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GOP may lose Senate seats in the midterm elections

By Tim Wheeler

Announcement by Democratic Senators Chris Dodd of Connecticut and Byron Dorgan of North Dakota that they will retire was greeted with dismay by Democrats and with glee by Republicans hoping to recapture majority control of the Senate.

The Obama administration and the Senate Democratic leadership has struggled to assemble the 60 votes, 58 Democrats and two independents, needed to break Republican filibusters. So with more than one-third of the Senate at stake in the midterms, even the loss of one seat could enable the Republicans to filibuster President Obama's agenda.

The corporate media is pouring out a litany of gloom, forecasting that the Democrats may lose four or five Senate seats and as many as 30 House seats in the midterm.

But this ignores the fact that six incumbent Republican Senators have also announced they will retire and the GOP may well lose some or all of those seats. If the Democrats are able to hold on to most or all of the Senate seats they now hold and win the race for six open seats now held by Republicans, the Democratic majority could actually be increased.



“There are more Republican Senators retiring than Democrats,” said Joelle Fishman, chair of the Connecticut Communist Party district and also chair of the CPUSA's Political Action Commission. “The approach has to be to make certain that the Republicans do not pick up more Senate seats,” she said. “The GOP will be going for the jugular.”

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The labor-led grassroots movements, she said, should set as their goal “to increase the Democratic majority in the Senate above 60 so the Republicans can't continue their filibuster tactics.”

Dodd, she said, was the target of the ultra-right. “They made him a scapegoat because he authored legislation taking on the sub-prime mort-

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gage lenders, and insurance giants like AIG. He was out front on health care reform including a robust public option. His voting record was nearly 100 percent pro-labor.” They pilloried Dodd for a personal mortgage deal reached with Countrywide Mortgage Company.

But given his low poll ratings, his chances of winning a sixth term were considered low.

The good news, she said, is that Connecticut’s Democratic Attorney General, Richard Blumenthal, has announced he will run for Dodd’s seat. “He has aggressively taken on the corporate interests and consistently stands up for workers’ rights and consumer rights. He is one of the most popular elected officials in the state,” she said. “He is someone ordinary working people can count on.” It will be more difficult to hold on to Dorgan’s seat in North Dakota. Republican Governor, John Hoeven is “seriously considering” a run for the U.S. Senate. Democrats considering a run include Rep. Earl Pomeroy, North Dakota’s lone at-large House-member or Heidi Heitkamp, Attorney General and former Tax Commissioner.

Democrats in Ohio stand an excellent chance

of picking up the seat of retiring Republican Senator George Voinovich. Ohio Sec. of State Jennifer Brunner and Lt. Gov. Lee Fisher are vying for the Democratic nomination.

“Brunner is the better candidate by a long shot,” declared Ann Pallotta, a long-time labor and community activist in Cleveland. “She is a magnet. She brings people along. She has been a fabulous Secretary of State, getting Ohio’s election procedures back on track. She is pro-labor and a real fighter.”

The labor movement and other grassroots organizations are well aware of the daunting challenge. Pushing through legislation like the \$174 billion jobs bill approved by the House before the Christmas-New Year recess is crucial to overcoming a mood of anger and frustration among voters many of whom blame incumbents of both parties for gridlock.



Tim Wheeler is a writer for the PW.

Rethinking national security

By PW Editorial Board

In a Dec. 4 editorial entitled, “The Welfare State and Military Power,” the Wall Street Journal actually said something we could agree with: you can’t have both guns and butter.

Of course, the WSJ warned increased domestic government spending advocated by the Obama administration inevitably crowds out military spending. So if the current health care reform passes, the American people will come to expect a new role for government.

Left unchecked, the WSJ says, the U.S. will end up like most European countries, which spend a greater share of their GDP on health care, pensions and jobless benefits and less on the military. Apparently, Europeans prefer their benefits and have no stomach for foreign occupation.

The WSJ maintains U.S. power globally is dependent on its military might. By following the path of greater domestic spending, the Obama administration is risking our status as a global power.

Given the failed Christmas Day bombing of a U.S. airliner and other terror threats, the ultra right will shamelessly exploit legitimate fears of

the American people. The Republican right wing and their military-financial-energy complex backers will try to ride these fears to victories in the 2010 mid-term elections and the presidency in 2012, or at least weaken the Democratic majorities leading to gridlock. After all the \$200 billion in yearly military contracts, not including billions more for maintaining nuclear weapons, is chock-full of profits these interests won’t give up easily.

While keeping people safe from terrorist attacks is an important function of government, there is another kind of national security, beginning with addressing the jobs and health care crisis, crumbling infrastructure, neighborhood violence, education funding and skyrocketing college tuition.

The American people need a wide-ranging discussion in communities, union halls, places of worship, and campuses about our national priorities and foreign policy. We need a different understanding of what makes us safe and what doesn’t and how our future depends on a green demilitarized economy at home and peaceful cooperation abroad.



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Clean energy manufacturing wins federal boost

By Joel Wendland

As government statistics reveal that the economy shed an additional 85,000 jobs in December, President Obama announced funding for tax credits to promote new job growth in the clean energy manufacturing sector.

Over 180 companies will receive about \$2.3 billion in tax credits to directly create 17,000 jobs. These companies, about one-third of which are small businesses, senior administration officials stated, will be rewarded for innovative, domestic manufacturing of clean energy products.

The tax credits have been awarded to companies who have chosen to build manufacturing facilities in 43 states in the US. They are also designed to leverage more than \$5 billion in private sector investments to create an additional 41,000 jobs, senior administration officials said.

“In order to make these jobs really work, [the U.S.] need[s] to be [a] global leader in high-growth industries,” one senior administration official said. “Clearly, these clean energy industries are among the highest growth in the global economy today.”

He added that the emergence of a major, domestic clean energy manufacturing sector would boost U.S. exports, in addition to creating new jobs.

“Building a robust clean energy sector is how we will create the jobs of the future,” said President Obama in remarks at the White House. “The Recovery Act awards I am announcing today will help close the clean energy gap that has grown between America and other nations while creating good jobs, reducing our carbon emissions and increasing our energy security.”

“By investing in innovative clean energy manufacturing projects like these, we are not only creating good jobs now, but helping lay a new foundation to keep America competitive in the 21st



century economy,” added Vice President Biden. “This is what the Recovery Act is all about.”

The White House recently called on Congress to double the size of the program to accelerate job creation in the U.S. clean energy manufacturing sector.

This round of tax credits is part of a larger multi-billion package of grants, investments, tax credits and loans from the federal government as part of the Recovery Act aimed at boosting and modernizing the “green economy.”

Sierra Club President Carl Pope praised the announcement of the tax credits in a statement. “Clean energy jobs are already putting food on the table and paying the mortgage for tens of thousands of Americans across the country. The tax credits announced today will benefit tens of thousands more,” he stated.

He urged Congress to take additional steps to pass comprehensive climate change and clean energy legislation to create more jobs.

Senior administration officials stated they are working with key figures in the Senate, such as Sens. John Kerry, D Mass., and Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., to push forward comprehensive climate change and clean energy legislation.

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NYC students in the street over MTA cuts

By Dan Margolis

Public high school students, as well as teachers and parents, are organizing in new ways against a proposal by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, to take away free and reduced-price Metrocards currently issued to students.

Young people have taken the lead in organizing. A number of new Facebook groups have sprung up in the past few weeks, including one, "Protest the MTA getting rid of STUDENT METROCARDS," which currently has nearly 100,000 members.

"The student organizing has been incredibly impressive," Working Families Party spokesperson Dan Levitan told the World. "You've got students using the tools that they use every day in their own life to really organize a rapid response." Levitan noted that, were the changes to go through, there would be a huge disparity between city students and those in the rest of the state.

While cutting free rides for students has drawn the most attention, the MTA is also drawing riders' ire by pushing other cuts.

After a demonstration, New York City Council speaker Christine Quinn called the cuts "a slap in the face to hard working people across our city."

"They're going to significantly scale back Access-a-Ride for the disabled." The MTA voted on the cuts in December, but they aren't slated to take effect until June, giving New Yorkers time to organize.

Levitan says that he is optimistic: "This fight continues, and as it gets closer to the time when these cuts get implemented, I think you're going to see that really take off."

Avaricia de dueños de periódicos

Por Tony Pecinovsky

Lee Enterprises está recortando el seguro de salud de los jubilados no por que están perdiendo dinero, sino porque quieren más ganancias", dijo Shannon Duffy, administrador del Gremio de Periodistas de St. Louis en una protesta de más de cien periodistas y otros afuera del diario St. Louis Post-Dispatch el 15 de diciembre.

Lee Enterprises, dueños del diario, canceló el plan de seguro pagado por la compañía que cubría a los jubilados. Los jubilados recibieron notificación por correo a solo semanas antes del los días festivos del fin del año. Ellos perderá su seguro el 1 de enero 2010.

"A ellos no les importa la época del año. Esto tiene que ver con la avaricia. Ellos se están sacando beneficios de uno", dijo Duffy.

De acuerdo a Dan McKay, presidente del Local 600 de los Tronquistas, "la avaricia corporativa se está regando como una enfermedad por el país. Tiene que parar".

Algunos de los trabajadores jubilados tienen seguros médicos que cuestan más de \$1.500 mensual. Además, el Gremio espera que Lee Enterprises trató de recortar los beneficios de salud para los trabajadores actuales cuando vayan a negociar un nuevo convenio laboral. El Gremio representa a más de

300 empleados del periódico.

En 2008, la jefa de Lee Enterprises, Mary Junck, recibió remuneración de \$2,5 millones, mientras que el oficial de finanza de la corporación, Carl Schmidt, tuvo un ingreso de \$1,2 millones. La compañía tiene como propiedad 53 periódicos a través del país.

"Es moralmente repugnante que estos ejecutivos se enriquezcan mientras recortan los beneficios de salud para los ancianos", dijo Duffy.

De acuerdo al Gremio, a los integrantes del sindicato se les prometió que tendrían seguro médico de por vida, pagado por la compañía. El resultado fue que muchos se jubilaron antes de cualificar para el seguro federal para jubilados - Medicare. En muchos casos el costo del seguro era más que la pensión que pagaba la compañía.

"Lee no está cumpliendo con la promesa que les hicieron a los hombres y mujeres que dedicaron sus vidas trabajadoras al Post-Dispatch", dijo Duffy. "Esa promesa está escrita explícita en los convenios laborales".

Actualmente, el Gremio de Periodistas está demandando a la corporación Lee Enterprises para que pague el costo total del seguro de salud para los trabajadores jubilados.

