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Health care bill hailed as giant first step

By Tim Wheeler

Fighters for health care reform, both inside and outside Congress, hailed passage by the House of Representatives late Sunday night, March 21, of a reform bill that extends health insurance coverage to 32 million uninsured people, outlaws denial of coverage for preexisting conditions, and limits insurance company premium increases.

The vote was 219 to 212 with not a single Republican voting yes. The 178 Republicans were joined by 34 “Blue Dog” Democrats in voting no.

Just before the roll call vote, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said the House was making history, “joining those who created Social Security and Medicare...” With passage of this bill, she added, “being a woman is no longer a ‘pre-existing condition.’”

Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and the third ranking leader of the House called the bill “the Civil Rights Act of the 21st Century.”

AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka greeted the bill’s passage as a “momentous step toward comprehensive coverage.” The legislation, he added, “is not a baby step or half measure, it is a solid step forward to set our country on a path to health care that actually works for working families.”



The lawmakers were voting to approve the bill approved last Christmas Eve by the Senate. Moments after approving the bill, the House approved a “Reconciliation bill,” a package of measures that dramatically improves the Senate version. A Senate vote on the Reconciliation package is expected Wednesday under rules that allow passage by a simple majority.

President Obama, scheduled to sign the bill

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into law March 23, also planned to fly to Iowa to defend the bill from the Republican right, which plans to campaign in the midterm elections on a promise to repeal the new laws. The GOP lawmakers unleashed a torrent of venomous lies to block it.

Tea partiers were outside the Capitol Build-

President Obama, scheduled to sign the bill into law March 23, also planned to fly to Iowa to defend the bill from the Republican right.

ing denouncing the bill as “Socialism” and “Communism.” Some goons accosted members of the Congressional Black Caucus, hurling the “n” word at them. One Black member was spat on by these Klan elements.

The AFL-CIO pointed out that the health care bill “survived a \$100 million lie-and-distortion campaign by Big Insurance to kill it, the same kind of scare tactics these groups have aimed at health care proposals for six decades.”

The labor movement made four million phone calls and one million emails in support of the bill. Working America, an AFL-CIO affiliated group went door to door talking with 210,000 people and collected 30,000 petition signatures for the bill.

In Aliquippa, Pa., members of the United Steelworkers (USW) staged a sit-in in the office of Democratic Rep. Jason Altmire to protest his decision to vote no. Rick Galiano, president of USW Local 9305 said, “We busted our humps working for Jason Altmire and many other politicians who

time and again promise they will work for us....We are tired of the broken promises.”

Health Care for America NOW media spokesperson Jacki Schechner was exultant. “This is a really tremendous first step,” she told the World in a phone interview. “We still need to get the Reconciliation package through the Senate and the President needs to sign it into law. But we’ve managed to accomplish something that has eluded us for decades which is giving the American people the security of good health care they can afford, so people will not go bankrupt when they get sick or lose their health coverage when they need it the most.”

Schechner added, “We launched this drive over a year ago and the heart and soul of the campaign was in the field,” she said. “We have a tremendous grassroots network that put everything they had into this and it really worked.”



Tim Wheeler writes for the People’s World.

March For America

By PW Editorial Board

As the historic health care bill was going to a vote in the House of Representatives March 21 tens of thousands of immigrant rights supporters converged on Washington D.C. to call for action on another pressing matter: comprehensive immigration reform. The mega march was called March For America.

There are estimated to be between 10 and 11 million undocumented immigrants, at least 8 million of whom are in the labor force. These immigrants want to join labor unions so that they can struggle alongside U.S.-born workers for justice on the job and in the community, yet they can not because their undocumented status gives them no rights. Thus they have to accept lower pay and worse working conditions than would be the case if they had legal status. This undercuts the position of all workers in the country, reduces the consumption power of the working class, and, even though undocumented immigrants do pay taxes, deprives federal, state and local governments of increased revenues that would come from higher

earnings. The lack of political rights of these immigrant workers also weakens the whole working class.

The anti-immigrant lobby, rooted in the fascist far right, tells U.S. born workers that the undocumented are “stealing their jobs” and claims that their mass deportation would “open up” jobs for U.S.-born workers. They have convinced many, but this is fallacious reasoning. Workers of every kind, immigrant and U.S. born, documented and undocumented, occupy jobs in the economy, but also create wealth by their toil and engage in other activities (as consumers and taxpayers) that create jobs for others.

A recent study by the Center for American Progress and the Immigration Policy Institute concludes that the legalization of the undocumented would add \$1.5 trillion to our country’s Gross Domestic Product over a 10 year period, and generate billions in new tax revenues each year. This translates into many thousands of desperately needed jobs. Legalizing the undocumented will create jobs, not take them away.



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Cuba blockade costs American jobs

By Scott Marshall

The figures are staggering. Even a minor easing of the U.S. blockade against Cuba would create tens of thousands new jobs in the U.S. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Wyoming Sen. Mike Enza have introduced just such a minimal bipartisan bill. A companion bill has been introduced in the House by Minnesota Congressman Collin Peterson. The Travel Restriction Reform and Export Enhancement Act would make very nominal reforms in the two areas mentioned in the bill's name.

First, it would ease some restrictions on Cuba's ability to buy U.S. agricultural products. Now Cuba must pay for any food imports in cash before the products reach Cuba and the transactions must be made through third country banks. The bill would normalize these transactions and allow U.S. exporters to use U.S. banks to make the deals. According to U.S. International Trade Commission estimates, the act would increase export food and agricultural sales to Cuba by roughly \$500 million a year. That would mean new jobs in export and agriculture related industries. Both the National Farmers Union and the American Farm Bureau have testified in favor of the bill.

Secondly, the act would end travel restrictions on U.S. citizens visiting Cuba. Cuba is the only country where U.S. citizens are forbidden to travel to by law. According to another study, al-



lowing U.S. travel to Cuba would greatly increase tourism to the tune of between \$1.2 billion to \$1.6 billion a year. Estimates are the increase would create over 23,000 jobs in the U.S. tourist industry alone. Farm organizations have pointed out that such a surge in tourism would increase Cuba's ability to buy more U.S. exports of food and hotel related products, creating even more jobs.

Again, these are minor reforms in the overall blockade policy of the U.S. government. President Obama used his executive powers to ease restrictions on family travel and cash remittances last year. Still the blockade policies and laws remain extensive and harmful.

The blockade is a failed policy. It is just plain wrong and harmful to the real interests of American working people. The U.S. blockade policy is rejected by nations around the world, friend and foe of U.S. foreign policy alike. It isolates the U.S. and weakens any possible efforts to promote peace or better foreign relations.

Think of how many jobs could be created with an end to the blockade and normal relations with our neighbor. Passage of the Klobuchar-Enza Act would be an important first step in that direction.

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Event honors women in unions

By John Rummel

In recognition of Women's History Month, the Civil Rights Committee of the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO showed the film "Norma Rae."

Committee co-chair Michele Artt said a lot of thought went into picking this film. "We wanted to honor women in unions and their struggle for equal pay. We needed a movie showing working people on the winning side. We really feel gains are possible when people unite and the movie sends a great message to all women."

The film is based on the 1975 story of Crystal Lee Sutton, a 33 year old mother of three, earning \$2.65 an hour at the J.P. Stevens plant in North Carolina. Low pay and unsafe working conditions compelled her to take a leading role in efforts to unionize the plant. An unforgettable scene in the film shows actor Sally Field stand on her workbench holding a sign spelling UNION.

Sadly, Sutton lost her battle with brain cancer on September 11, 2009.

April Smith, a retired teacher said, "It's hard to believe it took until the 70's to organize that plant — and now many of those jobs are gone. Having decent jobs and decent wages is even more of an issue today for women and families."

As I walked out, the words to the Dusty Springfield tune running through the movie were still in my head: "And maybe what's good gets a little bit better and maybe what's bad is gone."

Una reunión cumbre decisiva

Por W.T. Whitney

Para el presidente cubano, Raúl Castro, los resultados fueron "históricamente trascendentales." Fue "el proyecto de unidad de Simón Bolívar y José Martí empezando formarse institucionalmente", escribió Ángel Cabrera, de visionesalternativas.com.

Presidentes y representantes de 33 países latinoamericanos y del Caribe se reunieron el 23 y 24 de febrero para formar una organización llamado provisionalmente la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y del Caribe [CLACS]. La 21ª cumbre del Grupo Río y la 2ª cumbre latinoamericano sobre integración y desarrollo se reunieron juntas en Cancún, México, para fundar al nuevo grupo.

El presidente boliviano, Evo Morales y su homólogo venezolano, Hugo Chávez, impulsaron la iniciativa con su llamada a la creación de una nueva alternativa a la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA), "sin el Norte, sin el imperio, sin los Estados Unidos y Canadá". Participaban hasta los dirigentes conservadores latinoamericanos, según un analista, porque rechazan a la tolerancia histórica de la OEA a las tiranías, a las invasiones y a los golpes de estado.

Serán divulgadas las detalles organizativas del nuevo grupo en la próxima reunión, programada para Caracas en 2011. El grupo se forma a los 200 años del comienzo de la lucha anticolonial contra España.

La declaración fundadora cataloga sectores específicos programados

para integración: Primero, propuestas financieras, cubriendo mercados financieros, fondos para proyectos de desarrollo, una moneda común y la devolución ordenada de deudas. Sectores a ser incluidos bajo acuerdos futuros incluyen la energía, la integración física de infraestructura, la ciencia y tecnología, seguridad alimenticia, eliminación del hambre y de la pobreza, la salubridad pública y el agua potable. Otra categorías son la educación y cultura, migración, desarrollo sostenible, desastres naturales, el cambio ambiental, la cooperación norte-sur, servicios para la juventud y la lucha contra el terrorismo y el narcotráfico.

El comentarista Cabrera calificaba como "maravilla" los cambios en América Latina desde 1999, cuando Chávez fue elegido como presidente de Venezuela. Para entonces, Cuba socialista quedaba aislada bajo un bloqueo fuerte, pero ahora se ha afiliado a la comunidad de naciones latinoamericanas y del Caribe como modelo de la independencia y ejemplo digno de la solidaridad internacional. Recordaba al presidente Raúl Castro a la nación de "nuestra América" (la frase de José Martí) y a la doctrina del prócer que "la patria es la humanidad". Expresaba su aprecio por la denuncia al bloque norteamericano contra Cuba, hizo una llamada por la reconstrucción y descolonización de Haití y se afilió con la cumbre en apoyar el reclamo argentino a las Malvinas y sus reservas petroleras.

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523
Email: contact@peoplesworld.org