

# Unions and their allies mount filibuster reform push in U.S. Senate

Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the United Auto Workers (UAW) are reuniting with some progressive allies in a coalition to build public support for reforming the Senate filibuster rules when the 113th Congress convenes next year.

The Fix the Senate coalition, comprised of CWA, UAW, the Alliance for Justice, the Brennan Center for Justice, Common Cause, and the Sierra Club, tried unsuccessfully in 2010 to make the change. They had help from Democratic Sens. Tom Udall (NM), Tom Harkin (IA) and Jeff Merkley (OR).

"The current Senate rules enable obstruction and block progress on a range of issues key to America's future," the coalition said, pointing to Republican-led filibusters that halted the DREAM Act, which passed the House while receiving 55 votes in the Senate; blocked any debate on the Employee Free

Choice Act, which passed the House with an overwhelming majority and garnered 59 supporters in the Senate; derailed the DISCLOSE Act — which would have increased transparency over independent groups' campaign spending, despite receiving support from 51 senators; and blocked the Bring Jobs Home Act, which would have encouraged in-sourcing by providing tax incentives to companies that bring jobs back to the United States from overseas.

In the 1960s, threatened or actual filibusters affected only 8 percent of major legislation. By the 1980s, that had risen to 27 percent. But after Democrats retook control of Congress in 2006 and Republicans found themselves in the minority, filibusters soared to 70 percent. Over the last three sessions of Congress 386 motions to filibuster have been filed. And senators don't even have to give Mr-Smith-Goes-to-Washington-type-speeches to do it. They can simply raise the threat and that brings the discussion to an end.

It takes 60 votes to kill a filibuster.

In January 2013, at the beginning of the next session of the Senate, Democrats can reduce filibuster abuse with a

simple-majority vote. Democrats will hold 53 seats to the Republicans 45. Two senators are independents who typically caucus with the Democrats.

"To the average American, these reforms are just common sense," said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (Nev.). "Americans believe Congress is broken. The only ones who disagree are Mitch McConnell and Republicans in Congress."

One of the changes being proposed is to require a senator to hold the floor and actually debate the legislation.

## Carpenters Food Bank low on cash

Cash donations to the Carpenters Food Bank are at an all-time low, while distribution is reaching record levels.

Cash donations to help buy food can be sent to: **Food Bank, P.O. Box 17358, Portland, OR 97217.**

For more information about the Carpenters Food Bank, call Mike Fahey at 503-970-2482.

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## Lock-down at Constructing Hope

Bob Calwhite of the Pacific Northwest Carpenters Institute spent several hours in "jail" Nov. 13 as part of a fundraiser for Constructing Hope, a non-profit pre-apprenticeship program that prepares minorities, people coming from incarceration, and low-income individuals for careers in the construction industry. Students get hands-on training, required certifications, and real-life work experiences that equip them to enter the trades ready to work. The organization is supported by Laborers Local 296, IBEW Local 48, Carpenters Local 146, and the Carpenters training center. The fundraiser involved construction industry partners being held in lock-down until they could raise "bail" by securing donations. "We had a great response, raising approximately \$18,000 from over 100 donors in just a few hours," said Executive Director Patricia Daniels. "There are a few more donations pending and we're still encouraging others to help us meet our \$25,000 goal." Constructing Hope is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that relies on community support to achieve its mission. Donations can be made online at [www.constructinghope.org](http://www.constructinghope.org) or by mail at 405 NE Church Street, Portland, OR 97211. For more information, contact Daniels at 503-281-1234.

## ...Avakian's term is 2 years

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years at BOLI, including six years as deputy commissioner.

Hammond is a 36-year veteran of the agency, beginning as a clerical specialist with the Apprenticeship and Training Division. As administrator of the Wage and Hour Division, she has been the state's top enforcement official for ensuring that fair wages are paid to workers.

Avakian is interviewing candidates for all the open positions at BOLI and will announce his new hires as soon as possible.

Avakian also reminded union officials that this term as labor commissioner is only for two years. In 2009 the Oregon Legislature passed a bill establishing procedures for filling mid-term vacancies in certain state offices — specifically labor commissioner. Law-

makers did that to put the labor commissioner's race back on its original cycle in years when the governor is elected. It got off track in April 2008 when then-labor commissioner Dan Gardner, a member of IBEW Local 48, resigned mid-term to take a job with his international union in Washington, D.C.

Avakian was a state senator at that time and in the middle of a four-way race for the Democratic nomination for secretary of state when Gov. Ted Kulongoski appointed him to succeed Gardner. The office was then put on the ballot in the 2008 general election in November — two years before it would normally be up, but with the understanding that it would be for a full four-year term, and not to finish Gardner's term.

Avakian ran and defeated two unknown candidates.