

The Education and Labor Times

Strengthening America's Middle Class

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COMMITTEE ENHANCES EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Law Improves School Readiness



On November 14, 2007, by a vote of 381-36, the House passed the conference

report for the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, which was later signed into law on December 12, 2007. Head Start has been the premiere early education program in this country for more than 40 years, serving more than 20 million children in that time. The legislation helps more children arrive at school ready to succeed by improving teacher and classroom quality, expanding access to Head Start for more children, improving comprehensive services for children in Head Start and their families, and ensuring that taxpayer dollars only fund Head Start centers that are well-run and high-quality.

PRESERVING RETIREMENT SECURITY

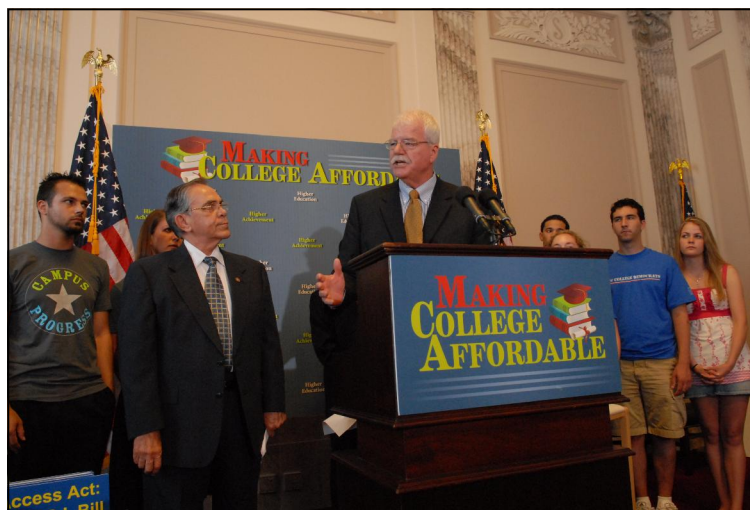
Committee Explores Impact of Financial Crisis

The Committee is examining ways to ensure a safe and secure retirement for workers, retirees and their families. During an October 7, 2008 hearing, witnesses testified that American workers lost as much as \$2 trillion in retirement savings during the previous year. "Unlike Wall Street executives, American families don't have a golden parachute to fall back on," Chairman Miller said.

Committee Votes to Give Workers Information on 401(k) Fees

On April 16, 2008, the Committee passed the 401(k) Fair Disclosure for Retirement Security Act. This bill would ensure American workers have clear information about fees that could be cutting deeply into their 401(k)-style retirement savings.

COMMITTEE MAKES COLLEGE MORE AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE



Chairman Miller and Subcommittee Chair Hinojosa speak to students about college affordability.

Law Provides the Single Largest Increase in College Aid since the GI Bill

The College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007, approved by the House on July 11, 2007 by a vote of 273-149 and signed into law on September 27, 2007, provides **the single largest increase in college aid since the GI bill** – roughly \$20 billion over five years. And it does so **at no new cost to taxpayers**. Under the law, 5.5 million students who take out need-based federal student loans each year will see the interest rates on their loans halved by 2011, saving the typical borrower (with \$13,800 in need-based loan debt) \$4,400 over the life of the loan, once fully implemented. Students who receive Pell Grant scholarships each year have already seen an immediate increase of \$490 in their maximum Pell scholarship, and will see a total increase of \$1,090 by the 2012-2013 school year. The law also provides loan forgiveness for public service members, such as nurses, police officers, firefighters, and first responders, makes loan payments more manageable, and gives upfront tuition assistance to students who commit to teaching in high-need public schools.

Law Ensures Continued Access to Student Loans for American Families

On May 7, 2008, the Ensuring Continued Access to Student Loans Act of 2008 was signed into law after the House overwhelmingly passed the measure on May 1, 2008 by a vote of 388-21. This law provides new protections, in addition to those already under current law, to ensure that families continue to have timely, uninterrupted access to federal college loans in the event that stress in the credit markets leads a significant number of lenders in the federally guaranteed student loan programs to substantially reduce their lending activity. The bill, which carries no additional cost for taxpayers reduces borrowers' reliance on costlier private college loans and encourages responsible borrowing, gives parent borrowers more time to begin paying off their federal PLUS college loans, helps struggling homeowners pay for college, and provides the U.S. Secretary of Education additional tools to safeguard access to student loans. On September 15, 2008, the House approved H.R. 6889, by a vote of 368-4, to extend certain provisions of the Ensuring Continued Access to Student Loans Act through July 1, 2010.

Law Expands College Access for Students and Families

On July 31, 2008, the House passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act by a vote of 380-49; it was signed into law on August 14, 2008. The law addresses the rising price of college by encouraging colleges to rein in price increases, clean up corrupt practices in student loan programs and streamline the federal financial aid application process. It also addresses textbook costs and increases college aid and support programs for veterans and military families. The Student Loan Sunshine Act and the Pell Grant Equity Act are both included in the measure.

COMMITTEE FIGHTS TO PRESERVE WORKERS' WAGES & BENEFITS

Law Increases the Minimum Wage

After 10 years of no action, the 110th Congress approved the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007 to provide a minimum wage boost for the lowest paid 13 million Americans with a bipartisan vote of 315-116 on January 10, 2007. It was signed into law on May 25, 2007 as part of an emergency supplemental appropriations bill. The Act increases the minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7.25 per hour over two years. The first two steps in that increase have already taken effect, bringing the federal minimum wage to \$6.55 as of July 24, 2008.

Law Provides Leave Time to Military Families

Workers who have family members wounded in military duty are now able to take six months of unpaid leave from their jobs to care for their loved one. Workers are also able to use Family and Medical Leave to deal with issues that arise as a result of the deployment of a spouse, parent, or child to a combat zone like Iraq or Afghanistan. These measures became law on January 28, 2008 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.

In the 110th Congress, the Committee has:

- Held 115 hearings
- Heard testimony from 696 witnesses
- Reported 26 bills out of Committee
- Worked on 13 bills in the Committee's jurisdiction that became law

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HOUSE VOTES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The House passed the No Child Left Inside Act on September 18, 2008 by a vote of 293-109 to improve environmental education for schoolchildren both inside and outside of the classroom. Studies show environmental education can help boost student achievement, build critical thinking and social skills, improve student behavior, and can enhance teaching. And as more and more businesses "go green," environmental education will help prepare students for the green jobs of tomorrow.

COMMITTEE WORKS TO PRESERVE WORKPLACE SAFETY

House Votes to Make Work Safer for Miners

On January 16, 2008, by a vote of 214-199, the House passed the Supplementary Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response Act (S-MINER) to help prevent mining disasters, improve emergency response when disasters do occur, and reduce long-term health risks, such as black lung disease, facing miners. The measure builds on legislation signed into law in 2006 by addressing serious gaps in mine safety and health standards.

House Passes Measure to Protect Food Flavoring Workers from Severe Lung Disease

On September 26, 2007, the House voted 260-154 for the Popcorn Workers Lung Disease Prevention Act to force the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration to act to protect workers at food processing plants from exposure to diacetyl, an artificial food flavoring chemical commonly used in microwave popcorn. Diacetyl has been linked to bronchiolitis obliterans, also known as "popcorn lung," a severe, irreversible lung disease that has sickened and killed a number of workers nationwide.



Eric Peoples, a victim of popcorn lung, testifies before the Committee.

House Votes to Prevent Combustible Dust Explosions

The Worker Protection Against Combustible Dust Explosion and Fire Act, passed by the House on April 30, 2008 by a vote of 247-165, would require OSHA to issue rules regulating combustible industrial dusts, like sugar dust, that can build up to hazardous levels and explode. In early February, combustible sugar dust exploded at the Imperial Sugar refinery in Port Wentworth, Georgia, killing 13 workers and severely injuring many more. OSHA has known about these dangers for years, but has failed to act, despite urges from the Chemical Safety Board.

HOUSE PASSES FAIR PAY MEASURES

The House passed two fair pay measures in the 110th Congress: the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act.

Passed by the House on July 31,

2007, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act ensures that victims of pay discrimination are treated fairly by overturning a Supreme Court decision that made it harder for workers to pursue pay discrimination claims. The measure would clarify that every paycheck or other compensation resulting, in whole or in part, from an earlier discriminatory pay decision constitutes a violation of the Civil Rights Act. It would also make clear that victims of pay discrimination are entitled to up to two years of back pay, as provided in the Civil Rights Act. The Paycheck Fairness Act, passed by the House on July 31, 2008, would help end the discriminatory practice of paying men and women unequally for performing the same job. This bill would strengthen the Equal Pay Act and close the loopholes created by courts and weak sanctions in the law that have allowed employers to avoid responsibility for gender-based pay discrimination.



Lilly Ledbetter testifies before the Committee.

STOPPING CHILD ABUSE AT RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS FOR TEENS

The House passed the Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2008 on June 25, 2008 by a vote of 318-103. It is estimated that tens of thousands of U.S. teenagers attend private and public residential programs – including therapeutic boarding schools, wilderness camps, boot camps, and behavior modification facilities – that are intended to help them with behavioral, emotional, or mental health problems. The Government Accountability Office found thousands of allegations of child abuse and neglect at residential programs for teens between 1994 and 2007. Tragically, in a number of cases, this abuse and neglect led to the death of a child. To address this urgent problem, this measure would keep teens safe with new national standards for private and public residential programs, prevent deceptive marketing by residential programs for teens, hold teen residential programs accountable for violating the law, and ask states to step in to protect teens.



Chairman Miller questions witnesses at an October 2007 hearing.

STRENGTHENING THE ECONOMY THROUGH INNOVATION

Law Invests in Education and Job Training Programs

The 21st Century Competitiveness Act, signed into law on August 8, 2007, makes major investments in education and job training programs to help encourage America's innovative spirit and strengthen the nation's economic competitiveness. It provides training programs for students who want to enter into science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) career paths, creates programs to enhance teacher education in the STEM fields, and places highly qualified teachers in high-need schools.

PRESERVING WORKERS' HEALTH COVERAGE

Law Provides Better Access to Mental Health Treatment

A measure to ensure better access to treatment for people suffering from mental illnesses was signed into law on October 3, 2008 as part of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008. The legislation, previously passed as the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, requires group health insurance plans to put coverage for mental illnesses on equal footing with physical ailments. Employers will be able to offer more comprehensive mental health coverage without significant additional cost, while reducing out-of-pocket costs for plan participants.

Law Prevents Genetic Discrimination

The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2007 (GINA) was signed into law on May 21, 2008. GINA protects personal genetic information from discriminatory use by health insurers and employers. The bipartisan measure prohibits employers from using individuals' genetic information when making hiring, firing, job placement or promotion decisions. It also makes it illegal for group health plans and health insurers to deny coverage to healthy individuals or charge them higher premiums based solely on a genetic predisposition to a specific disease.

COMMITTEE FIGHTS TO PRESERVE WORKERS' RIGHTS

House Passes Employee Free Choice Act

On March 1, 2007, the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) passed the House, 241-185. The bill would enable workers to bargain for better wages, benefits, and working conditions by restoring their rights to form unions. A key part of House Democrats' overall goal of strengthening America's middle class, the bill would reform a broken union election process in which employers frequently intimidate, harass, reassign, or even fire workers who support the formation of a union. Union workers earn more, on average, than do nonunion workers, and union workers are much more likely to have healthcare, pensions and more generous paid time off.

House Passes Employment Non-Discrimination Act

On November 7, 2007, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act was passed by the House by a vote of 235 to 184. The legislation would prohibit employment discrimination, preferential treatment, and retaliation on the basis of sexual orientation by employers with 15 or more employees. Thirty states permit employers to fire employees based solely on their sexual orientation.

House Votes to Extend Collective Bargaining Rights to Public Safety Workers in All 50 States

By an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote of 314-97, the House on July 17, 2007 approved the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2007 to guarantee the rights of firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical service workers in all 50 states to collectively bargain for better wages, benefits and working conditions. The bill would provide basic labor protections for state and local public safety workers.



Speaker Pelosi, Rep. Miller and public safety workers discuss protecting workers' rights.

Law Protects People With Disabilities

Signed into law on September 25, 2008, the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 was passed by the House on September 17, 2008 to stop discrimination against individuals with disabilities by restoring the original intent of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act. The law will reverse several U.S. Supreme Court decisions that have undermined the ADA.