

PEOPLE'S WORLD

www.peoplesworld.org November 28, 2015

New federal education aid bill: Teachers unions weigh in

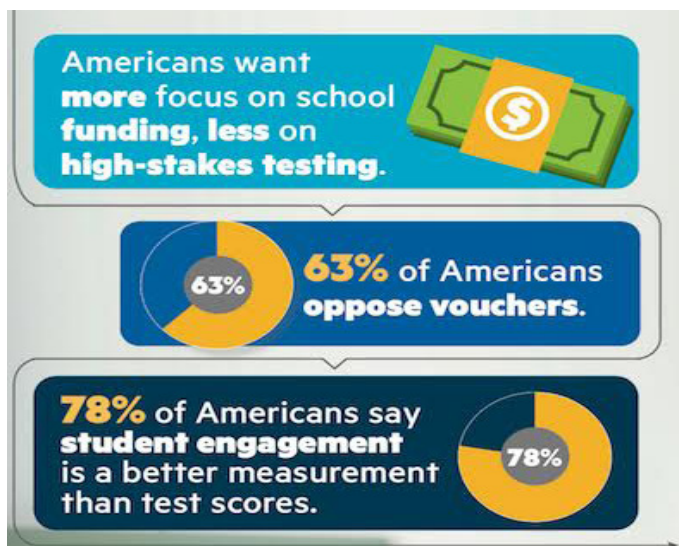
By Press Associates Inc

The president of one of the nation's two teachers unions, Randi Weingarten of the American Federation of Teachers, is lauding lawmakers' agreement on a framework for a new federal education aid bill to replace the controversial Bush-era No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law and its teach-to-the-test mandates.

But while Weingarten looks forward to enactment of the new statute, Lily Eskelsen-Garcia of the National Education Association is more skeptical. She praised lawmakers for dumping NCLB but said lawmakers must still create "a new accountability system," with a wide variety of measurements, to evaluate schools, teachers and students.

The statements come after congressional negotiators announced their framework agreement on Nov. 19. They hoped to have an entire education law available for votes just after Congress' Thanksgiving recess. President Obama had no immediate comment on their framework. Neither did the federal Education Department.

NEA, AFT, AFSA and their members lobbied their lawmakers long and hard to change the NCLB and get away not just from its teach-to-the-test, but also its tilt towards yanking funds from public schools and diverting them to private



schools, and its insistence that test scores be the sole measure for evaluating - and firing - teachers.

The key provision of the framework replaces the Bush law's mandate that flunks schools unless they meet pre-set "adequate yearly progress" measures with state-crafted programs to measure student progress. State programs must still fulfill student learning goals.

But states would get flexibility in designing their programs and measurements, and students

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would be subject to less-onerous numbers of tests. The explosion of repetitive testing, in just basic subjects, was a key complaint that students, parents, teachers and unions had with the NCLB.

The state-created education standards in the compromise Every Student Succeeds Act would “

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build on state-led innovation in measuring school performance using multiple measures beyond test scores,” a congressional fact sheet says.

Schools would still have to evaluate the students “in reading and math in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school, as well as science tests given three times between grades 3 and 12,” the framework says. But the reading and math evaluations don’t necessarily have to be statewide tests, it adds. If states can create a better evaluation, approved by the federal Education Department, they can use it.

And the legislation bans the Education Department from ordering or giving incentives to states “to adopt any particular set of standards, including the Common Core.” The Common Core, a set of standards that education commissioners from 46 states and D.C. originally adopted several years ago, has since become a political lightning rod for the right wing and Congress’ ruling Republicans. They charge it imposes national control on local schools.

The framework gives two messages for federal aid to the lowest-performing schools - those the

original 1965 federal education law was designed to help the most. Those are also the schools where AFT, in the nation’s largest cities, is the dominant union.

In one message, the framework says federal education aid “would supplement, not supplant” local school money.

That was a key problem the NEA had with Congress after Bush’s law passed 14 years ago: The promised money for improving student results never showed up. The union and its Michigan affiliates unsuccessfully sued Bush’s Education Department for the funds.

In the other, the framework gives states wide discretion and responsibility in choosing which schools and students get aid. And the feds can’t tell states and local school districts they must use a “one-size-fits-all” improvement plan - or any other specific plans.



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

Paris is bleeding: enough is enough

By PW Editorial

Many, many people, Americans included, recognize that U.S. actions over the decades have, unfortunately, fueled and in fact abetted the rise of backward, violent terrorism. As a recent New York Times overview makes clear, the so-called Islamic State - variously known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh - came out of three U.S. actions: the invasion/occupation of Iraq; aiding/abetting “rebels” in Syria; and regime change intervention in Libya. We have a terrible history of this: remember we created Osama bin-Laden and his al-Qaeda. Why? To advance the dominance of U.S. corporate interests across the globe.

Sen. Bernie Sanders pointed to this history during Saturday’s Democratic presidential candidate debate. “I would argue that the disastrous invasion of Iraq, something that I strongly opposed, has unraveled the region completely and led to the rise of Al-Qaeda and to ISIS,” Sanders said. “Now, in fact, what we have got to do - and I think there is widespread agreement here - is the United States

cannot do it alone. What we need to do is lead an international coalition which includes very significantly the Muslim nations in that region who are going to have to fight and defend their way of life.” President Obama in his news conference in Turkey was right when he said that defeating ISIS/ISIL “is going to require ... an ending of the Syrian civil war.” He noted the importance of talks now under way with Russia and Iran to try to bring this about.

But he is under a lot of pressure, both from ignorant Republican warhawks, and from some within the Democratic Party who back a discredited “tough” unilateral military approach.

Americans who want to see an end to terror and global social injustice have to speak out now. We must change our tune.

We must say to Russia, now: “We need you. We want to cooperate to get peace in Syria.” We must include others too - not only Iran, but, along with France, Germany and the UK, also important countries like China and South Africa.

We must change our tune if we want to see an end on terror and global social injustice.

UBB mine disaster: Blankenship trial's end at hand

By John Milam

In a surprising move, the defense team for accused coal criminal, Don Blankenship, rested its case Nov. 16 without presenting any witnesses. It had sought last week to Judge Irene Berger to dismiss the case against Blankenship. Closing arguments were held Nov. 17.

Blankenship was the former CEO of Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch [UBB] Mine at the time when an underground explosion killed 29 miners on April 5, 2010 in Raleigh County, W.V.

I spoke with Dr. Judy Jones-Petersen of Charleston, W.V. whose brother, Edmond Jones, was killed in the 2010 explosion at the UBB mine. Edmond left behind a wife and son to mourn his sudden death. Dr. Petersen has consistently attended the Blankenship trial from its beginning and she gave us invaluable insight into the progress of the trial from the view of a mourning sister.

Dr. Jones seemed confident that the government had put on an excellent case that proved Blankenship's guilt on all counts.

The prosecution witness who spent the longest time on the stand and whose testimony ran into November was Chris Blanchard, former president of Performance Coal. Mr. Blanchard testified that it was well known by management that it was cheaper to pay the fines for safety violations than to improve safety conditions. He testified to management's



apparent conspiracy to continue unsafe practices rather than slow production of coal and to hide the mine's lack of compliance with safe standards.

Miners who had worked at the UBB mine testified that the rock-dusting, necessary to prevent mine explosions, was not properly done, leaving the mine vulnerable for a combination of methane gas, coal dust, and a spark that could lead to the kind of massive underground explosion that caused the deaths of 29 miners. The miners testified that their fire-bosses dismissed their requests for rock-dusting because "there wasn't enough time."

It's not known how the jury will decide, but Blankenship's attorneys seem to be saying that they believe that the prosecution has failed to present sufficient evidence to prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, Blankenship's guilt on all three charges for which he now stands accused. If convicted on all three charges, Blankenship could face over thirty years imprisonment for conspiracy to violate mine safety standards, impairing government inspectors by covering up hazards to the miners' safety, and making false statements to securities regulators that essentially resulted in securities fraud.

The UBB management thought it was cheaper to pay the fines for safety violations than to improve safety conditions.

Millions of immigrants continue to wait for relief

By Maria Elena Durazo

Friday, Nov. 20, marked the one-year anniversary of President Barack Obama's announcement of executive action on immigration.

We had hoped to see relief for millions of immigrants this year, but unfortunately all too many immigrants still live and work in a climate of fear.

In his speech last year President Obama said hardworking immigrants trying to provide for their families should not be the focus of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) actions. Months later, an ICE investigation and raid of Ruprecht Company, a meat-packing plant in Mundelein, IL, led to arrests of immigrant workers and dozens of people losing their jobs.

Many of you have stood with Ruprecht workers in the past, and again we are calling on you to help us take action.

It's time to take action!

We want them to take responsibility for putting hardworking immigrants out of work by firing Chicago ICE Field Director Ricardo Wong. Someone must be held accountable.

Un amicus en favor del DAPA y DACA

AFL-CIO

Seguirán luchando trabajadores por mejores protecciones, a pesar de obstrucciones legales al alivio migratorio.

En respuesta a la decisión del Tribunal del Quinto Circuito de EE UU en el caso Texas v. U.S., el Presidente Richard Trumka de la AFL-CIO emitió la siguiente declaración:

“La decisión del tribunal de ayer [9 noviembre], la cual detiene aún más el alivio para millones de personas, no fue una sorpresa, pero es un recordatorio decepcionante sobre todo el tiempo que puede tomar la larga lucha por la justicia. Como solemos decir en nuestro movimiento – cada día que pasa, es un día que nos fortalece.

“A través del país, valientes hombres y mujeres se encuentran organizando para lograr un cambio desde abajo hacia arriba. Esta determinación, y visión, le llevó al presidente el año pasado a actuar y seguir adelante a pesar del obstruccionismo en el Congreso y en los tribunales. El movimiento sindical orgullosamente apoya a toda la gente trabajadora que tiene el coraje para actuar y mejorar las condiciones en sus lugares de trabajo o en sus comunidades. Continuaremos empujando a todas las ramas del gobierno para que fortalezcan las protecciones de todos aquellos que deseen ejercitar sus derechos más fundamentales, incluyendo el derecho a poder vivir y laborar sin temor a ser separados de sus familias.

“Es positiva la decisión del Departamento de Justicia de pedir una revisión rápida al Tribunal Supremo de Justicia para que los jueces escuchen

este caso de importancia vital durante este periodo. Estamos seguros que el Tribunal Supremo revertirá la decisión del Quinto Circuito y permitirá que las tan necesitadas políticas públicas de DAPA y DACA entren en vigencia.”

El actual sistema de inmigración de los Estados Unidos es disfuncional, y los trabajadores nacidos en los Estados Unidos así como también las familias inmigrantes están pagando un precio muy alto. El país necesita un sistema de inmigración que funcione para lo trabajadores, no un sistema que beneficie a los empleadores de las corporaciones y que perjudique a todos los trabajadores.

La actual política de inmigración estadounidense de la oportunidad a los empleadores a que manipules y abusen tanto a los inmigrantes como los trabajadores nacidos en los Estados Unidos, quienes sufren las consecuencias de este sistema.

Ahora decimos “¡Basta ya!”. Por eso, la AFL-CIO respalda un enfoque inclusivo, centrado en los trabajadores, para arreglar el sistema de inmigración quebrantado de la nación.

Estados Unidos necesita la Ley DREAM, un proyecto de sentido común para estudiantes indocumentados que llegaron a los Estados Unidos en su infancia. De acuerdo con la Oficina de Presupuesto del Congreso, si fuese aprobado este proyecto de ley, se fortalecería la economía y se reduciría drásticamente el déficit en unos \$1,400 millones.

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