

A New Day Daw

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Ushering in a new day in Congress, Nancy Pelosi takes the gavel from now Minority Leader John Boehner after her election as the first female Speaker of the House in U.S. history.

When voters gave control of the U.S. House and Senate to the Democrats on November 7, their message was loud and clear: It's time for a change – NOW!

“Jobs, health care, education, energy independence, a safer America, a dignified retirement – that’s what the Democrats are all about and we’re going to do that in the first 100 hours,” said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

After 12 years of being pushed aside while America’s wealthiest families prospered, working-class Americans became the focus of a revamped Congress.

On January 18, after only 87 hours in real legislative time, House Democrats wrapped up their 100-hour agenda. The result – legislation that boosts wages for the working poor, reduces Medicare drug prices, makes college more affordable for low and

middle income students and strips big oil of the millions in tax breaks they received from the Bush administration and a Republican-led Congress.

“After 12 years of Republican rule, it’s refreshing to see the Democrat-led Congress shift the focus of legislation away from giveaways to giant corporations and onto legislation that will benefit America’s working class,” said International President Tom Buffenbarger.

Wins in Congress

Just the Beginning

The House got the ball rolling in its first 100 hours, but the work is just beginning. When this edition of the *IAM Journal* went to press, the U.S. Senate had only begun work on these House bills.

Senate Republicans will likely try to poison many of these bills with tax breaks and other giveaways to the wealthy. Despite a clear mandate from the American people for change, President Bush has also threatened to veto many of these bills, including measures to lower prescription drug prices and give low-wage workers a raise.

The Democrat-led House has pledged to continue to fight for working Americans, including pursuing further cuts on student loans and passing the Employee Free Choice Act, a bill that would strengthen protections for workers' rights to organize by requiring employers to recognize a union after a majority of workers sign cards authorizing union representation.

"The fight has just begun," said Buffenbarger. "As we head towards 2008 and beyond, we need to constantly remind Congress the time has come to finally help low and middle income families get ahead."



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Legislation Passed By the House in its First 100 Hours

Fair Minimum Wage Act (H.R. 2)

The House voted overwhelmingly, 315-116, to increase the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour over the next two years. After nearly a decade, the minimum wage is currently at its lowest real value in 51 years and an increase would improve the lives of nearly 13 million Americans.

Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act (H.R. 4)

By a vote of 255-170, the House approved legislation requiring the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate lower drug prices on behalf of those who are enrolled in Medicare prescription drug plans. The bill also requires HHS to report to Congress every 6 months on the progress of drug price negotiations.

College Student Relief Act (H.R. 5)

With a vote of 356-71, lawmakers approved this bill cutting rates on subsidized student loans from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent over a five-year period, a first step in making a college education more attainable for low and middle income students. The bill would benefit 5.5 million students who receive need-based loans.

CLEAN Energy Act (H.R. 6)

The House voted 264-163 to cut \$14 billion in federal oil and tax breaks doled out to corporate giants such as Exxon, and then invested the money in renewable-energy programs.

Implementing the 9/11 Commission Recommendations (H.R. 1)

House lawmakers passed a bill to follow through on the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. The measure, which passed 299-128, included a provision that repeals a portion of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act that gave the Bush administration authority to terminate collective bargaining for employees of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). As a result, more than 40,000 airport screeners at the TSA are a step closer to collective bargaining rights.

Ethics Reforms

House Democrats put more distance between lobbyists and lawmakers by banning lobbyists' gifts, restricting privately funded junkets and banning members' use of corporate jets. The House also approved "earmark" reforms making special interest money and tax breaks often secretly inserted into legislation more visible.