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## To Grow and Strengthen the Middle Class: An Update on Education and Labor Issues from the US House Education and Workforce Committee Democratic Staff

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# TO GROW AND STRENGTHEN THE MIDDLE CLASS

*An Update on Education and  
Labor Issues from the US  
House Education & Workforce  
Committee Democratic Staff*

*August 2013*



Prepared by the Democratic staff of  
the US House Committee on  
Education and the Workforce

# CONTENTS

## Introduction

### Preparing Students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century—3

- Guaranteeing a World-Class Education System—1
- Guaranteeing Quality Early Childhood Education Opportunities—2
- Embracing Technology to Improve Education—3
- Protecting Children’s Safety—4
- Protecting Children’s Access to Healthy Meals —5
- Guaranteeing Access to a High Quality, Affordable Higher Education—6
- Keeping Tuition in Check at For-Profit Higher Education Institutions — 8
- Protecting Students and Taxpayers Against Fraud and Abuse —8
- Guaranteeing Access to Internship Opportunities for Low-Income Students—9

### Strengthening Working Families’ Economic Security—10

- Increasing the Minimum Wage—10
- Guaranteeing Equal Pay for Equal Work—11
- Getting America Back to Work—12
- Encouraging a Work and Family Balance—14
- Fighting Employment Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity —15
- Fighting Employment Discrimination Based on Age —15
- Modernizing Workforce Training Programs and Closing the Skills Gap—16
- Securing Workers’ Retirement—18
- Protecting Workers’ Right to Organize—18
- Protecting Historic Health Reform and Patient Rights—19
- Worker Safety—20
- Improving Labor Rights and Safety for Bangladesh’s Garment Workers —22

## Introduction

During the 113th Congress, Education and Workforce Committee Democrats have been fighting for an agenda that grows and strengthens America’s middle class. That agenda starts with a robust defense of working families against repeated assaults from special-interest legislation. In addition to defending hard-won rights, this agenda seeks to move the economy forward, with policies that put people first and ensure access to a world-class education, decent jobs, health care security, and a sound retirement. This middle class agenda includes:

### **Preparing Children for the 21st Century**

- ✓ Guaranteeing a World-Class Education
- ✓ Protecting Children’s Health and Safety
- ✓ Making a Higher Education Affordable and Accessible
- ✓ Expanding Access to Early Childhood Education

### **Strengthening Working Families’ Economic Security**

- ✓ Getting America Back to Work
- ✓ Increasing Working Families’ Pay
- ✓ Securing Workers’ Health Care and Retirement
- ✓ Protecting Workers’ Rights and Safety Protections

Unfortunately, this agenda has run up against the same obstruction that afflicts Congress overall. The committee’s Republican majority has pursued measures that would undermine accountability in education and job training programs, deny millions of Americans access to health care, undermine workers’ rights and pay, and jack-up student loan debt by billions of dollars. Meanwhile, popular measures to boost pay and create jobs have been stymied.



# PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

## Guaranteeing a World-Class Education System

Five decades after *Brown v. Board of Education*, there is still work to be done to ensure that all children have access to world-class educational opportunities. Democrats on the committee are committed to ensuring that the rewrite of the No Child Left Behind Act lives up to our nation's commitment to all of our children, regardless of their background, disability, or the zip code in which they live. Unfortunately, committee Republicans pushed through a plan that lets children down by walking away from our nation's civil rights responsibility to ensure all children have access to a quality education.

The GOP bill for a reauthorization of the nation's K-12 education law was opposed by an extraordinary cross-section of business, labor, civil rights, disability, child advocacy, and education groups. From the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to the National Education Association and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, organizations with a stake in America's children getting an equal opportunity to learn and succeed made clear that the GOP bill was a huge step backwards for our education system.

Committee Democrats have put forth an alternative solution in committee and on the House floor that improves the education of our children by:

- ✓ Investing in education as a driver of long-term economic success and funding key programs.
- ✓ Guaranteeing that all students have access to a world-class education.
- ✓ Supporting a professional environment for teachers and school leaders.
- ✓ Ensuring states set high standards and goals to ensure all students graduate from high school ready for college or a career.
- ✓ Providing states more flexibility to craft accountability and improvement systems while ensuring schools remain accountable for the learning of all students.
- ✓ Supporting access to wrap-around services to ensure student's non-academic needs are met.
- ✓ Supporting access to a well-rounded education, including dedicated funding for literacy, STEM, and enrichment areas such as arts and music.

The Democratic alternative was supported by a broad coalition of education advocates and civil rights groups.

*Read more:* [democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/issue/elementary-and-secondary-education-act](https://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/issue/elementary-and-secondary-education-act)

## Guaranteeing Quality Early Childhood Education Opportunities

Decades of research have revealed significant short- and long-term benefits of quality early childhood education. Committee Democrats are committed to advancing a comprehensive, quality preschool bill in line with President Obama's proposal. The proposal creates a new federal-state partnership to provide all low- and moderate-income four-year old children with high-quality preschool, and incentivizes full-day kinder-

garten policies in school districts across the country. Committee Democrats have also coordinated efforts to support Head Start and are fighting to undo deep, automatic budget cuts that threaten up to 70,000 children's access to this program and thousands of jobs.

### Embracing Technology to Improve Education

The promise of technology for education is great. It can increase access to educational opportunities. It can enhance the impact and reach of great teaching. And, it can help to lower costs and increase efficiency and productivity.

Senior Democrat George Miller has introduced two bills this Congress providing the resources, infrastructure, hardware, software, and human capacity needed to prepare students for the 21st century and beyond.

- ✓ The Transforming Education through Technology Act (H.R. 521) would help schools, districts, and states transform learning systems by utilizing innovative technology.
- ✓ To address the under-investment in learning technology R&D, the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Education (ARPA-ED) Act (H.R. 700) would aggressively pursue technological breakthroughs by funding projects that have the potential to transform teaching and learning the way the Internet, GPS, and robotics have transformed how we live our lives.

Read more: [democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/issue/technology-education](http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/issue/technology-education)



### Protecting Children's Safety

Committee Democrats are committed to ensuring that schools and residential facilities are safe and positive learning environments for all children. Because a patchwork of state laws fails to protect all children from acts of violence, abuse, and neglect, minimum national standards are needed to



ensure children's safety and limit the unnecessary risks posed by dangers like predators and abusive disciplinary practices.

- ✓ The **Keeping All Students Safe Act of 2013** (H.R. 1893) would put in place minimum safety standards to prevent the inappropriate use of disciplinary tactics known as seclusion and restraint in our nation's schools disproportionately affecting students with disabilities and students of color.
- ✓ The **Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2013** (H.R. 1981) would keep teens safe with minimum standards for residential programs that are focused on teens with behavioral, emotional, mental health, or substance abuse problems.
- ✓ The **Protecting Students from Sexual and Violent Predators Act of 2013** (H.R. 2083) would prohibit public schools from hiring or retaining anyone who has been convicted of certain violent crimes, including crimes against children, crimes involving rape or sexual assault and child pornography. I would also create a consistent background check policy across state lines.

- ✓ The **Protecting Student Athletes from Concussions Act** (introduced in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress and included in the Democratic ESEA alternative) sets minimum safety standards for concussion management in public schools across the country. This legislation is urgently needed to keep student athletes safe on the field and thriving in the classroom.
- ✓ In the wake of revelations of dozens of child sex abuse cases by coaches at youth swim clubs, committee Democrats expanded their GAO investigation of educational institutions' responses to child sex abuse to include youth athletics programs.

*Read more:* [democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/issue/keeping-our-students-safe](http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/issue/keeping-our-students-safe)

## **Protecting Children's Access to Healthy Meals**

Child nutrition also impacts the learning of students in the classroom. Committee Democrats have been fighting cuts to the nation's nutrition aid to families and fighting efforts to roll back nutrition standards in school meals as part of the **Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act**.

- ✓ Thwarted further Republican Congressional obstruction to block basic nutrition standards for school meals supported by taxpayer resources.
- ✓ Successfully ensured that US Department of Agriculture's would be able to implement new school food nutrition standards through the appropriations process.

*Read more:* [democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/blog/healthy-hunger-free-kids-act-2010](http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/blog/healthy-hunger-free-kids-act-2010)

## **Guaranteeing Access to a High Quality, Affordable Higher Education**

The rising cost of a college education is squeezing millions of students and families who are relying on access to an affordable education to compete in a competitive job market. As the cost of college outstrips working families' ability to pay, too many students are forced to take on high loan debt burdens and work long hours that interfere with their academic study. Large and unmanageable loan payments reduce graduates' ability to fully participate in the economy and hinder our rate of recovery from the recession.

### **Reducing Student Loan Debt**

- ✓ **Keeping Interest Rates Low** – On July 1, 2013, interest rates for more than 7 million students doubled, which would have forced borrowers to pay an extra \$1,000 in repayment costs each year they are in college. The **Bi-partisan Student Loan Certainty Act of 2013** reversed that rate hike and provided students and families \$25 billion in student debt relief in the next five years. Against Republican opposition, the law also included critical protections for students Democrats demanded including caps that prevent very high interest rates and allowing borrowers to lock in today's low interest rates, which would save students thousands of dollars in debt over the House Republican plan. The failed House Republican plan would have piled billions more loan debt on the backs of students, and would have been actually worse for students than the doubled rates.

- ✓ **Providing Refinancing Option for Student Loans – The Responsible Student Loan Solutions Act (H.R. 1946)**, introduced by committee Democratic Congressman John Tierney of Massachusetts, would allow federal loan borrowers to refinance their student loans to lower rates based on market conditions. Borrowers with high interest rates would be provided thousands of dollars in debt relief by refinancing. would allow federal loan borrowers to refinance their student loans to lower rates based on market conditions. Borrowers with high interest rates would be provided thousands of dollars in debt relief by refinancing.
- ✓ **Increasing the Maximum Pell Grant Award** – The maximum Pell Grant award increased to \$5,645, from \$5,550, this year due to the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act passed by Democrats in 2010. This critical scholarship helps students with financial challenges pay for college and reduces their reliance on loans.
- ✓ **Protecting Students from High Bank Fees** – Committee staff has opened an inquiry into campus debit cards that have been reported to use banking fees to siphon away limited student aid dollars into the pockets of big banks. The ongoing inquiry has already encouraged many companies and banks to reduce or eliminate certain fees charged to students. On the heels of our efforts, bank regulators such as the Consumer Financial Protection Board have opened their own inquiries into debit cards on campus.
- ✓ **Restoring Bankruptcy Protection for Student Loan Borrowers** – Private student loans are one of the only forms of consumer debt where struggling borrowers completely down-and-out cannot get protection and relief in bankruptcy. The **Private Student Loan Bankruptcy Fairness Act (H.R. 532)**, cosponsored by several committee Democrats, would restore bankruptcy protection for borrowers with private student loans.

## Keeping Tuition in Check at For-Profit Higher Education Institutions



While for-profit colleges have an important role to play in higher education, they have not lived up to their full potential. For-profit colleges educate around 10 percent of students nationally, but consume almost 25 percent of all federal student aid (including Pell grants, student loans, GI Bill funds and Department of Defense tuition assistance benefits) and are responsible for about half of all borrowers defaulting on federal student loans.

**The College Student Rebate Act (H.R. 6407)** – Introduced committee Democrat John Tierney, the bill would safeguard student and taxpayer investment in for-profit institutions of higher education by requiring colleges that spend less than 80 percent of their revenue on educational and related expenses to provide students, taxpayers or both with financial rebates.

The bill is modeled after provisions in the Affordable Care Act, which were proposed and championed by Rep. Tierney, providing for rebates to Americans when an insurance company fails to use a sufficient percentage of premium revenues on providing health care.

## Protecting Students and Taxpayers Against Fraud and Abuse

Committee Republicans are advancing H.R. 2637, which would overturn accountability and integrity measures in higher education. It would block the Department of Education's authority to issue rules on gainful employment (holding degree programs accountable for whether their graduates secure employment), credit hours (understanding what students and taxpayers are paying for when they cut checks for tuition), and state authorization (ensuring schools are authorized by the state to operate). By contrast, committee Democrats plan to work with the Department of Education in an upcoming gainful employment rulemaking process to ensure students have access to high-quality institutions and degree programs that lead to meaningful jobs.

## Guaranteeing Access to Internship Opportunities for Low-Income Students

Students with internship experience are often more likely to find a job after college than those without it. However, many internships are unpaid leaving many low-income students shut out of this valuable educational opportunity. The **Opportunities for Success Act (H.R. 2659)**, introduced by committee Democratic Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici (D-Ore.), would establish grants of up to \$5,000 each for Pell Grant-eligible students who accept a full-time internship and \$2,500 for students who accept a part-time internship. Grants would be administered by the financial aid departments of qualifying educational institutions.

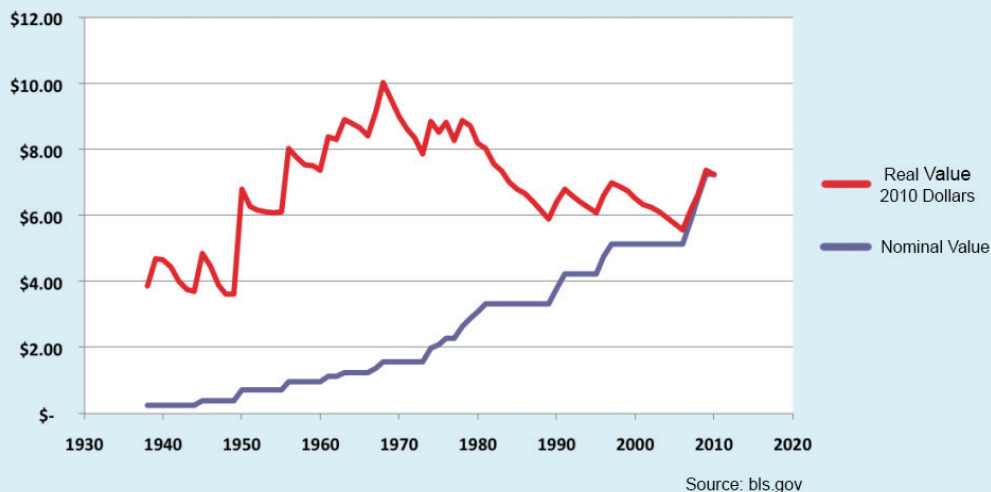


## Increasing the Minimum Wage

It's been four years since the last increase of the minimum wage took effect. The real value of the minimum wage today buys less than it did in 1956. In addition, workers who rely on tips haven't seen an increase in their wages since 1991. The required pay for tipped workers, excluding tips, has been stuck at a paltry \$2.13 per hour for 21 years. And, the federal minimum wage doesn't automatically rise with inflation.

The **Fair Minimum Wage Act (H.R. 1010)** would increase the minimum wage in three steps, from \$7.25 to \$10.10 per hour. The rate would then be indexed to inflation each year thereafter. In addition, the legislation will increase the required cash wage for tipped workers in annual 85 cent increases, from today's \$2.13 per hour until the tip credit reaches 70 percent of the regular minimum wage. A recent poll found that 80 percent of Americans agree that the minimum wage should increase to \$10.10 per hour. Some of the nation's most successful large businesses, like Starbucks and Costco, along with polled majorities of small businesses, have called for an increase, recognizing its value in spurring economic growth.

Real Value of Federal Minimum Wage Compared to Nominal Value: 1938-2010



House Democrats were able to bring their minimum wage proposal to a vote on the House floor on March 15, 2013. Unfortunately, House Republicans voted unanimously against the measure.

*Read more:* [democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/issue/fair-minimum-wage-act](http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/issue/fair-minimum-wage-act)

### Guaranteeing Equal Pay for Equal Work

This year marks the 50th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy signing the Equal Pay Act into law. When he signed it, President Kennedy stated that the Equal Pay Act would mean that ‘when women enter the labor force they will find equality in their pay envelopes.’ And yet, 50 years later, women still have not reached pay equity in the workplace.

Equal pay is not simply a woman’s issue – it’s a family issue. With women now the leading or solo breadwinners in 40 percent of households, compared with just 11 percent in 1960, families increasingly rely on women’s wages to make ends meet. When women bring home less money each day, it means they have less for the everyday needs of the families – groceries, rent, child care, and doctors’ visits.

Loopholes created by courts and weak sanctions in the Equal Pay Act have allowed unscrupulous employers to avoid liability for engaging in gender-based pay discrimination. The Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R. 377), introduced by Rep. Rosa DeLauro and cosponsored by committee Democrats, will strengthen the Equal Pay Act and close the loopholes that have allowed employers to avoid responsibility for discriminatory pay.

*Read more:* [democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/paycheck-fairness-act](http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/paycheck-fairness-act)



### Getting America Back to Work

Committee Democrats have offered a number of proposals to get America back to work. An economy built to last, that grows and strengthens the middle class, must be a high priority for Congress.

- ✓ **Pathways Back to Work Act (H.R. 2721)**, introduced by senior Democrat George Miller (D-CA), addresses the long-term unemployment crisis by connecting workers with job opportunities, providing young adults with jobs in summer and year-round employment, and creating a competitive grant for work-related training programs.

- ✓ **American Jobs Act**, as proposed by President Obama and introduced by committee Democratic Congresswoman Federica Wilson (D-FL), would, among other things, provide a \$30 billion investment in school infrastructure that will modernize at least 35,000 public schools – investments that will create jobs, while improving classrooms and upgrading our schools to meet 21st century needs.
- ✓ **Local Jobs for America Act (H.R. 2889)**, introduced by senior Democrat George Miller (D-CA), could provide our economy the needed shot in the arm by putting a million people to work by restoring these services in local communities. The bill authorizes critical resources to prevent job cuts and enable communities to hire back critical service workers who have lost their jobs due to tight budgets. It is estimated that the bill would create or save up to a million jobs in both the public and private sectors.
- ✓ **Public Land Service Corps Act of 2011 (H.R. 587)**, introduced by committee Democratic Congressman Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), would help restore the nation’s natural, cultural, historic, archaeological, recreational and scenic resources while training a new generation of public land managers and enthusiasts, and promoting the value of public service by employing youth between the ages of 16 and 25 to perform conservation projects
- ✓ **National Youth Summer Jobs Act of 2011 (H.R. 2539)**, introduced by committee Democratic Congresswoman Marcia Fudge (D-OH), would award five-year competitive grants to local governments to provide summer employment, including job readiness activities, work experiences, and job placement, for out-of-school youths age 14 to 21 who are enrolled in a public or private secondary school but are basic-skills deficient, unemployed, or underemployed.



### Encouraging a Work and Family Balance

This year marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). With the FMLA, our country made it a priority to give workers the ability to meet the demands of work and family. However, FMLA guarantees only unpaid leave, which millions of Americans cannot afford to take. The U.S. still has no mandatory paid family and medical leave policy – making it one of just three countries in the world and the only country among industrialized countries to not mandate paid maternity leave for new mothers. In addition, while workers in 145 countries around the world have earned paid sick days – but there is no policy to ensure earned paid sick days in the U.S.

House Democrats have introduced a number of proposals to provide needed family friendly leave policies. Among those proposals is the **Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1286)**, which would allow workers to earn up to seven paid-sick day a year and use it when they need it. Other proposals would expand the Family and Medical Leave Act to all workers in private and public jobs; and support the creation of a state paid leave fund that would assist states to design and plan for the implementation of self-sustaining paid family and medical leave insurance programs.



## **Fighting Employment Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity**

Currently, federal law only bans employment discrimination based on race, religion, sex, national origin, age and disability, but not for sexual orientation or gender identity. Workers in 33 states can legally be fired, denied a promotion, or harassed on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Committee Democrat Jared Polis (D-CO), joined by Democrats and Republicans, introduced The Employment Non-Discrimination Act, to end employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. In light of similar legislation being approved by a Senate committee on a bipartisan basis, Senior Democrat George Miller and Rep. Polis called on the committee to hold hearings on the bill. They have yet to receive a response from the committee chairman.

*Read more:* [democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/press-release/miller-polis-call-hearing-employment-non-discrimination-act](http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/press-release/miller-polis-call-hearing-employment-non-discrimination-act)

## **Fighting Employment Discrimination Based on Age**

On June 18, 2009, the Supreme Court rewrote our civil rights laws and made it harder for workers facing age discrimination to enforce their rights. In 2003, Jack Gross was demoted with lower pay and claimed that the demotion was because of age discrimination. A jury agreed that the company unlawfully demoted him because of his age.

However, in a 5 to 4 U.S. Supreme Court decision written by Justice Clarence Thomas, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Gross' jury trial and made it much more difficult for workers to hold employers accountable for their illegal actions.

The **Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act (H.R. 2852)**, introduced by senior Democrat George Miller (D-CA) would overturn the Gross decision and ensure that all Americans regardless of age will be able to seek justice when they are wronged on the job. It would make the standard for proving age discrimination the same as those alleging race, national origin or religious discrimination.

## **Modernizing Workforce Training Programs and Closing the Skills Gap**

With two years of private-sector job growth, there are signs that the nation's economy is on the road to recovery. However, more than 13 million Americans remain unemployed, 40 percent who have been looking for work for six months or more. At the same time, many employers in health care, advanced manufacturing, and other high-growth sectors report that they cannot find the skilled workers needed to fill up to 3.5 million current job openings across the country.

That's why the current workforce investment system needs to be modernized to assist these out-of-work Americans, including the long-term unemployed, acquire the skills that growing industries desire. Real investments in our workforce are not only critical for maintaining momentum for the current recovery, but also for our long term global competitiveness.

- ✓ The **Workforce Investment Act of 2013 (HR 798)**, introduced by committee Democrats John Tierney (D-MA), Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX) and George Miller (D-CA), would improve the nation's workforce investment infrastructure, focusing on finding workers jobs and careers through partnerships with in-demand sector employers, community colleges, labor organizations, and non-profits. *Read more:* [democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/issue/workforce-investment-act-wia](http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/issue/workforce-investment-act-wia)
- ✓ The **Community College to Career Fund Act (H.R. 2560)**, introduced by senior Democrat George Miller (D-CA), would help create partnerships between two-year colleges and businesses to train two million Americans for jobs in high-demand industries, such as health care, advanced manufacturing, clean energy, and information technology. *Read more:* [democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/sites/democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/files/documents/CommunitytoCollege.pdf](http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/sites/democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/files/documents/CommunitytoCollege.pdf)
- ✓ The **SECTORS Act (H.R. 919)**, introduced by committee Democrat David Loebsack (D-IA), would provide competitive grants to local areas working with employers to create employment clusters around particular industries, leveraging public and private resources to promote economic development and create good jobs.



## Securing Workers' Retirement

According to Government Accountability Office investigators, America's workers were often presented with false and misleading information regarding fees and their options with 401(k) assets when they leave an employer. Rep. Miller called on the Department of Labor to protect consumers from deceptive marketing materials disguised as advice, as well as for uniform standards and model notices to assist 401(k) accountholders in making better-educated decisions on their retirement savings, ensure the full disclosure of Individual Retirement Account (IRA) fees, and encourage people to keep their retirement savings in the 401(k) system. Committee Democrats are also working to address challenges facing the multi-employer pension system that covers millions of current and future retirees. Members hope to work on bipartisan reforms that will ensure the stability of the system so that retirees can rely on a secure retirement.

## Protecting Workers' Right to Organize

Like in the previous Congress, the committee's Republican majority has continued to press special-interest legislation to rollback workers' right to organize and collectively bargain. In the 113th Congress, they have already moved legislation designed to shut down the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the agency that enforces these rights.

Committee Democrats opposed that legislation and supported Senate efforts to finally break a Republican filibuster that was holding up presidential nominees to the NLRB. That filibuster was successfully broken and nominees have been confirmed, ensuring a functioning NLRB for some time. These confirmations were a defeat for obstructionism and chaos and a victory for workers and employers alike, who will be able to rely on the agency to vindicate their rights.



# Health Care Reform

## Protecting Historic Health Reform and Patient Rights

Committee Democrats have helped stop the more than 40 attempts by House Republicans to weaken or repeal the health care rights of Americans under the historic Affordable Care Act. Despite claims from opponents, the early evidence shows that the health care law is already having a positive impact on the lives of Americans.

The Affordable Care Act is giving Americans more security by holding insurance companies accountable, bringing down costs across the health care system, and helping more families get the peace of mind of affordable health insurance.

Tens of millions of Americans are already benefiting from stronger coverage:

- ✓ 71 million Americans in private plans are now receiving free preventive services.
- ✓ 34 million seniors in Medicare are now receiving free preventive services.
- ✓ 6.3 million seniors have saved more than \$6.1 billion on their prescription drugs.
- ✓ 3.1 million young people who otherwise would be uninsured have gained coverage under their parents' plans.

The law is also starting to help slow the growth in health care costs:

- ✓ U.S. health care spending grew at 3.9 percent the last three years, the lowest growth rate in 50 years.
- ✓ Medicare per beneficiary spending rose by just 0.4 percent in 2012.
- ✓ Medicaid per beneficiary spending actually dropped by 1.9 percent in 2012.

Even more, Americans will gain access to affordable coverage when new Health Insurance Marketplaces open in every state in 2014. The nonpartisan CBO estimates that there will be 27 million fewer Americans uninsured due to the law.

Finally, the law has already led to nearly \$2.1 billion in savings for American consumers as a result of new rate review provisions and provisions requiring insurers to provide rebates to consumers when insurers fail to spend at least 80 percent of premiums on medical care and quality improvement, rather than CEO pay, profits and administrative costs.

## Worker Safety

Democrats have offered a number of solutions to strengthen workplace safety and health:

- ✓ **Robert C. Byrd Mine Safety Protection Act (H.R. 1373)**, Following the worst underground coal mine disaster in America in the past 40 years, which killed 29 miners in West Virginia, committee Democrats George Miller (D-CA) and Joe Courtney (D-CT) introduced legislation to modernize the nation's mine safety law by requiring that mine operators adopt advanced mine safety technology, providing stronger criminal sanctions for reckless conduct, and enhancing whistleblower protections for miners.

- ✓ **Worker Protection Against Combustible Dust Explosions and Fires Act of 2013 (H.R. 691)**, introduced by Reps. Miller and Courtney, this bill would require the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue rules within a year to better protect workers and property from massive explosions and fires caused by metal, sugar and chemical dust accumulations that have killed 119 workers and injured another 718 between 1980 and 2005. The incidents persist despite outreach and OSHA targeted inspection programs.
- ✓ **Protecting Americas Workers Act (H.R. 1648)**, introduced by senior Democrat George Miller (D-CA) would update the Occupational Safety and Health Act by increasing penalties that have not been adjusted for inflation since 1990, modernizing obsolete whistleblower protections, expanding OSHA coverage to state and local government employees who lack such protections in 26 states, strengthens criminal sanctions, and requiring employers to promptly correct safety violations.
- ✓ **Offshore Oil and Gas Worker Whistleblower Protection Act of 2013 (H.R. 1649)**, introduced by senior Democrat George Miller (D-CA), would extend federal anti-retaliation laws to protect oil and gas workers when they blow the whistle on workplace health and safety violations or refuse to perform unsafe work on the Outer Continental Shelf. Workers on oil rigs like the BP's Deepwater Horizon risk losing their jobs if they report dangerous workplace conditions, particularly due to infrequent inspections and remote locations of offshore oil rigs.

## Improving Labor Rights and Safety for Bangladesh's Garment Workers

Following repeated garment factory fires and collapses – including the November 2012 Tazreen Fashions factory fire and the April 2013 Rana Plaza building collapse – committee Democrats worked to expose the pattern of repression by the Bangladesh government against worker advocates and unions for seeking to exercise labor rights.

- ✓ Senior Democrat Miller visited Bangladeshi garment factories, interviewed survivors of factory fires and collapses, and engaged with factory owners, union leaders and government officials.
- ✓ An amendment added to a defense bill would require garments made in Bangladesh and sold at base retail stores owned by the Department of Defense, known as exchanges, comply with an enforceable fire and building safety accord that will improve conditions in Bangladesh ready-made garment factories.
- ✓ Working with the Obama Administration to suspend Bangladesh's trade benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) until that government takes steps to afford internationally recognized worker rights, enforce fire and building safety codes, and end repression against unions and worker advocacy organizations.

