

The Club

During the days of the Republican-controlled Congress, GOP-insiders replaced the open debating and crafting of legislation with midnight votes and backroom deals.

Powerful “K” Street lobbyists roamed Capitol Hill advancing their clients’ interests that destroyed American jobs, communities and families.

A new day started with the election of 2006 and a new, worker-friendly Democratic majority. But lobbyists and special interests still have a major weapon – *The Club* – a select few in the Senate who hold the power to block legislation that would help America’s

working families.

The pain for America’s middle class is real and growing worse. President Bush wants taxpayers to pick up a near trillion-dollar tab for the unbridled

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greed that caused the Wall Street meltdown. The unemployment rate is at 6.1 percent, its highest

level in more than four years. The housing market is in shambles. Food prices have jumped eight percent in the past three months and are still climbing. Gas prices continue to hover around \$4 a gallon.

Forty-two percent of adults were either uninsured or had too little health care coverage during 2007, up from 35 percent in 2003.

Our massive trade deficit with China cost us more than two million jobs. And flawed trade agreements, such as the Central and North American Free Trade Agreements (CAFTA and NAFTA), continue to displace workers in the U.S. and Canada.



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In the Senate, the filibuster is an obscure rule that allows any senator to hold up a bill unless there are 60 votes to end debate. This lets a small group of GOP senators, The Club, block legislation to help working families. That power means pro-working family Senators, like Patrick Leahy (D-VT), right, must constantly compromise with GOP Senators such as Thad Cochran (R-MS), left. If voters elect a 60-vote Democratic Senate majority in November, Congress can pass badly-needed legislation for working families.

Yet, real solutions are few and far between. Corporate interests spent roughly \$17 million for every day Congress was in session last year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. The result – when Americans need real action, legislators must find a way to satisfy the few members in the Senate who can fili-

buster needed legislation, either by getting rid of critical provisions or dropping them altogether. For example, Democrats wanted to include more unemployment benefits in President Bush's economic stimulus package, but Republicans wouldn't agree.

"Government has gone off course. We refuse to pay

our bills. Instead we accumulate more debt. We waste billions in interest costs that buy nothing. Our manufacturing base is decimated. The greed of capitalism has reached compatibility with the greed of politics," said Fritz Hollings, a recently retired six-term Senator who spent years fighting for working families, in his



AP/ World Wide Photo

President Bush and "The Club" delayed efforts to help Main Street families facing foreclosure, but when the crisis threatened to wipe out Wall Street, Bush demanded swift action on a \$700 billion taxpayer-funded bailout. "The Club" delivered.

book – *Making Government Work*. "The capitalist is divorced from country to seek profit, and the politician is divorced from country to seek contributions. Desperate needs are ignored."

Small victories since Democrats regained control of both chambers of Congress in 2006 have offered a glimpse of a brighter future and what can happen when voters elect friends of working families. Unemployment benefits have been extended, cuts to Medicare physicians caring for low-income elderly have been avoided and the minimum wage increased for the first time in nine years.

Yet, as long as a small group of Senate lawmakers can bottle up needed legislation and the White House remains in hostile hands, the most effective solutions for the crisis in American families – health care coverage, job security, increasing family

income, skills training, infrastructure investment, and more – will remain out of reach.

As long as the money comes in, *The Club* remains intact. Their goal is clear: protect corporate interests at all costs.

The Republican Roadblock

Since Democrats took control of the House and Senate, Congressional Republicans have waged an unprecedented effort to block legislation that would benefit working families. A group of about 45 obstructionist Republican senators have deliberately filibustered nearly every major bill Democrats have tried to pass. Any

senator can filibuster. Then the Senate needs 60 votes, called a cloture vote, to end the filibuster. The result is that any bill really needs a 60-vote majority to pass in the Senate. The current Congress has already accumulated nearly 100 cloture votes. In comparison, the 109th and 108th Congress had 54 and 49 cloture votes respectively.

"From lowering taxes and addressing high gasoline taxes to ensuring quality health care to American workers who have been unemployed for more than six months, time and time again, Senate Republicans have refused to give us an opportunity to address these issues," declared Democratic Whip Senator Dick Durbin. "Republican obstruction has gone so far in the Senate that they will not even allow the Senate to debate legislation anymore, refusing to admit



AP/ World Wide Photo

President Bush and GOP Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) have teamed up to block or delay action on important legislation including health care for children, extending unemployment insurance benefits and the Employee Free Choice Act.

Legislation Blocked by 'The Club'

Some of the bills blocked by the GOP minority that would help America's families:

The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA):

The Employee Free Choice Act passed the House and won a majority vote in the Senate, 51-48, but came up short of the

votes needed to end the Republican filibuster. EFCA would restore workers' freedom to choose a union by establishing stronger penalties for violations of employee rights when workers seek to form a union and during first-contract negotiations, provide mediation and arbitration for first-contract disputes and allow employees to form unions by signing cards authorizing union representation.

The Trade Reform, Accountability, Development, and Employment (TRADE) Act:

Introduced by Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and a host of Democratic leaders, the TRADE Act would mandate trade pact reviews, establish standards, pro-

tect workers in developing nations and would help restore Congressional oversight of future trade agreements.

The Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act:

Passed by the House, but blocked by the Senate, this bill would have required Medicare to negotiate drug prices with manufacturers. The federal government could have saved nearly \$100 billion over 10 years by negotiating lower drug prices.

Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act:

Blocked in the Senate, this legislation would have effectively overturned last year's Ledbetter decision by the Supreme Court and restored the ability of workers to sue for pay discrimination.



Bill Burke, Page One Photography

that these important concerns are worthy of Senate debate.”

President Bush and Congressional Republicans have blocked legislation that would have lowered Medicare prescription drug prices, provided health insurance to an additional four million children and shifted tax cuts for big oil to renewable energy efforts. They also stood in the way of the most sweeping labor law reform in 70 years – the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). EFCA, which will

come up again in the 111th Congress, would strengthen workers' freedom to choose a union by establishing stronger penalties for violations of employee rights when workers seek to organize. Also, during first-contract negotiations, it provides mediation and arbitration for first-contract disputes and allows employees to form unions by signing cards authorizing union representation.

“Republican senators have shown once again that they do not understand the very

real economic concerns of America's middle-class families,” said Rep. George Miller (D-CA), Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, after Republicans blocked a vote on EFCA. “They continue to vote for the special interests and against American workers. This legislation is sorely needed given that, for the last several years, the incomes of middle-class families have been falling.”

After Republican senators blocked a clean minimum wage increase last year in



Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), left, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) have led the way on passing important legislation for working families such as raising the minimum wage and making college more affordable. But much more can be accomplished if voters increase the majority in the House and elect a 60-vote filibuster-proof majority in the Senate.

order to tack on corporate tax breaks, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA) took their underhanded maneuvers to task on the Senate floor. "What is it about working men and women that you find so offensive that you won't permit even a vote, denying the Senate of the United States the opportunity to express ourselves?" Kennedy questioned. "This is filibuster by delay and amendments. I have been around here long enough to know it when I see it and smell it."

A Democratic Wave

With a national distaste for President Bush and the GOP, Democrats find themselves with an opportunity to

secure a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate for the first time in 30 years.

"Working families have a chance to fundamentally change the political landscape of the country this fall," said IAM President Tom Buffenbarger. "If Democrats secure a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, we may finally see real health care reform, new trade agreements that will protect American jobs, investments in our country's infrastructure and skills training for our kids."

Democrats currently hold a slim 51-49 voting advantage in the Senate. But of the 35 seats up for election in 2008, Republicans have 23 seats to defend and

Democrats only 12, giving pro-labor candidates a chance to win key races.

"With Democrats on the offensive, there's the potential for a pick-up of not only the nine seats needed for a filibuster-proof majority, but an additional two or three seats that would give them a solid majority," said IAM Legislative Director Matt McKinnon. "Candidates such as Rick Noriega in Texas and Bruce Lunsford in Kentucky have the potential to really surprise some people."

"We cannot afford another eight years of watching important legislation wither and die, or get so overloaded with amendments that it's no longer worth fighting for," said Buffenbarger.