

# National AFL-CIO quick to approve anti-filibuster drive

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Frustrated with Senate Republican filibusters that stall nominations and block or kill legislation that has majority support — notably the Employee Free Choice Act — the AFL-CIO Executive Council has set out on a mission to inform citizens of abuses in the parliamentary procedure that do nothing but obstruct legislation, much of it legislation helping workers.

At the labor federation's Executive Council meeting here Aug. 4-5, union presidents announced plans to hold an "Our Nation" rally at the Capitol Oct. 2 to spotlight the issue.

Starting when they lost the majority after the 2006 elections, and escalating after Democratic President Barack Obama took office last year, the Senate's 41 Republicans have used filibusters 113 times (so far) to bring key legislation and appointments to a halt. The Senate needs 60 votes to move forward. Majority Leader Harry Reid, (D-Nev.), leads 57 Democrats and two independents who lean Democratic.

Reid's search for 60 votes has resulted in a watering down of key legislation, including aid to states for Medicaid, money to hire teachers, and the original stimulus law. It has also killed the Employee Free Choice Act, which has majority support in the Senate.

"Filibusters have made it virtually impossible to address the jobs crisis, energy policy or immigration reform," the AFL-CIO said. "The cloture statistics

alone actually understate the degree to which the Senate is now effectively controlled by a minority dedicated to obstruction and delay."

The AFL-CIO is calling on next year's Senate "to democratize its procedures and its rules."

The Communications Workers of America (CWA) went a step further at its recent convention, calling for abolishing the filibuster altogether. CWA President Larry Cohen, who chairs the AFL-CIO's Legislative Committee, said the union will quiz U.S. Senate candidates on the filibuster and decide on its support depending on their replies. "If they are for killing the filibuster, CWA will be for them," Cohen said. "If not, not."

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, (D-OR), is among a half-dozen or so lawmakers who support reforming Senate rules that allow silent filibusters. In an interview with Huffington Post, Merkley said he's canvassing his colleagues to determine how strong support is for reform.

"I think we will be able to pull a couple dozen senators into the debate," he said. "Now is the time to heat up this conversation. Going into this election cycle with people running for office ... it is important for people to remember that there was no supermajority requirement till 1917."

Moreover, since 1992 senators haven't had to actually filibuster — talk at length on the Senate floor. They sim-

ply tell the leadership that they are filibustering a bill or nomination.

"It's not constitutional. It's not statutory. It's a rule," Rep. Paul Hodes of New Hampshire told HuffPost, adding that he wasn't certain what the new rule should look like exactly, but the current ones needed to be reformed. "Everywhere I go, they say, 'Make 'em bring out the cots and the telephone books.' People are eager for real backbone and some toughness from Democrats."

At a Northwest Oregon Labor Council breakfast meeting with Sen. Ron Wyden, (D-OR), last month in Portland, filibuster reform was one of the first issues broached during a question and answer period.

Wyden was hesitant to support outright reform, explaining that he has used the procedure to defend causes "that folks in this room hold very, very dear."

Wyden used the filibuster to protect Oregon's voter-passed death with dig-

nity law, and he said he would use it to stop privatization of Social Security if it ever reaches the Senate floor.

"Our death with dignity law would be in the trash can today if I hadn't filibustered it," he said.

Wyden's primary concern is that filibuster abuses can be done in secret. "It's one thing to have the guts to stand up on the floor and say, 'I don't want so and so to have a vote.' But it's another thing to do it in secret."

Wyden said he is a ringleader in the Senate to pass legislation barring anyone from doing public business in secret. "They ought to have to go out on the floor and identify themselves," he said.

Democratic candidates running for the Senate told HuffPost that they hear regularly from voters about abuse of the parliamentary tactic.

"The use of the filibuster and the way it's led to backroom deals has cre-

ated the impression in the heartland that the Senate is dysfunctional," said Jack Conway, a Democratic candidate facing Republican Rand Paul in Kentucky. "They don't understand why Washington can't address the issues people care about. People in Kentucky wanted people focused on jobs — 14 months [of the health care debate] laid bare how broken the system was."

Conway was joined in his backing of filibuster reform by Senate candidates Elaine Marshall of North Carolina and Roxanne Conlin of Iowa, as well as sitting Senators Tom Udall (D-N.M.), Al Franken (D-Minn.), and Ben Cardin (D-Md.)

Udall told HuffPost that support is strongest among new members and those running now. "They're all tuned into it," said Udall, elected in 2008, of the freshman and sophomore senators. "The core of support will be those — and whoever comes in in 2010."

## Washington State Labor Council endorses Heck for Congress; Jacks, Probst, Chopp for state seats

TACOMA — Democratic congressional candidate Denny Heck was endorsed by the Washington State Labor Council at its Constitutional Convention here Aug. 11.

Heck, who is running to succeed

Brian Baird in the Third District, did not get the endorsement at the labor federation's Committee on Political Education convention in May. Instead, the endorsement went to State Sen. Craig Pridemore in a contentious

roll-call vote. Pridemore dropped out of the race two weeks later, forcing the WSLC to revisit the race.

Other candidates gaining labor support in the second round of endorsements were incumbent state representatives Jim Jacks in Vancouver's District 49, Tim Probst in Vancouver's District 17, and House Speaker Frank Chopp in Seattle's District 43.

The three Democratic lawmakers were not endorsed at the COPE convention primarily because of their votes on a state budget bill that were contrary to the position of public employee unions.


Chopp also has been at odds with labor, first for helping kill WSLC's top priority bill in 2009 — the Worker Privacy Act, which barred mandatory employee attendance at employer-called anti-union meetings, and then for his role with Democratic leadership to call state police about an internal WSLC e-mail that threatened to cut campaign contributions to Democrats for killing the bill. Chopp, Senator Majority Leader Lisa Brown, and Gov. Chris Gregoire said the e-mail crossed a line by linking campaign contributions to action on a particular bill. None of them contacted the labor council for an explanation of the e-mail before referring the matter to the Washington State Patrol, which quickly cleared WSLC of any wrongdoing.

In other political action, Jill Johanson was endorsed for Court of Appeals, while Jim Johnson received a "no endorsement" for State Supreme Court. A "no endorsement" means the WSLC will campaign against Johnson.

Endorsements can only be gained with a two-thirds vote of the delegate body. There were more than 420 delegates in attendance at the weeklong convention.

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