

Senate

1. *Building Up the Department of Defense: Ensuring Our National Security (147)*

AFGE opposed an effort led by Senator John McCain (R-AZ) to impose an additional round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) in 2001.

AFGE opposed additional BRAC for several reasons. During the 1996 presidential election, the Administration politicized the BRAC process in order to curry favor with voters in Texas and California—and did so by contracting out federal jobs that had previously been considered national security-essential and then did that without any public-private competition. Many lawmakers, both Republicans and Democrats, have questioned whether the Clinton Administration should be trusted again with BRAC authority. AFGE is also concerned about authorizing any new rounds of BRAC until previous rounds have been completed. Some installations are still receiving the work assigned to them by the 1995 BRAC round. Thus, they are still operating with artificially high excess capacity, which would put them at an unfair disadvantage if they were prematurely forced to undergo another round of BRAC.

Moreover, the Administration should stop insisting that short-term readiness concerns can be addressed with two more BRAC rounds. To the extent that BRAC saves money, such savings won't occur for seven to ten years. Pentagon officials need to look at items within the defense budget other than civilian personnel if they hope to make up for current readiness shortfalls. When Pentagon officials need money, why is it that the first (and often the only) place they turn to in the budget is civilian personnel?

McCain's amendment - opposed by AFGE - to the defense authorization bill (S. 1059) failed by a vote of 40-60, on May 26. The House did not even consider BRAC.

2. *Insisting on Fair Trade: Standing in Solidarity with the Steelworkers (178)*

AFGE supported the effort led by Senator John Rockefeller (D-WV) to pass legislation that would have directed the president to undertake the necessary steps to prevent foreign steel from being dumped into the American market, and unfairly putting even more American steelworkers out of their jobs. H.R. 975 would merely have required that the volume of imported steel products did not exceed the average volume for the 36-month period preceding July 1997.

As National President Bobby L. Harnage, Sr. wrote in a letter to lawmakers prior to the vote,

“Although this legislation includes tough measures, its enactment would simply ensure that steel imports during any month don't exceed the average tonnage volume of steel that was imported at the time much of the dumping began. Moreover, the legislation would expire three years after its enactment.

“With 10,000 steelworkers out of work, enactment of this legislation is necessary to prevent foreign manufacturers from using the American market as a dumping ground for their product. A strong and vibrant steel industry is essential to the well-being of thousands of steelworkers, but also to their own local communities and economies where they live, where they pay taxes, and where they buy the goods and services produced by others with their hard-earned income. Moreover, a strong and vibrant steel industry is essential to America’s national defense. We simply cannot afford to allow the destruction of this basic industry and the resulting reliance upon foreign steel producers for this important product.”

Although H.R. 975 passed the House, opponents of the measure prevented the legislation from being brought up for a vote in the Senate. An AFGE-backed motion to invoke cloture, which requires the approval of sixty Senators, and force the legislation’s consideration failed by a vote of 42-57, on June 22.

3. Standing up for FEHBP: Preserving Our Health Care Benefits #1 (197)

Although AFGE does not take a position on the issue of a woman’s right to an abortion, this union strongly opposes any reduction in health care benefits for federal employees. That’s why AFGE strongly supported an attempt by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) to kill an amendment offered by Senator Mike DeWine (R-OH) to the Treasury-Postal Appropriations Bill (S. 1282). DeWine’s amendment prohibited funding for abortions or for administrative expenses of plans in the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program that provide coverage for abortions, except where the life of the mother is endangered or the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. Although the vote was close, Boxer’s effort fell short by a vote of 47-51, on July 1.

4. Standing up for FEHBP: Preserving Our Health Care Benefits #2 (210)

During debate on legislation (S. 1344) to force managed health care plans to improve their service delivery, the Senate adopted a substitute version of the House legislation which would have, among other things, introduced Medical Savings Accounts (MSAs) into the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP).

AFGE strongly opposes the introduction of MSAs into FEHBP because this runs counter to the interests of federal employees and retirees and the principles of group insurance which underlie the entire FEHBP structure. Using tax incentives rather than group insurance for health care financing in an effort to bring down costs simply won’t work because MSAs don’t take into account that individuals by themselves have little bargaining power in the health care economy. Proponents of MSAs argue that they would turn consumers into purchasers. But few consumers have the medical knowledge to question or reject recommendations of health care providers. Consumers, especially individual consumers, are prohibited from choosing the lowest-cost routes to purchasing health care for themselves, e.g., only certified medical providers are permitted to prescribe drugs, order medical tests, etc. Individuals lack the bargaining power to negotiate favorable prices on

drugs, hospital stays, and physician services.

In addition, MSAs would provide individuals with incentives not to seek preventive care. Because money in an MSA not spent on health care would be a tax-free addition to regular income, many health care consumers would likely delay medical treatment until it was absolutely necessary, a practice which has shown to be more costly in terms of dollars and health than regular preventive care and diagnosis and care in the early stages of disease.

Finally, MSAs would drive up costs for individuals participating traditionally in FEHPB. Individuals in MSAs would have an incentive to delay costly care until after the next open season when they could re-enroll in traditional FEHPB coverage. The unpredictable costs to traditional plans would be unfairly borne by those who consistently support the non-MSA plans.

However, on July 15, the AFGE-opposed legislation which included MSAs in FEHPB passed by a vote of 53-47. S. 1344, along with H.R. 2990, became subjects of a House-Senate conference convened at the end of the 1st Session of the 106th Congress.

5. Providing Adequate Funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs: Ensuring Veterans Receive the Care they Deserve (243)

AFGE supported an amendment to the tax bill (S. 1429) – offered by Senators Paul Wellstone (D-MN), Tim Johnson (D-SD), Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Tom Daschle (D-SD) to create a \$3 billion annual reserve fund for veterans' health care programs.

Such an increase would be consistent with the *Independent Budget*, a comprehensive budget analysis of the Department of Veterans' Affairs prepared by four veterans service organizations, and ensure that DVA health care workers have the resources they need to provide veterans with access to high quality care. Under the Wellstone plan, proposed tax breaks for individuals earning more than \$200,000 annually would have been decreased in order to pay for the reserve account for veterans' health care. Unfortunately, the Senate defeated this opportunity to increase the DVA's health care budget by a vote of 58-42 on July 30.

6. Squandering the Surplus: Anti-Worker Tax Cut #1 (247)

AFGE opposed legislation (S. 1429) that would have slashed federal taxes by \$792 billion over 10 years. The tax package was strongly criticized for being too large and too generous to the wealthy and businesses. As was reported in the media, the legislation included billions and billions of dollars in tax breaks for multinational corporations and scores of special interest provisions. Even supporters of the legislation criticized the tax package as being directed more towards businesses than families. Moreover, the legislation would have made it impossible to use the surplus to make Social Security and Medicare even more secure and would surely have required massive cuts in discretionary spending, the funding used to run agencies and pay salaries.

As National President Bobby L. Harnage, Sr., told lawmakers before the vote:

“Federal employees, federal retirees, and their families have a special stake in ensuring that the surplus is not squandered on a tax cut skewed towards corporations and the wealthy. Since 1980, we have contributed more than \$200 billion towards deficit reduction in the form of lost and delayed pay raises and retirement benefits. That is why AFGE strongly opposes this tax cut legislation. After attending to the needs of Social Security and Medicare and adjusting the appropriations caps, the Congress should consider a smaller tax cut targeted at working and middle class Americans.”

However, the Senate passed the anti-worker tax cut legislation by a vote of 57-43, on July 30.

7. Squandering the Surplus: Anti-Worker Tax Cut #2 (261)

After technical changes to the anti-worker tax cut bill were made in a House-Senate conference, the Senate considered the resulting report (H.R. 2488). Because of mounting opposition, the vote on the conference report was closer than the one on the Senate’s own bill. However, the anti-worker tax cut conference report still passed the Senate by a vote of 50-49. At the urging of AFGE and numerous other progressive groups, the President vetoed the legislation, on September 23.

8. Across-the-Board Cuts: Defending the Important Work of Government #1 (313)

AFGE opposed an amendment offered by Senator Don Nickles (R-OK) to the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill (S. 1650) that would have put the Senate on record as expressing support for an across-the-board cut in all discretionary funding, the money used to run agencies and pay the salaries of federal employees, if a failure to do so would result in tapping the Social Security surplus to pay for the important work of the federal government.

The budget surplus is largely a mirage. The only reason there is a surplus on paper is because spending is being measured against the very tight budget caps agreed to in 1997. Before then, spending was measured against the amount needed to keep programs operating at the previous year’s levels. Estimates by the Economic Policy Institute and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) say that about 90% of the so-called surplus actually represents budget cuts below the previous year’s spending level. In the 1997 budget deal, virtually all the reductions assumed for next year come out of non-defense discretionary spending, the category of funding used to run agencies and pay salaries in agencies other than the Department of Defense. According to CBPP, the difference between the “capped” balanced budget and maintaining current levels of spending is conservatively estimated at \$595 billion over the next several years. That is, in order to stay under the caps, cuts of almost \$600 billion in discretionary spending will have to be made—and sooner rather than later.

If the spending caps were not bad enough, both the Congress and the President have

painted themselves into an even tighter corner by vowing not to spend a dime of the Social Security surplus. In the past, the surplus revenues to the Social Security Trust Fund were used to purchase special issue Treasury bonds, to be redeemed later when benefit obligations exceed revenues. After the bond purchase, Social Security lent cash to the federal government to use to help finance its day-to-day operations. Now with the Social Security surplus under virtual lock and key, agencies are warning federal employees that they might face layoffs and the programs they work on may be gutted because of the drastic reductions required to stay under the caps.

However, Senator Nickles' sense-of-the-Senate was adopted by a vote of 54-46, on October 6. Whether the budget caps should be lifted and whether the Social Security part of the budget surplus should not be used to fund the important work of the federal government are two extremely important public policy questions that the President and lawmakers continue to consider.

9. Across-the-Board Cuts: Protecting the Important Work of Government #2 (343)

AFGE strongly opposed the District of Columbia/Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Conference Report (H.R. 3064) because it included an across-the-board cut affecting all agencies of almost 1.0 percent. Across-the-board cuts are categorically wrong because they allow lawmakers to dramatically reduce the services provided by federal employees without making any attempt to understand the consequences for those Americans who rely on the government, or even to distinguish vital and effective programs from those which may need closer Congressional scrutiny. Americans, including AFGE members, expect their lawmakers to take the time and the effort to make the right decisions on how agencies should be funded, rather than mindlessly slash appropriations bills.

Lawmakers in favor of the across-the-board cuts pretended they were necessary in order to avoid using Social Security revenue for general government operations, even though *The New York Times*, among others, reminds us that "spending some Social Security money would have no direct effect on the retirement system's long-term financial condition and little or no economic impact."

Although the Congressional Republican leadership was ultimately forced to back down from 1.0 percent, the final budget agreement did include across-the-board funding cuts of 0.38 percent. And, despite the strong opposition of AFGE, it also included a pay delay for federal employees who would normally be paid on September 29th or 30th, 2000, to forego their paychecks until October 1 (although the funds would not be available in banks until October 2nd). Although not as damaging as earlier versions that had been floated, this cynical mandate essentially requires affected federal employees to lend the government their pay so that the cost of that end-of-the-fiscal year paycheck can be pushed into the next fiscal year.

As National President Bobby L. Harnage, Sr., wrote in a letter to lawmakers prior to the vote,

“Like many other Americans, federal employees live from paycheck to paycheck. It is unreasonable for the Congress to fail to pay federal employees in a timely manner for the services they have provided to the American people. The expectation that federal employees should be required to lend their pay—for even a few days—is unfair and unnecessary.”

The budget package, with the across-the-board cuts and the federal employee pay delay, passed the Senate, narrowly, by a vote of 49-48, on November 2.

10. Protecting Davis-Bacon: Showing Solidarity With Construction Workers (320)

AFGE supports the Davis-Bacon Act, one of the most important labor laws for our private-sector brothers and sisters, that requires any workers on a federal project to be paid prevailing wages. That’s why AFGE opposed an amendment offered by Senator Robert Smith (NH), while an Independent, that would have exempted projects undertaken in locations declared federal disaster areas by the President. Considering that the Davis-Bacon Act has been under constant attack since 1995 from anti-union lawmakers, it is important that members in AFGE and other AFL-CIO affiliates continue to protect the statute from threats, both large and small. That’s why AFGE supported the motion by Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) to kill the Smith Amendment. Specter’s effort was successful, by a vote of 59-40, on October 7.

11. Boosting the Minimum Wage: Fighting to Improve Opportunities for the Working Poor (356)

AFGE supported an amendment offered by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) to unrelated bankruptcy legislation (S. 625) that would have increased the minimum wage by \$1 an hour over two years, to \$5.65 an hour beginning January 1 of this year, and to \$6.15 an hour beginning January 1 of next year. AFGE considers an increase in the minimum wage to be particularly important because a significant number of federal employees employed by Department of Defense exchanges and Department of Veterans Affairs canteens work for the minimum wage. In addition, an increase in the minimum wage would boost the pay and standard of living of thousands of more public employees whose own compensation is tied closely to the minimum wage. AFGE opposed the effort by Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM) to table the Kennedy amendment, but it ultimately prevailed by a vote of 50-48, on November 9.

1999 Senate Voting Record

	BRAC	Fair Trade	FEHBP #1	FEHBP #2	Veterans Health	Tax Cut #1	Tax Cut #2	Across-the-Board Cuts #1	Across-the-Board Cuts #2	Davis-Bacon	Minimum Wage	AFGE SCORE
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Alabama												
Sessions, J. (R)	R	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	18%
Shelby (R)	R	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	R	W	27%
Alaska												
Murkowski (R)	R	W	?	W	W	W	W	W	W	R	W	20%
Stevens (R)	R	R	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	R	W	36%
Arizona												
* Kyl (R)	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	0%
McCain (R)	W	?	?	W	R	W	W	R	?	W	?	28%
Arkansas												
Hutchinson, T. (R)	R	W	W	W	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	18%
Lincoln (D)	W	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	90%
California												
Boxer (D)	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	100%
* Feinstein (D)	R	W	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	90%
Colorado												
Allard (R)	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	9%
Campbell, B. (R)	R	R	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	R	W	36%
Connecticut												
Dodd (D)	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	?	R	100%
* Lieberman (D)	W	W	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	81%
Delaware												
Biden (D)	W	R	W	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	81%
* Roth (R)	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	0%
Florida												
Graham, B. (D)	R	W	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	90%
# Mack (R)	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	9%
Georgia												
Cleland (D)	R	W	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	90%
Coverdell (R)	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	9%
Hawaii												
* Akaka (D)	R	W	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	90%
Inouye (D)	R	W	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	90%
Idaho												
Craig (R)	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	9%
Crapo (R)	R	W	W	W	W	W	?	W	W	W	W	10%

	BRAC	Fair Trade	FEHBP #1	FEHBP #2	Veterans Health	Tax Cut #1	Tax Cut #2	Across-the-Board Cuts #1	Across-the-Board Cuts #2	Davis-Bacon	Minimum Wage	AFGE SCORE
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	

Wyoming

Enzi (R)	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	9%
* Thomas, C. (R)	R	W	W	W	R	W	W	W	W	W	W	18%

KEY
R Voted Right
W Voted Wrong
? Did Not Vote
* Up For Re-election
Retiring
I Not Eligible Member
d Died In Office