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NEWS CLIPS

April 2, 2010

Randall Brassell, Director of Communications
Telephone: 615-521-4097 (Fax) 615-824-2164
Email: rbrassell1@aol.com

Senate Republican Coburn Blocks Aid to America's Jobless

Posted By [Tula Connell](#) On March 26, 2010 @ 12:02 pm In [Economy](#), [Legislation & Politics](#) | [20 Comments](#)

The Party of "No" gets ready to strike once more against working families.

As Congress considers much-needed relief for America's jobless workers and debates proposals to jump-start the economy, Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) blocked a stopgap bill to extend jobless benefits, saying its \$9 billion cost should not be added to the national debt. Coburn's block means the Senate, which goes on a two-week recess today, won't consider helping jobless workers until at least April 12.

From the [1] [New York Times](#):

As a result, some people who have been out of work for more than six months will at least temporarily lose benefits. Health insurance subsidies for the jobless will also expire. Republicans said Senate negotiations had produced a compromise that did not pass muster in the House.

Coburn is taking up where [2] [Sen. Jim Bunning left off](#) in sticking it to America's workers who, unlike him, don't have jobs or taxpayer-provided health care and retirement benefits. Bunning, a Kentucky Republican, earlier this month delayed unemployment benefits for 400,000 desperate Americans and forced an unnecessary furlough of another 2,000.

But unlike Bunning, an outsider to his own party, Coburn is supported by the majority of Republican senators who are indicating strong opposition to addressing the suffering of the nation's nearly 17 million jobless workers.

Recess appointments made to National Labor Relations Board



March 30, 2010

President Obama during the weekend announced recess appointments for two seats on the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Both appointees, Craig Becker and Mark Pearce, are Democrats; a third nominee, Brian Hayes, a staffer for Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), was left behind to be voted on by the Senate.

Three of NLRB's five seats have been vacant for at least two years; the recess appointments will last only until the end of this year, as opposed to the normal four-year term bestowed NLRB appointees approved by the Senate.

The move came despite warnings from Republican senators to the President not to use the upcoming Easter recess to make such a move. Becker's appointment in particular was seen as controversial, and has been stalled after failing a Senate cloture vote last February.

A letter signed by all 41 Senate Republicans suggested the Senate should confirm the two other NLRB nominees, Pearce and Hayes, with the President dropping Becker's appointment. Republicans consider Becker too pro-union because of his work with the Service Employees International Union and the AFL-CIO.

Is rail security adequate? Questions raised in Congress



March 31, 2020

Just days before terrorist bombs killed 38 people on the Moscow metro, the adequacy of security funding for U.S. ground transportation came under sharp questioning at a Senate hearing in Washington.

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Tex.), told the hearing, "Perhaps we haven't looked enough at surface transportation safety for buses and trains." She pointed out that only 2% of the White House TSA budget proposal for fiscal 2011 would go to surface transportation while 68% goes to aviation.

Her comments came on March 23 as Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) chaired a hearing of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee on the confirmation of Robert Harding to lead the Transportation Security Administration (Harding withdrew his name from consideration on Friday).

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.) also expressed concern about the state of ground transportation security.

"I worry that TSA's delay in issuing final regulations for public transportation and railroad training programs has allowed some transportation agencies to ignore security vulnerabilities and avoid providing training to their employees on these transit lines in which literally millions of Americans travel every day," Lieberman said.

Meanwhile, transit systems beefed up their security in the wake of the Moscow attacks.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority on Monday conducted random inspections of stations and yards with Metro Transit Police K-9 Explosive Ordnance Detection Teams.

"We will remain on a heightened state of security at least through the upcoming Nuclear Security Summit scheduled in Washington in a few weeks [April 12-13] and we are partnering with federal and local law enforcement for security related to that summit," said Metro Transit

Police Acting Chief Jeri Lee.

The New York Police Department on Monday doubled its presence on subway trains.

Brian Michael Jenkins, director of the National Transportation Security Center of Excellence at the Mineta Transportation Institute, noted that authorities have uncovered and defused a number of plots against the New York City subway system in the past.

“Although 100% passenger screening is unrealistic,” said Jenkins, “some systems have implemented selective passenger screening, where some randomly selected passengers voluntarily submit their bags and backpacks for brief inspection. In a diverse society extremely sensitive to profiling and privacy protection, selective screening must be carefully planned and closely managed to maintain public acceptance. However, it remains a useful option where, as in the wake of the Moscow attacks, subway and train systems are taking security up a notch to discourage copycats and malicious pranksters and to reassure passengers.”

3/31/2010 Federal Funding

Nation needs to ramp up transit funding, Rep. Nadler says

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) is trying to spearhead efforts to increase transit funding in the fiscal-year 2011 Transportation-HUD Appropriations bill. He recently joined 66 colleagues in sending a letter to the House Appropriations Committee requesting \$14.9 billion in funding for federal transit programs, which would represent a significant boost from the \$10.8 billion requested in President Obama's FY2011 budget.

Public transportation agencies are finding it difficult to keep up with ridership demand and, instead, are proposing fare hikes, service reductions and job cuts, said Nadler in a prepared statement.

“This situation is likely to worsen as state and local governments are forced to make budget cuts in the face of the recession and revenue shortfalls,” he said. “As we delve into our appropriations process for the coming year, it is essential that we provide sufficient federal funding to maintain our public transportation systems and increase their efficiency for riders.”

The funding request of \$14.9 billion matches the [American Public Transportation Association's \(APTA\)](#) estimate of how much it would cost to keep transit systems in a state of good repair and accommodate a projected doubling of ridership during the next 20 years, said Nadler.

The congressional efforts to increase transit funding are supported by APTA, the

Transport Workers Union, Amalgamated Transit Union and Transportation for America, he said.

Geithner asserts 'critical role' of manufacturing

By Howard Schneider
Washington Post Foreign Service
Thursday, April 1, 2010; A11

U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner used a trip to a Pittsburgh metals factory on Wednesday to buff the image of American manufacturing ahead of a key decision on China's currency policy, showcasing the type of heavy industry that can succeed in the United States despite stiff -- and some argue unfair -- competition from abroad.

"This is a sector that will play a critical role in helping to spur our economic recovery and contribute to our long-term prosperity," Geithner said after a day in which he toured a mill where Allegheny Technologies Inc. produces specialty metal plates. He also met with representatives of United Steelworkers and U.S. Steel.

ATI produces titanium, zirconium and stainless steel for aircraft frames, jet engines, chemical plants and other industrial uses. Company officials said investments in new equipment coupled with the unique nature of the metals they produce allowed them to remain profitable through the economic downturn. The company has a U.S. workforce of about 7,800 and several hundred employees abroad -- including at a joint venture in China.

Geithner said facilities such as ATI's show that American manufacturing remains strong -- despite what has been a steady loss of jobs as the production of textiles, consumer electronics and other goods has shifted overseas.

The loss of manufacturing jobs is central to a debate Geithner is going to have to referee April 15, when he is to rule on whether China's policy of pegging the value of its renminbi to the dollar amounts to currency manipulation. The renminbi is estimated to be undervalued by anywhere from 25 to 40 percent, giving Chinese goods an advantage in global markets -- and leading to accusations that the policy is costing U.S. jobs at a time when unemployment is stubbornly hovering around 10 percent.

In recent weeks, pressure has built among members of Congress and manufacturing and business groups for Geithner to cite China for its currency policies.

"We seem to have been in denial that this is a problem. Well, it's a problem," said Wayne Ranick, a spokesman for United Steelworkers International. He said union leaders have told Geithner that China's currency policy was "one of the chief causes of bankruptcy and job loss" among U.S. manufacturers, and urged him to act.

But there are also concerns about an open break in relations between the United States and China, and arguments in favor of addressing the currency issue by working through organizations such as the G-20 group of economically powerful countries. On Wednesday the U.S. Trade Representative's office released an annual survey of trade barriers around the world, and cited Chinese practices that it said discriminate

against U.S. goods. The United States runs a trade deficit with China that has exceeded \$200 billion annually for the past five years, part of an economic relationship far more complex than the currency issue alone.

Geithner has said recently that the United States cannot "force" China to revalue its currency, and said after a meeting with the United Steelworkers that it was important to keep the relationship cooperative and "work with China to create a level playing field for American exporters."

After Geithner's tour, ATI spokesman Dan Greenfield said the company agreed that the United States should fight for better market access and fairer policies from its major trading partners. But he also said plenty of American manufacturers succeed by "making things that no one else does."

Geithner's visit "was not about currencies; it was not about any specific country," Greenfield said. "It was about how a company can be successful with the majority of its employees in the U.S. We believe we can be competitive in the world economy. . . . We have to focus on what we do better than anybody else."

Deadlock Is Ending on Labor Board

By STEVEN GREENHOUSE

Because of President Obama's recess appointments of two union lawyers to the National Labor Relations Board, business groups are warning that the panel will kick quickly into a pro-union gear after 26 months of near paralysis, when just two of its five seats were filled.

Business groups fear that the appointment of Craig Becker, a lawyer for the A.F.L.-C.I.O. and the Service Employees International Union, will push the board to favor unions on dozens of issues — like whether companies should be required to allow union organizers on their property during organizing drives.

"Becker will bring a very strong, pro-union, anti-employer animus to decision-making at the board," said Randel K. Johnson, an executive of the United States Chamber of Commerce. "Our view is he will resolve things almost invariably in favor of unions."

Business organizations also worry that the board will revamp the rules for unionization elections by engaging more than ever before in broad rule-making while relying less on case-by-case decision-making.

Labor unions argue that the recess appointments of Mr. Becker and Mark Pearce, a Buffalo-based lawyer, will merely restore some balance after the board favored business under President George W. Bush.

“The Bush board took things in a really anti-worker direction,” said Jonathan Hiatt, chief of staff of the A.F.L.-C.I.O.. “Workers have taken a beating under board rulings in recent years, and we hope the new board will provide a little more fairness to workers who want to exercise the right to organize and bargain collectively.”

Mr. Becker and Mr. Pearce declined to be interviewed about their views on labor policy.

After being nominated, Mr. Becker, a former law school professor, came under fire for writing in a 1993 law review article that employers should not have a legal right to campaign in union elections. When Republicans said that his view conflicted with current law, Mr. Becker said that he was merely engaging in a scholarly debate and that as a labor board member, he would follow the law in deciding cases.

The labor board, created by the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, oversees enforcement of the laws governing union drives, strikes and negotiating labor contracts in the private sector.

Among the areas where unions hope the Obama board will take a new tack is the Bush-era ruling that graduate teaching assistants are not employees and therefore do not have a right to unionize. Labor leaders also hope the Obama board will reverse a ruling that many senior nurses are supervisors, rather than rank and file, and thus cannot join a union. That decision has hamstrung many unionization drives at hospitals by leading to litigation about which nurses can unionize.

One thing labor and business agree on is that the board’s deadlock will soon end. Since January 2008, the board has had just one Democratic member, its chairwoman, Wilma B. Liebman, and one Republican, Peter C. Schaumber. Now there will be three Democrats and one Republican.

About 220 cases are pending at the board, half on important, controversial issues that Ms. Liebman and Mr. Schaumber have not tackled, believing they should not be handled by just two members. And in about 60 cases, the two members have deadlocked.

“There’s now a full complement of Democrats on the board so they can start doing something,” said Samuel Estreicher, a labor law professor at New York University. “I think you’re going to see a more activist N.L.R.B.”

Accusing the Republicans of obstructionism in blocking or delaying his nominees, Mr. Obama appointed Mr. Becker and Mr. Pearce last Saturday after Congress left for a recess. Many Republicans criticized the move, which came after Democrats failed to muster 60 votes to

overcome a threatened filibuster in the Senate. But Democrats said that 7 of Mr. Bush's 10 appointments to the N.L.R.B. had been recess appointments, one of them the Chamber of Commerce's director of labor law policy.

For the last decade, many unions have avoided the labor board and its elections when seeking to unionize workers. The number of board-supervised elections fell to 1,343 last year, from 3,162 a decade earlier. Unions have instead often pursued card check, seeking to persuade a majority of a workplace's employees to sign cards saying they want a union and then mounting a campaign to press management to grant union recognition.

Many academic experts predict that the Democratic-dominated board will revamp rules so that unions do not feel the system is tilted against them. This could lead them to turn more to board-supervised union elections.

Unions often complain that it can take two months to hold an election, letting pro-union sentiment dissipate while management campaigns against the union, often in meetings that workers are required to attend — all while companies can bar union organizers from setting foot on their property. Unions also complain that many companies illegally fire union supporters during organizing drives and that it often takes the board three or four years to reinstate them.

“The union movement feels the board processes are not giving them a fair shake,” said James J. Brudney, a labor law professor at Ohio State.

Unions say all this helps explain why the share of private-sector workers in unions has fallen to 7.2 percent.

Harold P. Coxson Jr., a management lawyer and former Chamber of Commerce official, voiced concern that with Congress unlikely to enact legislation that makes it easier to unionize, the labor board “will make the difference in the debate.” Among the ideas that have stalled in Congress since the Democrats lost their 60-vote supermajority in the Senate is requiring snap unionization elections — within 7 to 10 days of pro-union workers petitioning for an election.

“We have heard that they are going to engage in rule-making that could impose ‘quickie’ union elections, perhaps in 5 to 10 days,” Mr. Coxson said. “The board will demonstrate with its agenda that they are not irrelevant.”

In an interview, Ms. Liebman declined to discuss the areas where the board might use rule-making.

“Rule-making is something that certainly academics have been talking about for some time,” she said. “I think it’s worth consideration. It’s often served up as the antidote to all the flip-flopping” between rulings by Democratic boards and Republican ones.

Breaking News Alert
The New York Times
Fri, April 02, 2010 -- 8:42 AM ET

U.S. Economy Added 162,000 Jobs in March: Unemployment Rate Held Steady at 9.7%

American employers added 162,000 jobs in March, the Labor Department reported on Friday, in a month when the government hired thousands of temporary census workers.

The unemployment rate held steady at 9.7 percent, the Labor Department said, but it is expected to worsen later this year as discouraged workers re-enter the labor force.

Job losses in February were less severe than the previously thought; only 14,000 jobs were lost that month, compared with a preliminary reading of 36,000.