over taxes, the distribution of wealth and income and campaign finance. By focusing public and media attention on the widening disparities of income, wealth and power, it has helped reframe the political debate and played an important role in many of the elections and organizing campaigns during 2013, helping inspire the progressive victories and movement-building activities listed here. Politicians and the mainstream media now consistently refer to the richest 1 percent, often highlighting the class warfare waged by the super-rich. Since the Occupy movement began, President Obama has given a number of speeches addressing these issues, including the most important speech of his presidency in December, in which he called widening economic inequality in America "the defining challenge of our time."
5. **A Populist Pope:** Occupy's message seems to have reached the Vatican, too. Pope Francis has consistently criticized the human and spiritual damage caused by global capitalism, widening inequality, and corporate sweatshops. In November, he released a remarkable 84-page document in which he attacked unfettered capitalism as "a new tyranny," criticized the "idolatry of money," and urged politicians to guarantee all citizens "dignified work, education and healthcare." "Today we also have to say 'thou shalt not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills," Pope Francis wrote. "How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?" Pope Francis is the most progressive pontiff since Pope Leo XIII, whose 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, focused attention on social justice and workers' rights at the dawn of modern industrial capitalism. There's no doubt that Pope Francis' public statements have boosted support for progressive movement in the U.S. and around the globe. He adds his voice to the growing number of faith-based groups in the U.S. -- including Network (the Catholic Social Justice lobby group and its offshoot, Nuns on the Bus), Sojourners, Interfaith Worker Justice, Bend the Arc (a Jewish justice group), PICO (a faith-based community organizing group), and others - who have expanded their efforts on behalf of workers' rights, immigrant rights, and the poor.
6. **Voting Rights Victories:** Although the Supreme Court's 5 to 4 ruling in June striking down the heart of the 1965 Voting Rights Act led a number of GOP-run states to change their election laws

making it more difficult for many voters -- especially seniors, people of color, and young people -- to vote, progressives launched a grassroots fight-back effort to increase voter registration and turnout. In August, North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory signed the nation's harshest voter suppression law; it requires strict government-issued photo ID to cast a ballot, cuts the number of early voting days by a week, eliminates same-day voter registration during the early voting period, makes it easier for vigilante poll watchers to challenge the validity of eligible voters, and expands the influence of unregulated corporate money in state elections. But polls showed that North Carolinians overwhelmingly oppose these new voter suppression measures, which triggered weekly "Moral Monday" mass protests outside the General Assembly and around the state, led by Rev. William Barber and the North Carolina NAACP. More than 930 people were arrested in civil disobedience by the session's end. The NAACP also filed a lawsuit challenging the new legislation and will seek a preliminary injunction in the summer of 2014. Similar protests emerged across the country and led to impressive victories. When the Republican-controlled Florida legislature tried to sneak in an amendment to deny seniors, people with disabilities and people needing language assistance help at the polls, a coalition of civil rights organizations launched a state-wide letter-writing and lobbying campaign which drew national media attention and pressured legislators to defeat the amendment. Grassroots pressure and changing public opinion pushed the U.S. Department of Justice to file lawsuits against Texas to adopting a tough voter ID law that had previously been blocked under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. Not all the voting rights victories were defensive. A grassroots campaign in Virginia (which was one of four states that permanently stripped the right to vote from people with prior felony convictions) pressured Gov. Bob McDonnell to restore voting rights to people with nonviolent felony convictions who have completed their entire sentence. Colorado and Maryland passed Same Day Registration laws, adding to three other recent triumphs in California, Connecticut, and the District of Columbia. Altogether, this makes 14 states (plus Washington, D.C.) that have Same Day registration. Other states will be considering it in 2014. Energetic efforts by progressives (kudos to Demos, Project Vote, and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law) have pushed states to implement the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), voluntarily or by lawsuit, to make major improvements to their procedures to offer voter registration to people using state social service agencies. The number of people registered as a result of these efforts is well over three million. Demos and others have made the case that the Health Benefit Exchanges under Obamacare are covered by the NVRA, which means that millions of people who will utilize these in the years ahead should all get the chance to register. Already, California, Connecticut, Maryland, Vermont, and New York have officially designated their HBE's as NVRA sites. The federal site, when it is fully functioning, will link to registration opportunities as well.

7. **LGBT Rights:** Even before the U.S. Supreme Court declared parts of the federal Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional in June, the tide of public opinion about same-sex marriage and gay rights in general had already turned. In 2012, Wisconsin voters elected the nation's first openly gay U.S. Senator (Tammy Baldwin), President Obama endorsed same-sex marriage, and gay rights advocates won the first election victories for gay marriage in Maine, Maryland and Minnesota. But the momentum accelerated even more in 2013. The Supreme Court ruling was a victory, but also a double-edged sword. Rather than call for equal rights (which would have meant ruling that all state bans on same-sex marriage violate the constitution, as the court did in 1967 when it overturned all state bans on inter-racial marriage), the court left it up to the states to decide. That put the burden on gay rights advocates to organize and litigate on a state-by-state basis, but that strategy has so far proven to be successful. Rhode Island, Illinois, Minnesota, Delaware, New Jersey, and Hawaii legalized gay marriage and thanks to a unanimous ruling in December by its Supreme Court, New Mexico became the 17th state to do so. Also in December, a federal judge struck down Utah's ban on same-sex marriage and a federal judge in Ohio ruled

that same-sex marriages should be recognized on death certificates. In November, state Sen. Ed Murray, a gay Democratic state legislator who sponsored and led the successful Referendum 74 campaign in 2013 which legalized same-sex marriage in the state, won Seattle's mayoral race, making it the second largest city in the country to elect an openly gay mayor. Annise Parker, a lesbian, was elected mayor of Houston (America's fourth largest city) in 2009. Other large cities that have elected gay and lesbian mayors include Providence, Rhode Island and Portland, Oregon. In February, soccer star Robbie Rogers came out of the closet on his website, then joined the Los Angeles Galaxy, becoming the first openly gay male athlete to play in a prominent North American team sport. Two months later, NBA player Jason Collins became the first male pro-athlete in a major U.S. team sport to come out during an active career, doing so in an April cover story in *Sports Illustrated*. In December, Obama appointed three prominent gay athletes -- the legendary tennis star Billie Jean King, and figure skater Brian Boitano (who won the gold medal at the 1988 Winter Olympics), and two-time Olympic hockey player Caitlin Cahow -- to represent the U.S. at the Olympic the opening and closing ceremonies at February's games in Sochi, Russia. This was clearly meant as a jab at Russia's recent anti-gay laws.

8. **Paid Sick Leave Gains Traction:** About 40 million Americans -- almost 40 percent of private-sector workers -- don't get even one day of paid sick leave. The issue of paid sick leave wasn't even on the agenda a few years ago, but now it is gaining traction. Three-quarters of all Americans -- including 59 percent of Republicans -- think there should be a law guaranteeing all workers a minimum number of paid sick days. In 2013, New York City, Jersey City, and Portland adopted paid sick leave laws, joining San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. as well as the state of Connecticut. In June, the New York City Council overrode a veto by Mayor Michael Bloomberg to pass a law that would require businesses to offer paid sick leave for their workers. The benefit will go into effect in 2014 for employees of businesses with 20 or more workers and at a later date for smaller employers. But lobbying by corporate lobby groups has thwarted efforts by unions and other activist groups to get cities and states to adopt a law that most Europeans take for granted. The Philadelphia City Council passed a paid sick leave bill in 2013 but was one vote short of the 12 votes needed to override Mayor Michael Nutter's veto in late December. Ten states have adopted laws banning cities and counties from enacting paid sick leave, sponsored by members of members of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the corporate-funded network of state legislators, along with the Chamber of Commerce, the National Restaurant Association, and other business groups. With the support of Republican Gov. Scott Walker, Wisconsin repealed Milwaukee's mandatory paid sick leave law, which 69 percent of voters approved in a 2008 referendum. But the pendulum is starting to swing the other way. Grassroots activists in a growing number of states -- including Arizona, Minnesota, Illinois and North Carolina -- are mounting campaigns to try to get their legislatures to pass paid sick leave laws in 2014.
9. **Death Penalty Closer to Death:** Maryland became the 18th state to abolish the death penalty -- and the sixth in the last six years. Across the U.S., only 39 executions took place in 2013, down from 98 in 1999. The 39 executions were carried out in nine states. Texas had the most, 16. But even Texas is revealing reluctance to sentence people to death. It had 48 new death sentences in 1999 but only nine in 2013 -- the sixth year in a row that Texas had less than 10 death sentences. Thirty states have had no executions in the last five years. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, the number of new death sentences was near its lowest level since capital punishment was reinstated in the United States in the 1970s. There were 80 new death sentences in 2013, three more than in 2012 but down from 315 in 1996. All 80 death sentences came from only about 2 percent of counties in the entire country. And, as the *New York Times* recently observed, the death penalty is "dormant in the federal system and the military." The *Times* also noted that "the death penalty as applied in America now -- so thoroughly dependent on where

the defendant lives and how much money he can spend on his defense -- violates the constitutional guarantees of due process and equal protection, and no longer can overcome the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishments." The percentage of Americans who favor the death penalty for people convicted of murder has dropped from 80 percent in the mid-1990s to 60 percent today, according to a Gallup poll. This shift is due, at least in part, to the growing number people, including death row inmates, who have been exonerated based on DNA testing, a tribute to the persistence of journalists and researchers who've blazed this trail.

10. **Gun Battles:** In April, several months after the Newtown massacre, a minority of Senators stood with the gun lobby and used the filibuster to thwart even modest legislation, including background checks, to keep our communities safer from gun violence. So the battleground shifted to the states. Since Newtown, 114 bills were signed into law at the state level, according to *Mother Jones* magazine. There are 41 new laws in 21 states and Washington, D.C. that make it harder for people to own guns, carry them in public, and enhance the government's ability to track guns. Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware and Maryland all passed laws to expand background checks in 2013. Eighteen states and DC strengthened their ability to track gun ownership. In addition, 15 laws in 15 states made it harder for people with serious mental-health problems to possess guns. Together, these laws affect more than 189 million people -- well over half of all Americans. But in 29 states, new laws were enacted making it easier for people to own guns, carry guns in public places (including schools and churches) and make it more difficult for the government to track guns. In a modest victory in December, Congress passed a 10-year extension of the Undetectable Firearms Act, which prohibits the sale and distribution of guns made entirely from plastic due to the risk that they can be carried unnoticed through metal detectors.
11. **Women's Rights:** 2013 was not a great year for women's rights. Efforts to restrict a woman's right to choose and to limit access to reproductive health care expanded in many states. Despite this, activists won a number of pro-choice and women's equality victories, educating voters about these attacks and mobilizing them for action. After being stalled in Congress for over a year, Congress reauthorized and President Obama signed the Violence Against Women Act on March 7. In the Virginia governor's race, pro-choice Democrat Terry McAuliffe defeated extreme anti-choice Republican Ken Cuccinelli, who as state attorney general had helped close abortion clinics and blocked access to birth control. California Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill (sponsored by Assemblymember Toni Atkins) to increase access to safe, early abortion for California women by increasing the number of trained healthcare providers (nurse practitioners, certified nurse-midwives and physicians' assistants) who can perform abortions. Voters in Albuquerque, N.M. defeated a ballot measure that would have banned abortion after 20 weeks. In Maine, pro-choice legislators and the Maine Choice Coalition defeated three anti-choice bills, including one that would have established legal rights for a fetus by setting viability at 12 weeks (rather than the *Roe v. Wade* defined 24 weeks) and would have created a "personhood" status for fetuses. In February, U.S. District Court Judge Neil Wake overturned a law passed by the Arizona legislature and signed by Governor Jan Brewer that banned state payments to Planned Parenthood because their clinics provide abortions. (Federal judges had already issued similar rulings in Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, although Texas then revised its law by refusing to accept federal Medicaid funds, allowing it to exclude Planned Parenthood as a provider of services to low-income women). Last summer, despite a courageous 13-hour filibuster, State Senator Wendy Davis failed to stop a dangerous anti-abortion bill in Texas legislature, but her stand not only made her a national symbol of the growing fight-back around women's reproductive rights but also made her a credible candidate for governor with a national following and a growing army of supporters. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) gained national attention for her efforts to address the serious problem of sexual assault in the military. She recently said that she's within reach of getting 60 votes for her Military Justice Improvement Act

to overhaul how the Pentagon handles allegations of sexual assault and rape and expect it to come to a floor vote in the Senate early in 2014.

12. **Fighting Wall Street and Winning:** The battle against Wall Street greed has many fronts. After it looked like Wall Street accountability was forgotten in a post-Occupy America, continued widespread outrage at the banks and at Attorney General Eric Holder's "too big to jail" excuse, grassroots activist groups built pressure for action. Community groups and unions pushed the city of Richmond, CA to take on Wall Street with its plan to use eminent domain to help "underwater" homeowners by purchasing mortgages and reducing the principal, making homes more affordable and protecting owners from foreclosure. Other cities, including Seattle and Newark, took steps to adopt the idea, which has generated national attention. Los Angeles sued Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and Citigroup for their discriminatory and predatory lending practices that "led to a wave of foreclosures that continues to diminish the City's property-tax revenues and increase the need for, and the costs of, City services." Nevada and Minnesota passed Homeowners Bill of Rights, joining California in defeating the banking industry. New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman threatened to take Bank of America and Wells Fargo to court for disregarding the terms of 2012's \$26 billion settlement by five banks to end foreclosure abuses. Americans for Financial Reform, Occupy Homes, and the Home Defenders League kept up the heat on the Justice Department (including civil disobedience at its headquarters by families who lost their homes to illegal foreclosures). Finally the department became more aggressive at investigating banks whose practices triggered the recession and negotiating large settlement agreements. Its \$13 billion settlement with JPMorgan Chase was the largest corporate payment in federal government history and the first to force bankers to admit wrongdoing. The Obama administration also forced other major banks, including Wells Fargo and Bank of America, to pay billions of dollars in fines to settle claims involving a range of wrongdoing, including questionable mortgage practices. Much of the settlement money will go to homeowners to reduce mortgage principal. But in October, Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) told the Obama administration that fines are not enough; she asked federal regulators why no major bank CEOs have gone to jail for their role in causing the mortgage meltdown and economic crisis. Despite opposition from the bank lobby, in July the Senate finally confirmed Warren ally Richard Cordray to lead the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (which was Warren's idea), allowing the new agency to get down to business, including serious action on credit card companies, car loans, and bank abuses. CFPB ordered \$2 billion in penalties against the largest nonbank mortgage servicer in the country, Ocwen Financial Corp., which must also refund \$125 million to more than 180,000 wrongly foreclosed homeowners. After three years of resistance from Wall Street, federal bank regulators finally adopted the Volcker Rule to refocus banks on service to customers and the real economy rather than on speculative trading and the exploitation of conflicts of interest.
13. **Environmental Victories:** Across the country, community groups, unions, and public health advocates are pushing local governments to change the way they deal with trash, improving the environment, improving conditions for sanitation and recycling workers, and creating more sustainable cities. One of the biggest victories was Los Angeles' adoption of the "Don't Waste LA" plan following a two-year campaign by environmental groups, unions, and community organizations coordinated by the LA Alliance for a New Economy. Student activists persuaded several small colleges to divest from major energy corporations that exacerbate global warming as part of broader .350 campaign, which has spread to over 200 colleges and universities. Environmentalists continued to make the Keystone Pipeline project a political controversy. In his June speech on climate change at Georgetown University Obama signaled that he'd approve the project only if it does not substantially increase greenhouse gas emissions. "The president is saying what the science has always demanded," said Bill McKibben. "It's encouraging news for

certain." In June 22 people -- including many former Obama campaign staffers and donors -- were arrested at the State Department's downtown Chicago office while peacefully protesting against the pipeline. Former Vice President Al Gore said: "This whole project is an atrocity." Likewise, environmentalists put the issue of hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking" (in which drillers blast millions of gallons of chemically treated water into the ground to extract gas from hard-to-reach deposits deep in the earth), on the nation's agenda. In New York state alone, more than a hundred towns have enacted local bans or moratoriums on gas drilling, including fracking. The anti-fracking movement inspired the film *Promised Land* starring Matt Damon and written by Damon and John Krasinki.

14. **Progress on Immigrant Rights:** Immigrant rights activists held rallies and hunger strikes, marched on Capitol Hill, conducted acts of civil disobedience, and met with, called, faxed, tweeted, and sent letters and petitions to elected officials in Congress and at the state level. They held press conferences and prayer vigils and chained themselves to the White House fence and the gates of detention centers. They encircled ICE facilities to shut down deportations. Hundreds were arrested, including eight members of Congress, calling for immigration reform. They fasted on the national mall in Washington, D.C. The result was a significant shift in public opinion, a victory in the Senate, and a slew of pro-immigrant laws in diverse states that include expanded protections for immigrant workers, driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants, greater access to higher education, and limits on discriminatory enforcement policies. The movement expanded to include a wide array of organizations and constituency groups, including the AFL-CIO, SEIU, the Alliance for Citizenship, CREDO Action, Presente, National Council of La Raza, America's Voice and other civil rights and equal rights advocates. In June, 14 Senate Republicans joined Democrats in a landmark, bipartisan vote to pass S 744 by a 68-32 margin. The bill contained a path to citizenship, a return provision for certain immigrants who had been deported, no age limit for DREAMers, and more. House Speaker John Boehner refused to call for a vote on the immigration bill, so activists began a campaign to target House Republicans in "swing" districts with a large number of Latino voters. Eleven DREAMers were arrested when they refused to leave Eric Cantor's office; 12 activists in Spokane were arrested after conducting an act of civil disobedience at Cong. Cathy Rodgers' office; and in Bakersfield, 13 women forced an 11 pm meeting with Republican whip Cong. Kevin McCarthy. By the time the August recess was over, activists had organized 1,194 events in 41 states and gathered more than 600,000 names on petitions for citizenship. In response to these rallies, sit-ins, petitions, and other forms of protest, the tide began to turn. At least three Republican House members bucked their party leadership to embrace immigration reform. In November, activists began a 22-day hunger strike, which drew even more attention to the issue. One of the hunger strikers was Eliseo Medina, a former United Farm Workers activist and now a national leader with SEIU. Barack and Michelle Obama visited the hunger strikes to express their solidarity. The momentum is growing for a win in the House in 2014. Meanwhile, according to a report by the National Immigrant Law Center, the movement made dramatic advances at the state level. Eight states, including California, enacted laws providing driver's licenses or driving privilege cards for undocumented residents. Colorado, Oregon, Minnesota, and Hawaii expanded access to higher education by providing in-state tuition for undocumented students who meet residency and secondary education requirements; 18 states now have tuition-equity policies in place. Many state and local governments passed legislation limiting collaboration between local law enforcement officials and federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The harshest state law -- Alabama's HB 56 (which prohibits landlords from renting homes to undocumented immigrants, requires schools to check students' legal status, and requires police to arrest suspected immigration violators) was nullified. After the Supreme Court ruled against a similar law in Arizona, Alabama

officials decided to surrender, settling various lawsuits and coughing up \$350,000 to cover their opponents' legal bills.

15. **Fighting Corporate-Style School "Reform":** Across the country, corporate big-wigs and their foundations are part of an effort that they and the media misleadingly call school "reform." What they're really after is not "reform" (improving our schools for the sake of students) but "privatization" (business control of public education). They think public schools should be run like corporations, with teachers as compliant workers, students as products, and the school budget as a source of profitable contracts and subsidies for textbook companies, consultants, and others engaged in the big business of education. But parents, teachers, and students are fighting back. For example, backed by the Seattle Education Association, teachers at Garfield High School refused to administer the Measures of Academic Progress test to ninth graders -- a setback to the corporate-backed education agenda of high-stakes testing. With support from parents, the NAACP, and others, the teachers won a big victory when the superintendent announced in May that schools could opt out of the testing plan and that test scores would no longer be a graduation requirement. In April, hundreds of Chicago students walked out of standardized tests in protest against being pawns of the corporate school agenda. In Los Angeles, progressive school board member Steve Zimmer won his re-election campaign against an opponent who was funded by what educational historian Diane Ravitch calls the "billionaires boys club," including Michael Bloomberg, Rupert Murdoch, Eli Broad, and the Walton family (heirs to the Walmart fortune).
16. **Success Against Sweatshops:** A large global coalition of consumer groups, college students, human rights activists, and workers' rights organizations made major strides in drawing attention to sweatshop abuses and pressuring global corporations to improve conditions for garment workers. On the eve of the sixth-month anniversary of the deadliest disaster in the history of the garment industry -- the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, which claimed the lives of 1,134 Bangladesh garment workers in April -- United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) launched a campaign to demand an end to deathtrap factories. In the last eight years, over 1,800 Bangladesh workers, making clothes for many well-known global brands, have lost their lives in factory fires and accidents, while earning \$37 a month, the lowest-minimum wage in the world. In the face of government suppression of unions and dissent, thousands of Bangladesh workers went on strike in October to protest these conditions, causing a four day shutdown of hundreds of factories, which forced the government to raise the minimum wage to \$68 a month, still the lowest in the world, but a 77 percent increase for the four million Bangladeshis who work in the clothing sector, the country's largest export industry. After human rights groups and international media drew attention to the complicity of major retailers in the Rana Plaza and other disasters, two non-profit advocacy organizations -- Workers Rights Consortium and the International Labor Rights Forum -- in solidarity with Bangladeshi workers, brokered an Accord on Building and Fire Safety in Bangladesh, a legally-binding contract between unions and clothing brands that emerged. By the end of the year, over 100 apparel corporations from 19 countries in Europe, North America, Asia and Australia (including H&M, C&A, Zara, Primark and Tesco) had signed the Accord, which requires the major retailers to fund safety inspections and give workers a chance to negotiate on working conditions and wages. But the world's largest retailer, Walmart, as well as Target, Disney, and GAP, have so far refused to sign. (Walmart, Disney, Dickies, and Sears -- who produced clothing at the Tazreen Fashions factory where 112 workers died in a fire in November 2012 -- have also refused to offer the survivors or victims' families any compensation, although other global retailers have done so). USAS and its campus affiliates are demanding that colleges stop doing business with brands that produce college-logo clothing in sweatshops and refuse to sign the Accord. Already, NYU, Temple, Duke, and the University of Pennsylvania agreed to the demands. Four of the largest retailers that produce college-logo apparel under licensing agreements with universities -- Fruit

of the Loom (owner of Russell Athletic), Knights Apparel, Adidas, and Top of the World -- signed the Accord. Meanwhile, a clothing factory in the Dominican Republic, created with support from anti-sweatshop activists, continues to supply T-shirts and sweatshirts sewn by workers who are paid a living wage, are represented by a democratic union, and face none of the abusive labor conditions that continue to plague apparel workers around the world. The shirts are sold by Knights Apparel under the company's new Alta Gracia brand, and are available in campus bookstores across the country and online.

17. **ALEC on the Ropes:** For years, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) operated without much notice. Many of the nation's major corporations and right-wing foundations (including those tied to the Koch brothers) funded ALEC to help them quietly promote business-friendly legislation through state legislatures, including bills to reduce regulations and taxes on corporations. ALEC recruits conservative state legislators to join as "members," entices them with expenses-paid travel junkets and conferences, and encourages them to introduce "model" bills that they road-test in conservative states and then try to expand them elsewhere. ALEC boasted that its legislative members introduced over 1,000 bills every year and that one in every five of them were enacted into law. But in 2011, the Center for Media and Democracy, with the help of *The Nation* and broadcaster Bill Moyers, began a series of investigative reports on the shadowy world of ALEC, exposing it to public scrutiny for the first time. At first, a few corporations, embarrassed by their links to ALEC, withdrew their financial support from the organization. Then, in 2012, the controversy of the killing of Trayvon Martin drew attention to ALEC's role in pushing Florida to adopt the first "stand your ground" law in 2005 and then successfully getting it enacted in other states -- an idea advocated by ALEC-affiliated gun manufacturers and Walmart (the nation's largest retail seller of guns and ammo). In 2013, investigators and media outlets exposed ALEC's support of Republican-backed state voter disenfranchisement laws and legislation to require science teachers to incorporate misleading arguments against the reality of global warming into their curriculum. In December, the *Guardian* reported that about 400 state legislators and 60 corporations (including Amazon, Coca-Cola, General Electric, Kraft, McDonald's and Walmart) cut their ties with ALEC because of the negative publicity. As a result, it lost more than one-third of its projected 2013 income. ALEC's remaining corporate members include AT&T, Exxon Mobil, Peabody Energy, Pfizer, Diageo and Altria (the tobacco giant formerly called Philip Morris).
18. **Campaign Finance Reform:** In the wake of *Citizens United*, Americans expressed growing concern about the political influence of money from corporations and wealthy Americans. Groups such as Public Campaign, the Sunlight Foundation, and the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP) continued to issue well-researched reports exposing the various ways that corporations, trade associations, business lobby groups, and wealthy individuals have tightened their grip on which politicians get elected and what legislation and regulations they support and oppose. On its OpenSecrets website, CRP's analysis of nonprofit tax returns revealed how conservatives abuse the IRS "non-profit" rule to engage in overt political action, not "social welfare," much of it traceable to groups linked to the Koch brothers' energy empire. Armed with this kind of information, citizens are fighting back. The New York State Charities Bureau for the first time required transparency for political spending from charities doing business in the state. In October, California's Fair Political Practices Commission, under the leadership of Ann Ravel, levied \$16 million in penalties on those organizations that violated state reporting rules for campaign contributions. The FPPC aggressively pursued the dark money trail, especially two shadowy Arizona groups (one linked to the Koch brothers) that donated a last-minute \$11 million to two 2012 referenda to weaken labor unions and to tax wealthy Californians to add funding for public schools. President Obama appointed Ravel to the Federal Election Commission (FEC), where she will continue to be a watchdog against corporate influence-peddling. New York

City's public funding system adopted in 1999 -- which provides a 6-to-1 match of public dollars on the first \$175 of all contributions made to participating candidates -- has helped level the playing field and played a role in Bill de Blasio's victory in the mayoral race. Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md) recently introduced the Grassroots Democracy Act, based in part on New York City's law. It would match every \$1 in donations of \$100 or less with \$5 in public matching funds and provide a \$50 tax credit to every voter to contribute to a candidate of his or her choice. The bill would also bar candidates who participate in this voluntary system from accepting contributions larger than \$1,000.

19. **Student Debt:** In May, more than 100 students from different states marched to the Delaware headquarters of Sallie Mae -- which owns \$162 billion of student debt, makes huge profits, acts like a Wall Street bank, is a member of ALEC, and since 2008 spent over \$16 billion in lobbying -- to express their anger over the student debt crisis. In October, students at NYU organized a protest during President John Sexton's State of the University speech, demanding that the university put a 10-year freeze on tuition increases and raise the average financial aid grant by 25 percent, while chanting "Education is a human right." The next month, thousands of college students from across California joined in rallies and panel discussions to draw attention to dramatic state cuts to higher education and the growing student debt crisis. Some students protested outside Santa Monica's luxury Fairmont Miramar Hotel, which is owned by computer titan Michael Dell, who took advantage of loopholes in state law to evade paying \$1.2 million a year in property taxes -- money that demonstrators say could fund higher education. The growing burden of student debt emerged as a major issue in 2013 thanks to the hard work of students activists, organizations like the U.S. Student Association and Generation Progress, and progressive think tanks like Demos and the Roosevelt Institute. As the movement grows across the country, the issue is likely to become a potent issue in the 2014 elections and beyond. Student debt has skyrocketed over the past decade, quadrupling from just \$240 billion in 2003 to more than \$1 trillion today, according to a Demos report. Seventy percent of college seniors graduated with debt in 2012, with an average debt of \$29,400, the highest amount ever. The problem is still getting worse as a result of stagnant family incomes, the rising cost of a college education, and the declining proportion of college costs covered by federal aid. The rising cost of higher education -- even public universities, which have lost 25 percent of state support since 2000 -- makes it harder for even middle-class students to attend college or to remain in school long enough to graduate. It is an even bigger obstacles for students from low-income families and students of color. Students from working class families -- especially those who attend the growing number of for-profit colleges that rip off their students -- have high rates of loan defaults, undermining their credit ratings. Student debt is not only one of the major causes of home foreclosures but it also makes it harder for college graduates in their 20s and 30s to purchase homes because they are still paying off college loans. Mounting student debt also makes it harder for college graduates to pursue careers in public service and the helping professions which typically pay less than jobs in the private sector. The burgeoning movement has caught the attention of elected officials. In 2010, Obama overcame GOP opposition to restructure the student-loan industry by eliminating private banks and lenders from the federal student-loan business, so that federal government would provide loans directly to students without any middleman taking a cut. In August, Obama signed legislation to lower interest rates on students loans and in December he met with university presidents to discuss how to reduce the cost of higher education. In 2013, Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA) and Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Jack Reed (D-RI), and Dick Durbin (D-IL) proposed legislation to reduce student debt. But so far the most successful policy reform occurred in Oregon, where state legislators unanimously passed a bill paving the way for students to attend public universities without paying tuition or taking out traditional loans at all. Under the plan, which is scheduled to be finalized in 2015,

students will pay nothing while in school; instead, after graduation, four-year students pay 3 percent of their income for the next two decades or so to fund the education of future students -- without a role for the big banks. The idea -- called "Pay It Forward, Pay It Back" -- is the brainchild of John Burbank of the Seattle-based Economic Opportunity Institute, but its political momentum was driven by Oregon's Working Families Party, which built a statewide coalition, including students at Portland State and other state institutions, won the support of university officials, and then persuaded state legislators, including Rep. Michael Dembrow, a Portland Democrat who chairs the higher education committee. In December, U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) introduced a bill to provide federal support for Pay It Forward pilot programs.

20. **Domestic Workers Win:** Until 2013, domestic workers were excluded from protections such as a guaranteed minimum wage, paid breaks, and overtime pay. In September, the Obama administration announced new rules extending the Fair Labor Standards Act to include the 800,000 to 2 million home health workers -- who help seniors and others with self-care tasks like taking medications, bathing, and shopping -- under the federal government's wage and hour protections. A week later, California governor Jerry Brown signed the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights, allowing the full spectrum of domestic workers -- including live-in nannies and housekeepers -- to benefit from the same gains as the home health workers. The California victory follows previous victories in New York and Hawaii. Campaigns are now underway in Massachusetts and Illinois. For the first time ever, these employees will be guaranteed the federal minimum wage and will earn overtime pay. These victories have implications for a much larger portion of the workforce, including independent contractors, nontraditional employees, and those on temporary assignments. Much of the credit for these historic wins is due to the tenacious organizing of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, led by the dynamic young organizer Ai-Jen Poo.
21. **Minnesota Shows the Way:** Under Democratic Gov. Mark Dayton and Democratic majorities in both the state House and Senate (the first time this has occurred since 1978), Minnesota showed a path to high road economic recovery. The state turned a deficit into a surplus with tax increase on the wealthy, passed a Homeowner Bill of Rights, in-state tuition for undocumented students, "banned the box" to prevent unfair barriers to ex-offender unemployment, repaid money taken from the schools, and granted bargaining rights to home care and childcare workers. In May, Dayton signed an economic development bill that mandates that 1.5 percent of Minnesota's electricity must come from solar by 2020. The state will also invest in community-owned solar gardens and pay consumers for the extra electricity their panels produce. The same month, Dayton signed a bill legalizing same-sex marriage. Each victory was made possible by a vigorous organizing effort by grassroots progressive groups and their allies in government. Key to these victories is Take Action Minnesota, a broad coalition of consumer, environmental, labor, community, civil rights, and other organizations. May also saw another Minnesota milestone. Rep. Michelle Bachmann, the founder of the Tea Party Caucus in Congress, announced that she won't run for re-election from her suburban district outside Minneapolis. The previous November, she barely won her last campaign despite outspending her Democratic opponent, Jim Graves, by a huge margin. Graves [threatened to run](#) again in 2014 and Bachmann, running scared, choose to give up her seat rather than risk defeat. Minnesota serves as a mirror image to its neighbor, Wisconsin, which under the sway of a right-wing Republican governor and legislator has pursued a different course that focuses on slashing government services and destroying unions.
22. **Obamacare:** Let us not allow a terrible website glitch to obscure one of the most important legislative accomplishments of the past half century -- the Affordable Care Act. Despite Republican efforts to demonize and defund it, and despite the Obama administration's massive screw-up in creating a workable website, the truth is that by the end of 2013, more than two

million Americans had already signed up for quality, affordable health care -- many for the first time -- under the federal and state plans. Over 100 million Americans had already reaped the benefits of the law, enacted in 2010, that prohibited insurance companies from discriminating against people with pre-existing health conditions and protected consumers in other ways. Within a few years, 25 million people who are currently uninsured will have coverage thanks to Medicaid expansion and the ACA marketplaces. Most progressives view the ACA as a stepping stone toward broader reform that will reduce health care costs and bring the insurance, hospital and pharmaceutical industries under stricter regulations.

23. **Good Appointments:** Activists and progressive Democrats in Senate forced Larry Summers to withdraw his candidacy to become next chair of the Federal Reserve, paving the way for Janet Yellen, a liberal on unemployment and bank discrimination issues, to become the first woman to hold that influential position. Progressives have an ally in Obama's new labor secretary, Tom Perez, a long-time activist on workers' rights issues. But after the Republicans refused to confirm many of Obama's other appointments, a frustrated Major Leader Harry Reid finally decided to use the "nuclear option" to break the power of the filibuster for non-Supreme Court appointments. One of the first beneficiaries of these new rules was Cong. Mel Watt, whom (after a six-month delay) the Senate confirmed as head of Federal Housing Finance Agency, putting Bush holder and banking industry puppet Ed DeMarco out to pasture.
24. **Popular Progressives:** In a nation dominated by corporate-run media, it is sometimes difficult for progressives to break through the cultural fog to reach wide audiences. But a number of progressives have managed to become popular figures with a diverse following. These include Senator Elizabeth Warren, Texas state senator Wendy Davis, singers Bruce Springsteen and Tom Morello, organizers Rev. William Barber (leader of North Carolina's "Moral Monday" movement) and Ai-Jen Poo (founder of the National Domestic Workers Alliance), talk show host Tavis Smiley, TV celebrities Rachel Maddow, Jon Stewart, and Stephen Colbert, filmmaker Michael Moore, academics Melissa Harris-Perry and Robert Reich, historian and education activist Diane Ravitch, writer Barbara Ehrenreich, playwright Tony Kushner, and Bill Moyers, who announced his retirement from his "Moyers and Company" TV show in November but then changed his mind in response to an outpouring of emails and letters insisting that he remain on their air.
25. **Pete Seeger: How Can We Keep From Singing?** Pete Seeger will be 95 on May 3. In the past year and a half he's published a book of his collected writings, *Pete Seeger: His Life in His Own Words* (with collaborators Rob Rosenthal and Sam Rosenthal), appeared on the *Colbert Report* and performed "Quite Early Morning" (accompanying himself on the banjo), released the music video and single of "God's Counting on Me, God's Counting on You," performed with Arlo Guthrie at Carnegie Hall, shared the stage at New York's Beacon Theater with Harry Belafonte, Jackson Brown and others to celebrate the life of Native American activist Leonard Peltier, issued an audiobook (in April) entitled *Pete Seeger: The Storm King, Stories, Narratives and Poems* (which was nominated for a Grammy), sang "I Come and Stand at Every Door" on *Democracy Now* on August 9 to commemorate the 68th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, sang "This Land is Your Land" (adding an anti-fracking verse) at the Farm Aid concert in Saratoga Springs in September (joined by Willie Nelson, Neil Young, John Mellencamp, and Dave Matthews), and in December performed at a concert in Nyack to benefit the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He's scheduled to appear at another concert with the Guthrie family on January 17 at Symphony Space in New York and will no doubt continue to lend his presence and voice to more progressive causes in 2014, despite the fact that his wife of 70 years, Toshi, died in July. Isn't it time to award Pete Seeger the Nobel Peace Prize?

Peter Dreier teaches Politics and chair the Urban & Environmental Policy Department at Occidental College. His latest book is *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame* (Nation Books, 2012).

CORRECTION: A previous version of this post incorrectly stated that Jim Graves is running for Michele Bachmann's Congressional seat. The post has been updated to clarify that Graves threatened to run but is not currently running for the seat.

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