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Filibuster reform effort fails

'For members of our union ... the failure to enact substantial reform of the rules almost guarantees that for two more years, there will not be effective debate, discussion or voting on even the critical issues the Obama Administration has outlined.'

LARRY COHEN, PRESIDENT
COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — A determined effort to curb abuses of the Senate filibuster failed on Jan. 25 when the Senate's two party leaders announced a "compromise" resolution that was enacted by lawmakers.

The agreement between Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) does streamline some filibuster rules by limiting filibusters on what is known as the "motion to proceed." Republicans have used such filibusters not to block a bill from a vote but simply to prevent debate on legislation from beginning. The new rules also limit debate on some judicial and federal nomina-

tions and make some other changes.

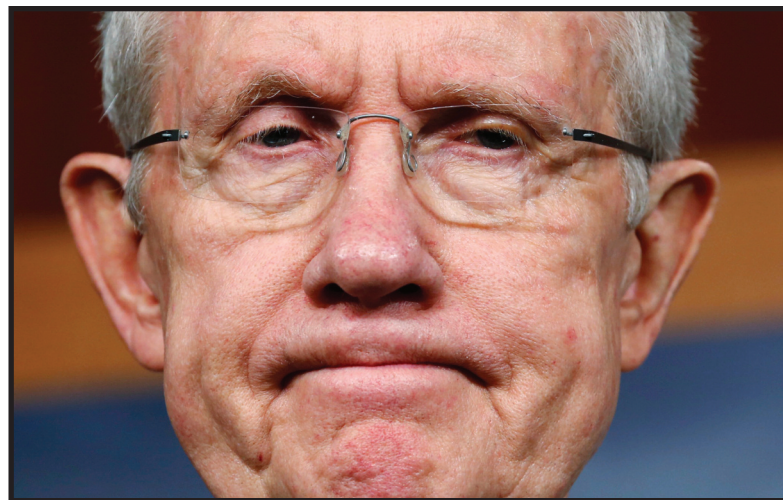
But the compromise resolution does nothing to change the use of the secret, silent filibuster, and it still will take 60 votes to invoke cloture (stop debate).

A record 391 filibusters were called in the 112th Congress as minority Republicans did everything possible to block popular progressive bills — even ones with majority support — from becoming law. Most of the legislation organized labor has fought for to restore collective bargaining rights and to create jobs — from the Employee Free Choice Act, to the Bring Jobs Home Act, the American Jobs Act, and many more — never received a Senate floor

vote due to threat of a filibuster. Had any of those bills reached the floor they would have passed.

"For members of our union, and progressives throughout the nation, the failure to enact substantial reform of the senate rules almost guarantees that for two more years, there will not be effective debate, discussion or voting on even the critical issues that the Obama Administration has outlined," said Larry Cohen, president of Communications Workers of America (CWA), which was part of a 51-group coalition that promoted filibuster reform.

The "Fix the Senate Now" coalition sent 2.5 million e-mails to lawmakers,



U.S. SENATE MAJORITY LEADER HARRY REID

delivered petitions with a million names, and added 100,000 phone calls, jamming the U.S. Capitol switchboard on numerous occasions.

Leading the charge for filibuster reform in the Senate were Democrats Jeff Merkley of Oregon, Tom Udall of New Mexico, and Tom Harkin of Iowa.

Their reform package — which was supported by an overwhelming major-

ity of voters, according to national polling — called for the elimination of the silent filibuster, instead requiring obstructing senators to stay on the floor and talk about why they are blocking legislation or a nominee. It also sought to require 41 senators to vote to continue debate rather than force 60 senators to vote to end debate.

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Union members down to 11.3 percent of U.S. workforce

Washington is nation's fourth most unionized, and Oregon is #9

U.S. union membership dropped once again in 2012, both as a percent of the workforce and in absolute numbers. According to the latest annual report from the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 11.3 percent of wage and salary workers were members of a union in 2012 — down from 11.8 percent in 2011. Union members were 20.1 percent of the workforce in 1983, the first year for which comparable data are available, and the percentage has declined just about every year since 2000.

The data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The survey found that there were 14,366,000 union members nationwide in 2012 (down from 14,764,000 the year before). Of the new total, roughly 7.3 million public sector workers were union members, compared with 7.0 million private sector workers.

Public sector workers were five times more likely to be unionized (35.9 percent) than private sector workers (6.6 percent.) And within the public sector, local government workers had the highest unionization rate, 41.7 percent. That includes workers in heavily unionized occupations such as teachers, police officers, and firefighters. Highly

unionized private-sector industries included transportation and utilities (20.6 percent) and construction (13.2 percent).

In a prepared statement, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said, "working women and men

urgently need a voice on the job today, but the sad truth is it has become more difficult for them to have one," as the data show.

"Our still-struggling economy, weak laws and political — as well as ideological — assaults have

taken a toll on union membership, and in the process have also imperiled economic security and good, middle-class jobs," he said.

BLS analyst Jim Walker told Press Associates Union News Service the most definite thing that can be drawn from the numbers is the long-term trend of declining union density in the U.S.

Overall, Walker added, the decline in union density reflects the changing nature of the economy. He noted the survey that produces the union data also generates the monthly employment and jobless numbers. It has shown a consistent long-term shift away from construction and manufacturing to service jobs, many in less-union-dense industries, such as finance, insurance and real estate (1.9 percent unionized).

Other findings:

- Black workers (13.4 percent) were more likely to be union members than white (11.1 percent), Asian (9.6 percent), or Hispanic (9.8 percent) workers.

- Union membership was highest among workers ages 55 to 64 (14.9 percent), and lowest among workers aged 16 to 24 (4.2 percent).

- Full-time workers were twice as likely to be union members as part-time workers, 12.5 percent compared with 6.0 percent.

Among the states, New York continued to be the most heavily unionized, with 23.2 percent of workers in a union, followed by Alaska (22.4 per-

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Union membership rates by state, 2012 annual averages

(U.S. rate = 11.3 percent)

