

...Report links GOP filibusters to McConnell campaign cash

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Connell (R-KY), to discuss the resolutions.

Jan. 22 will be the new first day.

Some of the most vocal opponents of filibuster reform are lobbyists who profit from the Senate dysfunction.

The Nation magazine reported how Republican-led filibusters and “silent holds” on nominations have resulted in some Big Business windfalls for corporations that just happened to be large contributors to the senators’ campaigns.

“Sort of an ‘everybody wins’ situation for lobbyists, lawmakers, and corporations, but pretty much a losing proposition for the rest of us,” writes Mike Hall of the AFL-CIO NOW blog.

The Nation pointed to Steven Duffield, vice president for policy for Karl Rove’s group Crossroads GPS, as one of the most vigorous rules reform opponents, who has touted his ability to get Republican lawmakers to unleash filibusters and holds and who, “literally sold filibusters, anonymous holds and the other forms of obstruction” during his 2011 lobbying work.

Sen. McConnell himself launched at least eight successful filibusters in the 112th Congress — including the jobs creation bill — at virtually the same time he was collecting campaign cash from special interests opposed to those measures, the Kentucky AFL-CIO pointed out during a press conference Jan. 4.

The state labor federation unveiled a new study by the non-profit non-partisan Public Campaign Action Fund il-

lustrating the success of the Republican filibusters in killing legislation that would have hurt those special interests.

Some of the highlights from the report, “Cashing In On Obstruction”:

- On the very day debate began on a bill to repeal subsidies to Big Oil, an astonishing \$131,500 in campaign contributions passed from the hands of oil donors in Midland, Texas into McConnell’s re-election war chest. Three days later the bill failed by filibuster.

- Companies that lobbied against bringing jobs back to America and ending tax breaks for offshoring have given McConnell \$1 million to win his elections and look out for their interests. Big McConnell donors such as GE, Microsoft, and Exxon Mobil also have billions in untaxed profits stashed overseas.

- Despite once supporting transparency, McConnell has led the effort to block the DISCLOSE Act and keep Americans in the dark about the money flowing into elections. Wealthy individuals and companies spending millions in secret money have overwhelmingly helped elect Republicans, an essential step in McConnell’s ambition to become majority leader of the Senate.

- Sen. McConnell took the unusual step of filibustering a district court nominee, former trial lawyer Jack McConnell, who was vehemently opposed by the insurance industry and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce after Jack McConnell won a multi-billion dollar case against lead paint companies. Sen. McConnell has received

\$1.7 million from insurance interests, and has taken tens of thousands of dollars from one of the lead paint companies in the case and its parent company.

The report further states that McConnell gets 84 percent of his campaign cash from PACs and large donors and only 16 percent from individuals in Kentucky. He has raised some \$45 million for his elections in his career, not counting funds he is already stockpiling for his 2014 race. The largest donor in the group of 37 is General Electric, giving at least \$174,812 to McConnell over the years. It’s followed by Microsoft (\$100,750), Koch Industries (\$85,450), and Exxon-Mobil (\$74,300).

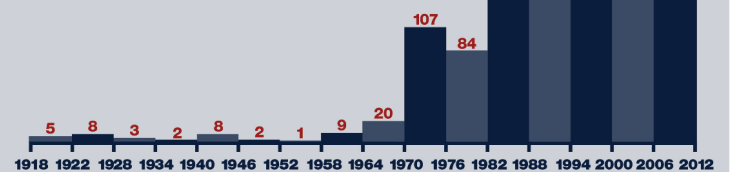
“These 37 companies have collectively stashed \$445 billion in untaxed profits overseas instead of using those funds to create jobs in America. GE, Microsoft and ExxonMobil also stand out, with offshore profits of \$102 billion, \$61 billion, and \$74 billion, respectively,” the report says.

“Congress isn’t working for Kentuckians, but it is working for lobbyists and corporate interests,” Kentucky AFL-CIO President Bill Londrigan said at the Louisville press conference. “McConnell has always put his donors’ interests before the needs of middle class families, but now he’s helped to grind Washington to a halt when we need someone on our side.”

(Editor’s Note: David Groves, editor of *The Stand*, a blog of the Washington State Labor Council, and Press Associates Inc., contributed to this report.)

BILL OBSTRUCTION: A GROWING PROBLEM

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Boeing push for pension changes may lead to strike

Bargaining between the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA) Local 2001 and The Boeing Co. ended Jan. 11 with the union reporting little progress on key issues. A key sticking point is Boeing’s demand to switch new hires to a defined contribution pension plan, i.e., a 401(k).

In a memo following the talks, SPEEA said “the company indicated that they still intend medical cost increases, elimination of the pension for future hires, and reduction of growth in retirement benefits” for the existing engineers and technical workers.

An affiliate of the International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers (IFPTE), the union represents 22,950 engineers and technical workers at Boeing. About 200 members work at the Boeing plant in Gresham.

The sides have been in bargaining since April 2012. In October, engineers rejected Boeing’s initial offer by 95.5 percent, while technical workers turned it down by 97 percent. Existing contracts expired Nov. 25.

After taking a month-long holiday break, bargaining resumed Jan. 9 with assistance from a federal mediator.

On Jan. 9 thousands of SPEEA members took part in “Day of Action” events throughout the Northwest in support of negotiations. Members marched through Boeing factories and offices or attended updates with negotiation team members in lunchtime meetings.

International President Greg Junemann attended a Jan. 10 SPEEA Council meeting to reiterate IFPTE’s support, and to remind workers that

Boeing tried to push them to accept cuts and takeaways in 2000.

Boeing currently is enjoying record profits, a completely funded pension, 4,200 airplanes on backorder, and \$20 billion cash on hand, the union said.

“Your negotiating teams’ focus is negotiating a contract that respects your contributions without going out on strike,” Junemann said. “But the folks in Chicago need to hear this loud and clear: If they provoke a strike by SPEEA again, all of IFPTE, and a whole lot of the labor movement, is ready to show them again that engineers and technical workers deserve respect and their fair share of this company’s remarkable success.”

The union has filed two unfair labor practice (ULP) charges against Boeing since bargaining began. The most recent was Jan. 2. The specific charges relate to Boeing taking surveillance photographs of engineers and technical employees marching inside and outside the factory on Dec. 12 and after. The first ULP was filed in October and relates to Boeing seizing employee cameras and photographs of union marches. Both charges are currently before the National Labor Relations Board.

“After Boeing tried and failed to build the 787 on the cheap, SPEEA members stepped up and saved the program,” said SPEEA Executive Director Ray Goforth. “Everything has now turned around and the company has developed amnesia about how that happened.”

Negotiations were scheduled to resume Jan. 16, after this issue of the Labor Press went to press.



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