

# AFSCME 1999 Voters' Guide

## Vote Descriptions

### SENATE

#### **Saving Social Security and Medicare**

The Senate rejected an amendment by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) during floor consideration of the federal budget for 2000 (SConRes20) that would not have allowed any new tax cuts until legislation was passed to extend the solvency of the Social Security and Medicare trust funds.

AFSCME supported the effort to save Social Security and Medicare for future generations but the Senate rejected this amendment by a vote of 54-45 on March 24, 1999.

#### **Gutting the Patients Bill of Rights**

The Senate approved a deeply flawed patient protection bill (S. 1344) that failed to cover two-thirds of those who are currently in managed care plans. In particular, all state and local government employees are excluded from the legislation. The bill failed to provide whistleblower protections for health care workers who speak up for the care of their patients. It also allowed insurance companies to continue to override the treatment decisions of physicians, yet did not hold insurance companies accountable when their decisions result in the injury or death of patients.

AFSCME opposed this bill which was approved by the Senate by a vote of 53 to 47 on July 15, 1999.

#### **Blocking School Construction**

The Senate defeated an amendment to S. 1429, the tax cut bill, which would have assisted local school districts in building and repairing our nation's public schools. The amendment would have reduced class sizes and provided students with the educational tools necessary to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

AFSCME supported this amendment which was rejected by the Senate by a vote of 55 to 45 on July 30, 1999.

#### **Tax cuts for the wealthy and special interests**

The Senate passed a bill (S. 1429) which would provide major tax cuts for wealthy Americans and special interests at the expense of working families. In order to finance the tax cut, the bill would require devastating cuts in key programs including education, health care and environmental protection. Not one dime would be put aside to save Social Security for future generations.

AFSCME opposed this bill which the Senate passed by a vote of 57 to 43 on July 30, 1999.

#### **Worker Rights Enforcement**

The Senate killed an amendment to S. 1650, the 2000 funding bill for labor, health and education programs, that would have slashed funds for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) – the agency that defends workers' legal rights. Instead of using the money to protect workers and their unions from unscrupulous employers, the funding would have been redirected for other purposes. Without sufficient money to operate, the NLRB would have been weakened and unable to carry out its mission.

The Senate defeated the amendment by a vote of 50 to 49 on September 30, 1999.

## **Minimum wage**

The Senate defeated an amendment by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) to the bankruptcy reform bill (S. 625) which would have provided for a one-dollar increase in the minimum wage over two years. Without it, 12 million minimum wage workers -- over 60 percent of whom are adults over the age of 20 and female and almost 50 percent of whom work full time -- would actually lose income in terms of real wages despite the economic boom.

The Senate defeated the amendment, which AFSCME supported, by a vote of 50 to 48 on November 9, 1999.

## **HOUSE**

### **Hurting Social Security and Medicare**

The House passed a federal budget plan for 2000 (HConRes 68), which failed to adequately protect Social Security and Medicare. The budget plan would have squandered the projected federal surplus on large, new tax cuts for the wealthy and special interests without addressing either Social Security or Medicare's financial problems.

AFSCME opposed the budget plan which passed the House by a vote of 221 to 208 on March 25, 1999.

### **Undermining education**

The House passed a bill (H.R. 1995) which would undermine various federal programs designed to increase student achievement levels. The bill specifically calls for consolidation of various federal education initiatives into a block grant to the states. It especially puts at risk efforts to reduce class sizes and to recruit and train new teachers.

AFSCME opposed this bill which passed the House by a vote of 239 to 185 on July 20, 1999.

### **Tax cuts for the wealthy and special interests**

The House passed a bill (H.R. 2488) which would provide major tax cuts for wealthy Americans and special interests at the expense of working families. In order to fund the tax cut, the bill would require devastating cuts in key programs including education, health care and environmental protection. Not one dime would be put aside to save Social Security for future generations.

AFSCME opposed the bill which passed the House by a vote of 223 to 208 on July 22, 1999.

### **Threatening worker health and safety**

The House approved a bill (H.R. 987) which would prevent the agency charged with protecting worker health and safety, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), from issuing an ergonomics standard designed to protect workers from musculoskeletal and repetitive motion injuries. These painful and crippling injuries -- the biggest job safety problem in the workplace today -- demonstrate the need for an ergonomics standard to protect workers.

AFSCME opposed the bill which was approved by the House by a vote of 217 to 209 on August 3, 1999.

### **Gutting the Patients Bill of Rights**

The House rejected an alternative version of the Patients Bill of Rights (H.R. 2723) which would have established few protections and provided weak enforcement mechanisms. The rejected alternative was pushed by the GOP leadership in an effort to derail a bipartisan bill with meaningful reforms crafted by Reps. Charles Norwood (R-GA) and John Dingell (D-MI). After the alternative was defeated, the House approved the AFSCME-endorsed Norwood-Dingell bill which includes comprehensive patient protections, strong enforcement features and whistleblower protections for health care professionals who advocate for their patients.

AFSCME opposed the alternative bill which was defeated by the House by a vote of 238 to 193 on October 7, 1999.

### **Weakening public education**

The House rejected an amendment to H.R. 2, the Student Results Act, offered by Rep. Army (R-TX), which would allow states to use \$100 million in public education funds to finance private school vouchers. A voucher system would divert much needed funding from public schools thereby weakening the public schools system.

AFSCME opposed the amendment which was rejected by a vote of 166 to 257 on October 21, 1999.