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415 N. Killingsworth St.,
P.O. Box 5455, Portland, OR 97228.

Telephone (503) 285-5555.

E-mail: info@theskanner.com

World Wide Web site:

<http://www.theskanner.com>

Fax: (503) 285-2900

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The Rising Ocean is No Joke in N. Carolina

Did you hear the joke about how Republicans in North Carolina want to ban scientific discussion about the rising ocean levels? Well, I hate to break it to you, but it is no joke. A law is making its way through North Carolina legislature – advanced by the Republicans, of course – to limit all calculations on rising sea levels to those determined by the North Carolina Coastal Resources Commission. Further, the calculations have to be based on historic trends. In other words, the Commission is only to look to the past and not factor in what is really happening.

If anyone has any question as to what a Republican takeover of the national government would look like, watch our friendly North Carolina GOP in action. They do not like the fact that the ocean is rising so, presto, let's pretend that it is not happening. Let's not scare vacationers who want to visit and perhaps purchase property on the Outer Banks. Let's leave them all in blissful ignorance while the oceans rise eventually turning those beaches into seabed unless something dramatic is done soon.



TRANS AFRICA

Bill Fletcher Jr.

But then, the Republicans do not want to do anything about the climate catastrophe because, after all, they assert that the catastrophe is not happening. And how better

denial would be comedic if it were not so serious. Whether the denial is based upon an absurd attempt to protect property values, or a bury-your-head-in-the-sand approach does not really matter. Let's also leave aside some of the possible First Amendment issues contained here. The bottom line is that today's Republican Party is, quite literally, attempting to rewrite reality.

We are living through an environmental crisis, North Carolina GOP's opposition notwithstanding. We are witnessing the disappearance of the polar caps and the

not happening is the equivalent of a child making noises so that they do not hear things that they wish to ignore.

Yet it is not just denial. There is a struggle underway, and that is precisely what makes the politics of the Republican Party so dangerous. Environmental collapse is not inevitable since there are steps that can be taken, but they can only be taken when we take the blinders off and face reality.

So, with all due respect to the people of the great state of North Carolina, it is not only time to wake up and smell the scent of the sea closing in on your lovely homes on the Outer Banks, eventually making Raleigh a beach front...it is also time to laugh out of office the dimwits who believe that saying it ain't so is enough to make it not happen.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a Senior Scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies, the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum, and the co-author of Solidarity Divided. He can be reached at papaq54@hotmail.com

The Republicans do not want to do anything about the climate catastrophe because, after all, they assert that the catastrophe is not happening

to demonstrate that it is not happening than to not look at the actual data.

The North Carolina climate

extinction of species. There is a dramatic crisis afflicting bats with millions dying off, and there is the equally ominous collapse of bee colonies. To pretend that this is

Taking Care of Those Who Take Care of Us

Ai-Jen Poo, a powerful and passionate advocate for the rights of domestic workers, leads the National Domestic Workers Alliance. Who are these folks? They are the private household workers (maids) who propped up inept women in the movie, *The Help*. They are the home health aides who take care of our elders when they are ill or disabled, bringing them meals, bathing them, and accompanying them to medical appointments. They are the nannies that care for children when parents are working. In some ways, they are a backbone of our economy, and yet they often have neither voice nor money.

I was struck by the situation of domestic workers when I heard Ai-Jen at the National Council for Research on Women's annual conference. While some of us focus mostly on race, she is more likely to focus on class and the many ways that public policy is made from an extremely privileged perspective. The women who stitch together a living by working two and three domestic jobs certainly don't have the time to put their situation in context with public policy. And those who make public policy have only limited exposure to those who have to live it. Ai-Jen and the National Domestic Workers Alliance bridge that gap.

The organization started in 2007, and now has representation in more than 20 states. In New York, NDWA was instrumental in the passage of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights that went into effect in November 2010. It requires that people who work in other people's homes for 40 hours a week or more (except for relatives and casual employees such as babysitters) must be paid the minimum wage, must receive overtime pay, vacation time, workers'



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

compensation and disability benefits. One might assume that some of these benefits are already written into law, and in some ways they are. But domestic workers are more likely to be treated as casual workers than as profession-

then, the law had so many loopholes that few adhered to it. At the same time, failure to abide by the law has tanked many a nominee for a federal appointment. Judge Kimball Wood comes to mind as a capable jurist who was snagged by her failure to take Social Security taxes out of the wages of her full-time housekeeper.

Ai-Jen's presentation reminded me how little has changed for private household workers. There are employers who deduct from low wages if there is breakage in their homes. There are others that may deduct for meals. Without

In California, a piece of legislation that is similar to the New York bill is being considered. Indeed, Assembly Bill 889 passed the lower house of the California State legislature, but the California State Senate is dragging its heels. Indeed, some have so distorted the bill that they describe it as "the babysitter law," even though those who do not work full time are specifically excluded from the legislation. Those who oppose the bill talk about their free market rights, but have blinders on when it comes to the rights of others. Unfortunately, while women are the majority of private household workers, it is also women who are the majority of those who hire, and often exploit, them.

It is amazing how stuck the feminist movement has become around issues of women on the bottom. Twenty years ago there were passionate debates about housework pass along and the many ways that the women's movement could be mutually supportive along class lines. Now, though a passionate woman is fighting for domestic workers, she is not often joined by those who have greater voice, more power, and the ability to make a difference.

While domestic workers today are less likely to be African American than Latino, we in the African American community need to remember that the workplace has long been oppressive to those at the bottom. In speaking up for domestic workers, we speak up for our mothers and grandmothers, but also for ourselves, no matter what our economic status.

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based economist and writer. She is President Emerita of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C.

Those who make public policy have only limited exposure to those who have to live it

als, and if they are working full-time, they must be treated as professionals.

Listening to Ai-Jen Poo was like a blast from the past for me. My

intervention, the majority of 2.5 million workers take care of our most precious assets, our children and our parents, without being paid fairly. They cook our food,

Those who oppose the bill talk about their free market rights, but have blinders on when it comes to the rights of others

early academic work focused on private household workers. Although the Minimum Wage Act was passed during the Depression, private household workers and farm workers were excluded from the legislation until 1974. Even

and who wants someone who feels that they are being paid unfairly to cook their food? After all, even the private household workers in the pre-civil rights South weren't always benign.