

Jobs bill for teachers and first responders blocked by GOP

Republican-led filibusters in the U.S. Senate have blocked two bills that would have put hundreds of thousands of people back to work.

On Oct. 11, the GOP filibustered President Obama's \$447 billion American Jobs Act, which independent economists calculated would save or create more than a million jobs. The legislation would have been paid for by raising income tax rates by 5.6 percent on people making more than \$1 million a year.

The bill actually had majority support (51 senators), but it fell short of the 60 votes needed to end a filibuster. All 47 Republicans in the Senate, and two Democrats, voted to block the bill. Forty-nine Democrats and the two in-

dependent senators voted for cloture and to bring debate to an end.

One week later, on Oct. 20, Republican senators blocked a scaled back version of the American Jobs Act.

Entitled the Teachers and First Responders Back to Work Act (S. 1723), the bill would have channeled \$35 billion to state and local governments to put back to work or keep on the job an estimated 300,000 teachers, 15,000 firefighters, and thousands of public safety officers.

The bill would have been paid for by a one half of 1 percent tax on those making more than \$1 million a year.

Senate Democrats voted 47-2 to bring up the bill and stop the GOP filibuster. The GOP opposed it 47-0, and

the independent senators split 1-1.

"For the second time in two weeks, every single Republican in the United States Senate has chosen to obstruct a bill that would create jobs and get our economy going again," President Obama said in a statement.

Vice President Joe Biden, speaking at rally Oct. 19 hosted by the International Association of Fire Fighters, told the crowd that when he and other Obama Administration officials sat down to design to the jobs bill, "We said we should do things that would create jobs and that Republicans support. This wasn't designed to put Republicans on the spot. It was designed to do something to help this country."

"The things we picked are things

that every Republican I've served with have supported — infrastructure, tax cuts for small businesses, for middle-class people, the ability to provide for the safety and security of our communities, and continue teaching our kids.

"But these guys wouldn't even allow us to vote on it. Now we're going to vote piece by piece and they can explain to the American people why they are against the people who save our lives and give our children a chance to have good lives."

International Association of Fire Fighters President Harold Schaitberger said that Republicans can't use the excuse that the bill adds to the deficit as a reason to oppose it because "It is all paid for with a one half of 1 percent tax

on those making more than a \$1 million a year. I think they can afford that."

The day before the Oct. 20 Senate vote, members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in Oregon, representatives from North Clackamas School District, and students and personnel from the Sabin-Shellenberg Professional Technical Center in Milwaukie, Oregon, gave Congressman Kurt Schrader (D-5th Dist.) a tour of empty classrooms to illustrate the impact funding cuts and job losses have had on career and technical training programs at the school.

"The training I am receiving here at Sabin-Shellenberg is the same as I would receive in a college program, so not only am I getting a head start, but I'll also save money on my college education," said student Alex Vdovich.

Had S. 1723 not been filibustered, some \$300 million in aid would have been available to put teachers back in the classroom, said Belinda Reagan, an AFT-Oregon executive vice-president and president of Portland Federation of School Professionals Local 111.

"The empty classrooms illustrate the urgency behind passing job creation legislation in Washington," Schrader said. "Career training programs were designed to prepare students like Alex Vdovich with the skills they need to succeed in the global economy."

Republicans derail 'Buy America' plan offered by Merkley

Even though a majority of senators supported the amendment to H.R. 2112, the threat of a filibuster kills it

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — A threatened Republican filibuster in the U.S. Senate derailed a proposal by Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), that would have required federal freight rail projects paid for with taxpayer dollars to use "steel, iron and manufactured products" made by American workers.

Senators voted 55-44 for the amendment to H.R. 2112, the Agriculture, CJS, and Transportation/HUD Appropriations bill. But Merkley needed 60 votes to stop a threatened Republican filibuster.

Democrats backed the amendment 49-1, Republicans voted 5-42 against it, and the two independent senators split.

There was no debate on the amendment. Merkley spoke for it. Nobody spoke against it.

"It is important to boosting American jobs and manufacturing and ensuring more of our American dollars are spent here at home," Merkley ex-

plained. "When the government spends tax dollars, it should be looking to American companies to provide goods and services. Recently, an issue came to light that gave me substantial concern."

"A few months ago, a bid was awarded to a Chinese company to provide steel for a freight rail bridge in Alaska — the Tanana Bridge. There was strong American competition. However, the award went to the Chinese company.

"If there were a level playing field, that would be one thing. But, in fact, China is employing a three-tiered strategy that provides enormous subsidies to its own manufacturing, tilting the playing field considerably.

"At a time when Americans everywhere are searching for jobs, we should be supporting American companies that employ and hire Americans, especially to make sure American companies are not disadvantaged by Chinese strategy

that tilts the playing field against our companies and thereby destroys jobs in America," he said.

The Department of Transportation operates under Buy America rules for its grant programs administered by the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration. However, the Federal Railroad Administration only has Buy America rules for its passenger rail programs, not its freight rail programs.



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