

AFSCME LEGISLATIVE REPORT
August 7, 2009

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Senate Confirms Sotomayor to Serve on the U.S. Supreme Court

By a vote of 68-31, on August 6 the Senate confirmed Judge Sonia Sotomayor to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. Sotomayor will be the first Latino and the third woman to ever serve on the nation's highest court. After three days of debate, only nine Republicans joined with Democrats and two Independents to vote yes on her confirmation.

AFSCME endorsed Sotomayor's confirmation, noting her outstanding educational credentials, and her extensive and distinctive background as a litigator, prosecutor, trial court and U.S. appellate judge. Judge Sotomayor has been consistent in her interpretation of labor laws and has worked to preserve the rights of workers to receive fair pay, health benefits and to be free of workplace discrimination.

(Cynthia Bradley- cbradley@afscme.org)

House Committees Complete Health Care Reform Bills; Senate Committee Continues to Slow Reform Progress

By a vote of 31-28, the House Energy and Commerce Committee passed "America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009" (H.R. 3200) just before the House began its summer recess on July 31. All Democrats on the panel voted in favor except John Barrow (GA), Rick Boucher (VA), Jim Matheson (UT), and Bart Stupak (MI). All Republicans voted against the bill. To get enough votes to pass the bill out of committee, a number of changes proposed by the conservative "Blue Dog" Democrats were included in the approved bill. They somewhat weaken the public health insurance option, shift 7% of the cost of expanding Medicaid to the states after 2016, increase the number of small businesses exempted from the "pay or play" requirements, and make coverage less affordable for low- and middle-income earners purchasing coverage on their own. The Committee approved other changes that improve retiree health care, including an amendment sponsored by Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) that requires Medicare to negotiate with drug manufacturers for lower drug costs, as well as amendments sponsored by Reps. Schakowsky and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), that would use some cost saving in the bill to increase affordability credits. During the August recess, the three House committees with jurisdiction over health reform will negotiate what will be included in a final bill, which will then be voted on by the full House. AFSCME is working during the recess period to make the final House bill as strong as possible.

The Senate Finance Committee is the only remaining committee of jurisdiction in Congress that has not passed a health care reform bill. Negotiations are continuing during the August recess, and the Committee has set a tentative deadline of September 15 to finish its work.

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Show Health Care Reform Opponents We Won't Be Silenced!

Health care reform opponents, including so-called "tea party" activists, are disrupting congressional town hall meetings throughout the month of August. Their goal is to intimidate members of Congress and force them to vote no on reform by shouting them down and causing disturbances reminiscent of the 2000 Florida recount.

AFSCME is encouraging all members to attend all Democratic and Republican town hall meetings in full force to show that Americans support reform. Wherever possible, please bring cameras with you to document this outrageous right wing behavior and send the video to Blaine Rummel at brummel@afscme.org.

Let's show members of Congress that supporters of real health care reform will not be bullied into silence.

AFSCME Launches "Highway to Health Care Reform" Tour

This week, AFSCME is launching our Highway to Health Care Reform campaign, a rock and roll theme RV tour that will crisscross the country during the August congressional recess. The RV will travel through key states to mobilize the public to contact their members of Congress to demand real reform that guarantees comprehensive, affordable health care for everyone. In the press release announcing the tour, AFSCME International President Gerald McEntee said, "AFSCME will make the voices of Americans demanding real health care reform heard in the halls of Congress. It will make Congress hear the truth – America can't wait for reform that guarantees quality, affordable health care for all."

The Highway to Health Care Reform tour features an RV outfitted as a mobile activism center, complete with on-board laptop computers, cell phones and postcards for participants to contact their senators and representatives. The tour includes posters and literature that pay homage to famous rock musicians and a video that urges local residents to write and call their members of Congress. To support this effort, AFSCME will make a heavy blog ad buy during August in key states, and urge the public to text the union's short code to be connected directly to their members of Congress.

The Highway to Health Care Reform tour is part of the union's unprecedented \$6 million Make America Happen campaign, which includes ads, canvassing, phone calls, online activities and the deployment of dozens of campaign field organizers to key states in support of President Obama's efforts to win real health care reform this year.

(Blaine Rummel- brummel@afscme.org)

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