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Senate battle on minimum wage hike looms



By Mark Gruenberg

The Senate will vote on raising the nation's minimum wage after lawmakers return from their Easter-Passover recess later this month, its sponsor says. And - to nobody's great surprise - the issue is becoming even more politicized than it was before.

That announcement by Senate Labor Committee Chairman Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, brought cheers from a jammed Capitol rally on April 3 after the labor-backed "Raise The Wage" bus ended its 11-state tour by halting at the foot of Capitol Hill.

But it also gives unionists and their allies several more weeks to lobby lawmakers to raise the wage. That recess "is the time to raise hell and raise a ruckus" to force lawmakers to vote to raise the wage, Harkin declared.

"If we don't win this vote, we'll bring it up again," Harkin added. "And if we don't win that vote, we'll bring it up again. And if we don't win that vote, we'll bring it up in November and win at the polls."

Unionists and minimum wage workers got off the bus to tell Harkin, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., Obama administration Labor Secretary Thomas Perez, House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler and other supportive unionists and

lawmakers stories of trying to survive on \$7.25 an hour - or, in the case of workers who depend on tips, far less.

Harkin and Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., are leading the charge for raising the minimum wage in three 95-cents-a-year steps to \$10.10 an hour in 2016 and indexing it to inflation after that. The tipped wage, now \$2.13 hourly, hasn't risen since 1991. It would rise gradually to 70 percent of the regular minimum wage.

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Millions of workers would benefit from the hike, speakers said. Shuler noted previously that 70 percent of minimum wage workers are working women. Pelosi noted the average minimum wage worker is 30 years old. They're usually single mothers, not teenagers, she added. And almost

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half of minimum wage workers have college degrees, other information shows.

“For five years, I never got a raise.” graying African-American worker Ruben Jones told the crowd, even though he works two minimum-wage jobs in the D.C. suburbs. Halting at times to control his emotions, Jones said the minimum wage pays so little that “I have two children and four grandchildren in Ocean City (Md.) and I can’t even afford to go visit them.

“I’m living with my mother because I can’t afford an apartment of my own. I do everything in my job I possibly can to treat my customers right. To work like this and be treated like this is a shame. Please raise the minimum wage. We all need it.”

Unionists, lawmakers and Perez chimed in with their support, and with more stories from minimum-wage workers. Perez had interviewed a Newark Airport worker who toiled at the minimum wage. “He didn’t get a raise for eight years until New Jersey voters gave him one” by voting last year to hike the Garden State’s minimum

wage.

“The whole point of the Fair Labor Standards Act” - the 75-year-old law that established the minimum wage and overtime pay - “is to set a wage floor so that people don’t have to live in poverty,” Perez explained.

But thanks to Senate GOP filibusters and adamant opposition from the GOP House majority, past minimum wage hikes, though backed by labor and the Obama administration, have died. That led New Jersey and many other states to raise their minimum wages above the federal minimum of \$7.25 hourly. Connecticut, weeks ago, became the first state to enact the \$10.10 minimum, Perez said.

And the same prospect looms again. One union legislative representative told Press Associates afterwards that Harkin is still several votes short of the 60 he needs to break yet another planned GOP filibuster.



Mark Gruenberg edits Press Associates Inc.

Obamacare sign-ups are something to celebrate

By PW Editorial

More than seven million signed up for health insurance by the end of the final day of eligibility under the nation’s health care law. It’s a huge achievement.

What has become the signature law of the Obama presidency has now survived historic attacks from Republicans and corporate backers, an attempt to gut key provisions in the Supreme Court, refusal by GOP governors to accept federal funds that would expand insurance for the elderly, disabled and poor, and a disastrous rollout of the new health care exchange website. The more than seven million who signed up on the exchanges exceeded both the scaled-down projections of five or six million and the original administration predictions of seven million enrollees by Mar. 31. Obama acknowledged the problems in getting things started but blasted Republicans for trying to repeal rather than improve the law.

“That is part of what change looks like in a

democracy, change is hard, fixing what is broken is hard,” Obama said. “But the debate over repealing the law is over. The Affordable Care Act is here to stay.” House Republicans have voted more than 40 times to kill the law with many Republican governors refusing to implement Affordable Care Act provisions that would expand Medicaid in their states. The president took time to challenge some of the more outrageous attacks on the ACA by Republicans. “There are still no death panels. Armageddon has not arrived.”

The president said more than three million young people have gained access to insurance because of the Affordable Care Act. Millions more on top of that, have gotten insurance under expansion of Medicare. More needs to be done. The best plans are beyond most worker’s means. Bureaucratic red tape needs to be untangled. Ultimately a public option needs to be adopted. That said, the foundation for making health care a human right has been laid.

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Activists demand Cantor support immigration reform

By Evlynn Wier

As the America Needs a Raise bus pulled into Portland for its second stop on a ten state tour, Mayor Michael Brennan stood at City Hall, flanked by local business owner Anne Rand and minimum wage earner Tabitha Weyland, to welcome the effort.

Last November, 4 immigration reform activists gathered at the Capitol to begin a 22-day fast. Eliseo Medina, Cristian Avila, Rudy Lopez, and DJ Yoon were joined by hundreds of supporters of “Fast for Families: A Call for Immigration Reform”, to appeal to Congress for an end to the harmful immigration practices that continue to shatter innocent families that came to the U.S. looking for a better life. Other supporters fasted for shorter periods of time and there were solidarity fasts in many cities.

The November actions gave rise to the Fast for Families bus tour that began January 27th, with fasters and activists visiting 67 key congressional districts to lobby for immigration reform. On February 24th, two buses, one with a northern route, the other covering the south departed from L.A. to visit 70 cities, ending up in Washington D.C. on April 9th. Not only Latino, but also Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants lead the tour, bringing attention to less publicized groups of immigrants being affected by Congress’s inaction on immigration reform.

April 2, the two buses met and joined local faith and immigration reform leaders and activists in Richmond, VA, House Majority Eric Can-



tor’s district. They erected tents and began a four-day fast to be accompanied by events, rallies, and community meetings to send the message that we cannot wait any longer for reform. In opening remarks at a rally April 3, Reverend Tony Suarez pointed out that immigrants built our country. “Immigration is not a new issue in this land. Our forefathers were dreamers who came to this country.”

After the rally, a small group of activists moved on to Virginia GOP headquarters to meet with staffers about comprehensive immigration reform. “ We’re asking him (Rep. Cantor) to sit down and talk to us about this broken immigration system and we hope that we can touch his heart to make him understand that he has a unique power to end the suffering of our community of immigrants” said organizer and faster Eliseo Medina. One staffer was moved by the fasters’ commitment to change people’s hearts and minds about immigration reform. “Conservatives aren’t driven by hate. We’re struggling with how to make the system more moral.”

Sign a petition telling Representative Cantor it’s time for a vote on immigration reform. For more information, visit fast4families.org, follow @fast4families on twitter, or like them on Facebook.

Demonstrators erected tents and began a four-day fast demanding action from Rep. Cantor.

Management actions at NY transit unite workers

By Gary Bono

The situation at the Central Electronics shop of New York City Transit, located in Woodside Queens has reached a boiling point.

For some time the management at the Woodside facility has implemented a reign of terror on the workforce.

The latest and the most extreme anti-worker action is the arbitrary suspension for 20 days of the union section vice chair, Israel Roman, on trumped up charges. The suspension was implemented merely based on statements by management. The vice chair was never given a hearing to present his side of the issue.

On Feb. 25, management presented Roman with a stipulation delineating the false charges and mandating that he be suspended. They told him he had to sign the stipulation or be fired. Roman signed but made it clear that he was only signing to acknowledge receipt, not agreement.

The thinking is that the vice chair was just the first victim and that management is similarly targeting more people,

It is of the utmost importance that other labor organizations and progressive forces in general are informed as to what is going on here.

Please contact superintendents Peter Stratos and Archie Bogosian. The address of the Woodside shop is 33-33 54th Street, Woodside, NY 11377. The phone number is 718-533-2727. The head of the TA is Carmen Bianco. His address is 2 Broadway, New York New York.

Misión Barrio Nuevo atiende a 883 mil familias

Telesur

La Gran Misión Barrio Nuevo, Barrio Tricolor es una especie de síntesis de todas las misiones de la Revolución Bolivariana, creada en agosto de 2009 por el Comandante Hugo Chávez para transformar en su totalidad las zonas populares del país.

El vicepresidente Ejecutivo de Venezuela, Jorge Arreaza, precisó 6 de abril que la Gran Misión Barrio Nuevo, Barrio Tricolor ha registrado grandes avances en todo el territorio nacional, con la constitución de 61 corredores en 19 estados del país, que atienden a unas 883 mil 394 familias.

“Son 61 corredores en 19 estados, 131 comunas y dos mil 397 consejos comunales”, informó el Vicepresidente, en un encuentro que sostuvo con representantes de la Gran Misión, en el Cuartel de la Montaña, en Caracas (capital). Arreaza detalló que la cantidad de familias se traduce en más de tres millones de personas atendidas en todo el país, una cifra que asegura “ascenderá a finales de año”, cuando el Gobierno Nacional cumpla la meta de 200 corredores establecidos.

En la reunión aprovechó el momento para destacar el compromiso del pueblo organizado con la puesta en marcha del programa social, y la confianza que ha depositado el presidente de Nicolás Maduro al darle el rango de Gran Misión.

“La Gran Misión Barrio Nuevo, Barrio Tricolor es como la síntesis de todas las misiones, porque cuando nosotros vamos y abordamos una comunidad para dignificar la vida,

es para poder construir en conjunto el vivir viviendo que el comandante Hugo Chávez tanto nos pidió”, subrayó. En la ciudad de Caracas se ha avanzado en el establecimiento de 13 corredores de la Gran Misión, ejecutando a su vez 145 obras de acondicionamiento de los espacios públicos en 16 zonas populares capitalinas.

El Gobierno Nacional aprobó una inversión de 883 millones de bolívares para realizar las 145 obras, en materia de reducción de riesgos, dotación a instalaciones deportivas y de salud, y sustitución de viviendas.

El Plan fue creado en agosto de 2009 por el líder de la Revolución Bolivariana, Hugo Chávez, para “transformar en su totalidad las zonas populares del país”, garantizando a las comunidades la dotación de recursos, equipamiento y herramientas para la producción y construcción.

Para lograr la transformación integral de las comunidades se establecieron cinco vértices estratégicos: organización popular para la construcción de comunas, mapeo de los barrios, dotación de equipos y herramientas para la producción y construcción; desarrollo del Plan Patria Segura y desarrollo productivo comunal.

Durante sus declaraciones por el lanzamiento de la Gran Misión, el Presidente venezolano aprovechó para reiterar su rechazo a la estrategia aplicada por la empresa Twitter, de eliminar las cuentas de seis mil 600 usuarios que lo seguían en la red social.

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