



“DO NOTHING” REPUBLICAN CONGRESS IGNORES SCHOOLS AND WORKING FAMILIES

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Democrats believe in opportunity and prosperity for all. Working families deserve wages and benefits that allow them to support their families, put their kids through college, and enjoy a secure retirement. Students from all backgrounds deserve a world-class education, from early childhood through to an affordable college education. Unfortunately, Congressional Republicans do not seem to agree. As this Congress draws to a close, it is clear that the Republican-controlled 109th Congress will be known as the “Do Nothing” Congress, since they have failed to do anything to help working families.

“Do Nothing” Republican Congress Ignores Education

Failed to Adequately Fund Education



This year, the Do Nothing Congress failed to pass a bill to fund education and health programs. The bill currently before the House of Representatives would provide \$400 million less for education programs than what was provided for 2006, and \$1 billion less than what was provided for 2005. The bill falls \$16.4 billion short of the NCLB funding level promised for 2007, creating a cumulative funding shortfall of \$56.7 billion for NCLB since the law was enacted in 2002.

Failed to Make College Affordable, Raided Federal Student Aid Instead



Every year, the challenge of paying for college becomes greater and greater for students and families. With tuition on the rise, increasing by 40 percent between 2001 and 2005, the typical student leaves college today with \$17,500 in federal loan debt. Instead of helping students and families attain the American dream of going to college, this Do Nothing Congress decided to cut \$12 billion out of the federal student aid programs in order to help finance tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans. The Do Nothing Congress also failed to raise the Pell Grant value for the fourth year in a row. The Pell Grant, currently at a maximum of \$4,050, is worth \$900 less (in inflation adjusted terms) than it was worth in 1975-76.

Failed to Help Katrina Students Get Back to School



One year after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast region, local schools and colleges still lack the support and resources they need to reach pre-Katrina operational levels. The Gulf Coast region is suffering as the Do Nothing Congress stands by and allows agencies like FEMA to offer excuses instead of results.

Failed to Bolster Early Childhood Learning Opportunities



Instead of expanding its commitment to our youngest learners, Congressional Republicans cut funding for Head Start while pushing radical, extremist ideas that run counter to core American values, even though they could not be passed into law. This Do Nothing Congress: cut Head Start funding – for the first time in more than 20 years; is now three years late in reforming Head Start; and proposed rolling back long standing civil rights protections for Head Start teachers.

Failed to Help Working Poor Get Out of Poverty and Off of Welfare



This Do Nothing Republican Congress has failed to value work and failed to prioritize the needs of the working poor: those Americans working the hardest to make ends meet. After repeatedly failing to reauthorize and reform welfare (TANF) and the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) in a way that would help families move off welfare *and* out of poverty, this year Congressional Republicans instead chose to: undermine state and local programs aimed at helping the working poor move out of poverty; and ignore GAO reports calling for stronger oversight efforts of CSBG to ensure that poverty assistance programs funded through the CSBG dollars are being used as they are intended.

Failed to Provide Child Care Assistance to All Working Poor Families



Child care assistance is one of the most important work supports for the working poor. At a time when child care funding only meets the needs of one in seven eligible families, the Do Nothing Congress has repeatedly voted to cut the number of families receiving child care assistance; in fact, under Republican leadership in Congress, 200,000 fewer families are receiving child care assistance since 2002.

Failed to Investigate Bush Administration's Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services



This Do Nothing Congress has repeatedly ignored its responsibility to examine or provide oversight of the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services. It has ignored: evidence that the President's Department of Education broke the law when it wasted taxpayer dollars to promote its own political agenda; numerous allegations and later proof that the President's Department of Education circumvented the law when it directed hundreds of millions of dollars of the Reading First program to Bush's cronies and major party donors; allegations about the misuse of federal Head Start grant money by the Bush appointed director of the Head Start program; and, it has allowed this Administration to undermine long standing practice related to equity in university athletic programs.

“Do Nothing” Republican Congress Ignores Working Families

Refused To Raise the Minimum Wage



The minimum wage was last raised in 1997 and has been stuck at \$5.15 ever since. Democrats have repeatedly introduced bills to increase the minimum wage. Republicans have refused to allow up-or-down votes on those bills, and have refused to hold a single hearing on the minimum wage. In real dollar terms, the minimum wage is now at its lowest level in 50 years. This year, rather than allowing a clean vote on the minimum wage, House Republicans attached an estate tax cut for the rich and a wage cut for waiters and other tipped employees to a minimum wage provision, ensuring that the bill would never pass the Senate and workers would never see a minimum wage increase under a Republican Congress.

Failed To Protect Worker and Retiree Long Term Retirement Security



Despite pension plan underfunding of more than \$450 billion and Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) pension insurance deficits of more than \$23 billion, the Republican-controlled Congress passed pension legislation that does not save the PBGC and actually pressures employers to either freeze or terminate their traditional pension plans. Since the law's enactment this summer, several large companies have already moved to terminate their pension plan, including DuPont. Furthermore, when the worst pension collapse in U.S. history unfolded at United Airlines, the Republican Education and Workforce Committee refused to hold a single hearing on this crisis. Democrats, on the other hand, put together the first-ever “e-forum” to give United employees and retirees a chance to testify on the crisis.

Failed To Make Health Insurance More Available or Affordable




Under the Bush administration, the number of Americans without health insurance has increased by 6 million to 46 million uninsured. Republicans have done nothing to reduce the ranks of the uninsured and have even cut back on SCHIP, the state health care program for low-income children. Rather than making skyrocketing health care costs more affordable, Republicans have opposed Democratic efforts to allow Medicare to negotiate over drug prices, permit reimportation of cheaper drugs from Canada, and eliminate the doughnut hole that subjects Medicare recipients to \$3,000 in out-of-pocket costs for life-saving drugs.

Failed to Preserve Worker Training and Protection




The latest Republican appropriations bill for the Labor Department contains painful cuts to worker training and protection programs, including: \$431 million slashed from Workforce Investment Act programs; elimination of America's Job Bank program; an 82% cut to the Bureau of International Labor Affairs, the office that fights sweatshop and child labor overseas, leaving American workers more vulnerable to the cheapest, most abusive forms of labor by our competitors; continued staffing cuts at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration; and \$10 million slashed from enforcement of wage and hour laws – minimum wage, child labor, and overtime rules.


Failed to Protect Ground Zero Workers

 Republicans have repeatedly refused Democrats' demands to investigate the government's failure to enforce health and safety regulations for Ground Zero workers. Reports indicate that the Environmental Protection Agency gave inaccurate assurances to workers about air quality at Ground Zero, and now a report shows that 70% of these workers have developed new or worsened respiratory ailments since 2001. The heroes of 9/11 – firefighters, police officers, iron workers, and others – rushed into the disaster without a second thought because people needed help. Now, they need help.

Failed Workers in Katrina Reconstruction

 After Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, the Bush administration added insult to injury by cutting Gulf Coast workers' wages when it suspended the Davis-Bacon Act. Democrats introduced a bill to restore Gulf Coast workers' wages, but Republicans refused to give it a hearing or a vote. In an unprecedented procedural move, Democrats turned the bill into a resolution under the National Emergencies Act, under which it would receive expedited treatment – and a vote. Fearing defeat on the House floor, the Bush administration reversed course and restored Gulf Coast workers' wages.

Failed to Pass Real Mine Safety Reform

 After five years of GOP funding and staffing cuts to the Mine Safety and Health Administration, U.S. miners suffered a series of fatal mining accidents in 2006. The Republican Congress failed to invite any miners, family members or rescue workers to tell their stories in a congressional hearing. Democrats were forced to hold an un-official forum on mine safety to give miners and their families their only opportunity on Capitol Hill to tell Congress what needed to be done to stop mining deaths. This forum and pressure from Democrats, miners, and their families forced the House Republicans to finally consider a Senate compromise bill to improve mine safety. When Democrats offered three simple amendments to that bill – guaranteeing at least 48 hours of breathable air to trapped miners, mandating nationwide inspections of breathing devices which had failed at Sago and other mines, and speeding up the timeframe for providing miners with underground communications – House Republicans refused to allow a vote.