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White House vows to veto GOP anti-VA worker bill

By Press Associates Inc

The Obama administration has issued a veto threat against the latest House Republican scheme to let Department of Veterans Affairs managers virtually fire workers at whim, a measure the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Government Employees and House Democrats tried unsuccessfully to stop.

The legislation, HR1994, by House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller, R-Fla., would virtually end all legal protections for any worker at the VA, the federation and the union said. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., a Republican presidential hopeful, authored and introduced the counterpart anti-worker Senate measure S1082.

AFL-CIO Legislative Director Bill Samuel adds if HR1994 becomes law, the VA would in essence return to the spoils system of the 1800s, where bosses could fire workers for political reasons - or none at all.

And the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) says that if HR1994 reaches the desk of President Obama, "his senior advisors would recommend a veto," including on constitutional grounds that it violates due process of law for the workers.

Samuel says the GOP's bill would let VA managers summarily fire anyone, including "housekeepers, police officers, cemetery workers, phy-



sician assistants, nurses, claims representatives, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers." All would be "at-will and subject to the whim of managers engaging in discrimination, retaliation, and patronage."

AFGE President J. David Cox, a retired VA nurse whose union represents the agency's workers, said HR1994, and Rubio's bill, too, would let managers fire whistleblowers - such as the AFGE-represented rank-and-file workers who exposed

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the VA's treatment scandals. Obama's OMB was more legalistic in issuing its veto threat.

"The centerpiece is a provision that allows a VA employee to be removed or demoted without the opportunity to appeal that decision to the full Merit Systems Protection Board," OMB said. The

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board decides agency-vs.-worker federal personnel disputes.

“These provisions remove important rights, protections, and incentives which are available to the vast majority of federal employees in other agencies...and are essential to ensure federal employees are afforded due process,” OMB adds.

OMB noted all federal workers can be fired “for a variety of reasons” from being AWOL to falsifying records, misusing government property or sexual harassment. By giving the VA complete firing power for any reasons, “this bill will have unintended consequences,” including scaring potential VA employees away, OMB adds.

Cox, trying to stop HR1994 before the House passed it July 29 on a party-line vote, said workers “depend on lawmakers to advance legislation to improve” the VA. The bill doesn’t.

“We will fight HR1994 in the Senate as hard as we fought it in the House, because it is the antithesis of accountability reform at the VA,” he said. Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee, D-Texas, reinforced that point during House debate. She added, “This is not a bill that helps veterans. In fact, it

takes away consistent, long-working employees who see something and say something, and so I am voting ‘no.’”

The union and the AFL-CIO are pushing alternative legislation in the GOP-run 114th Congress. That measure, by Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., failed in the House, but Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., will try to substitute it for HR1994 when the Senate debates the issue.

“Their approach to VA reform preserves essential due process rights and allows employees to continue to speak up against mismanagement,” AFGE adds. And while Takano and Blumenthal would immediately fire workers who “present a clear and direct threat to public health,” their bill also “reduces mismanagement by curtailing a widespread revolving door problem in the VA and improving management training and performance measures.”



Press Associates Inc. (PAI) is a union news service.

Court blocks Texas voter IDs - maybe

By Larry Rubin

A federal appeals court ruled Wednesday that a Texas voter ID law, as written, discriminates against blacks and Hispanics and violates a provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

However, the Court left the door wide open for a re-written law that might do the same thing.

The Texas voter ID law, passed by the right wing-controlled Texas legislature, states that even though people have an approved voter registration card, in order to vote they must show one of seven approved forms of photo ID: a Texas driver’s license, a U.S. passport, a state-issued ID card, a Texas concealed handgun license or a U.S. military ID. Student identifications, voter registration cards and utility bills are not considered “acceptable.”

It has been conclusively shown that a far greater percentage of poor people and minorities do not have these forms of identification and lack easy access to birth certificates or other documents to obtain them.

In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Sections 4 and 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which required federal approval for any changes made to voting procedures by states such as Texas that had for years suppressed the rights of minority voters.

In short order, nineteen states passed laws requiring voters to show identification at the polls. Courts across the country, including the U.S. Supreme Court, struck down challenges to these new laws.

However, in 2014, Texas District Court Judge Nelva Gonzales Ramos ruled that the Texas Legislature had passed its ID law for the purpose of suppressing the voting rights of poor and minorities and that the law “creates an unconstitutional burden on the right to vote.”

In Wednesday’s ruling, the federal appeals court said that although the Texas law as written is, in fact, discriminatory, the intent, as stated by the legislature was to prevent “voter fraud,” not to discriminate.

**This law violates
a provision of the
Voting Rights Act
of 1965.**

Native Americans gather to support the Sanders campaign

By Andrea Perkins

When Bernie Sanders held that nationwide live stream event, my community center, the American Indian Center of Chicago (AIC), was asked by the Sanders campaign to be one of the meeting places for his event.

We had about 150 people for the event -- filling up the largest room in the building! Natives and non-Natives during the 20-minute countdown expressed reasons why they were interested in Sanders.

They spoke of “higher wages for the working class” and “taxing the rich.” Some spoke of how mainstream media isn’t talking about Bernie enough and when they do it isn’t very informative about his politics.

While all this was being said, I was happy to notice the range in age and race of those in attendance. And there was a high level of enthusiasm from people signing up to volunteer and make donations to the campaign -- some of the strongest I have seen.

The countdown ended and Bernie Sanders walked out, wasting no time with boring opening statements. He opened his speech strong and coined a new hashtag for the night: #EnoughIsEnough.

He talked about how too many people are living in poverty. Bernie said “We cannot continue to maintain a starvation minimum wage.”



Bernie continued to talk about how every person should receive healthcare, paid time off, maternity leave, and free education.

I think one of the moments that stood out the most and got the most applause and adoration from the group was when he spoke of police brutality. Sanders said, “We’re tired of seeing black people yanked to the ground and assaulted ...We have to combat institutionalized racism in the U.S.” Bernie ended this statement with a bold #EnoughIsEnough.

Bernie went on to talk about the need for a new “political revolution” and “strong grassroots organizing.” At the end of program, the Sanders campaign asked viewers to send out a mass text message with the word WORK to sign up to volunteer.

I hope that the level of enthusiasm continues and grows in new and unexpected ways. I’m hoping that at some point during this election season Native Americans are going to be able to directly ask questions of the presidential candidates. I want to know how Bernie Sanders is going to address the issues facing Natives. If his campaign can keep up this energy around Bernie, I feel that he might have a real chance to win this.

“We have to combat institutionalized racism in the U.S.”

U.S.-Turkey deal: disaster in the making

By Conn Hallinan

The recent agreement between Turkey and the U.S. to cooperate against the Islamic State (IS) in Syria brings to mind the sociologist C. Wright Mills description of those who make American foreign policy as “crackpot realists”: realists about advancing their careers, crackpots about the policies they pursue.

The plan will allow the U.S. to use Turkish airbases to bomb the IS in exchange for Washington’s support for Ankara re-igniting its 40-year-old war with the Kurds. The U.S. will also buy into creating a “buffer zone” on Syria’s northern border that, according to Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, will allow “moderate forces like the Free Syrian Army ... to take control of areas freed from the ISIL,” or IS. One U.S. official describe the agreement as “a game changer.” In reality it will entangle the U.S. more deeply in the Syrian civil war and give cover to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s gambit to deepen ethnic divisions in Turkey as part of a strategy to bring his conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) back into power.

The Turkish Army does not want to go into Syria, and there is zero support in any Western country for a replay of Iraq and Afghanistan. On top of which, a U.S. or NATO invasion is exactly what the IS would like to provoke. Ironically, the only force that could possibly defeat the Islamic State is the Syrian Army. Getting from here to there, however, will require a diplomatic sea change in the region. But one thing is certain: the current U.S.-Turkish “plan” will make everything worse.

Exigen el cese del bloqueo a Cuba

Granma

Los participantes en la VI Asamblea de los Pueblos del Caribe, efectuada en Main Camp de Curazao, aprobaron una declaración en la que exigen al presidente de Estados Unidos Barack Obama el cese del bloqueo económico, financiero y comercial contra Cuba.

Asimismo, los representantes de organizaciones sindicales, políticas, feministas, ambientales, campesinas y juveniles de otros sectores sociales y populares de 12 países del área pidieron al mandatario norteamericano la entrega al pueblo cubano del territorio usurpado ilegalmente en Guantánamo.

La Asamblea reconoció el aporte de recursos materiales y humanos de los gobiernos de Cuba y Venezuela para el bienestar y desarrollo socio-económico de los países caribeños, proyecto que surgió hace diez años gracias a la voluntad y gestos solidarios de los presidentes Fidel Castro y Hugo Chávez.

Los presentes en la VI Asamblea de los Pueblos del Caribe manifestaron el apoyo al Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela ante los intentos continuos de desestabilización por parte de la derecha que busca desconocer la decisión soberana del pueblo venezolano y conducir al país a una crisis política, institucional y económica.

Estuvieron de acuerdo en que constituye una vergüenza, que en pleno siglo XXI, el Caribe se distinga por ser la región del mundo que aún conserve los índices más elevados de territorios bajo el yugo colonial y neocolonial, y se pronunciaron en promover una

identidad caribeña basada en el respeto a la diversidad y en la resistencia frente a todas las agresiones y formas de opresión imperialista.

Al propio tiempo, corroboraron la Proclama de América Latina como Zona de Paz, firmada por todos los presidentes y jefes de Gobierno en la II Cumbre de la Celac, celebrada en La Habana a finales del mes de enero del 2014.

Igualmente, los reunidos ratificaron el compromiso inalterable de respaldo al proyecto de integración y concertación latinoamericano y caribeño expresado en la Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América-Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos, Petrocaribe, la Comunidad del Caribe, la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y del Caribe, la Asociación de Estados del Caribe, entre otros, pues representan una oportunidad histórica de avanzar en beneficio del desarrollo económico, social y político de nuestras pequeñas economías subdesarrolladas.

Otro objetivo aprobado fue acompañar la lucha del pueblo puertorriqueño por su definitiva y total independencia, y demandaron al presidente Obama a que excarcele al patriota boricua, Oscar López Rivera, quien se mantiene por más de 34 años en cárceles norteamericanas.

La VI Asamblea de los Pueblos del Caribe concluyó con el compromiso de avanzar en la lucha por la construcción de una sociedad nueva y solidaria articulando con ello la lucha del Caribe con la de todo el continente.

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