In 1984, legislative inactivity replaced legislative achievement in the 98th Congress as the specter of a Ronald Reagan veto hung over Congress, and the Republicans-controlled Senate became the burial ground of worker legislation. Despite the best efforts of Democrats and some progressive Republicans in the House of Representatives, Reagan conservatives in the Senate delayed one major legislative initiative after another designed to help American workers. While the Administration's legislative agenda continued to reward the wealthy, the list of Reagan-induced fatalities affecting working Americans continued to grow. These included:

- A bill to provide health care for jobless workers and their families.
- Legislative offering mortgage assistance to unemployed Americans facing foreclosure and loss of their homes.
- The domestic auto content bill to help revive the U.S. auto industry and put unemployed workers back on their feet.
- A $2.5 billion jobs bill creating 300,000 jobs in the badly neglected repair and rehabilitation of local government facilities.
- An increase in training funds for workers made jobless by foreign imports.

In the House, Republicans right-wingers blocked action on plant closing provisions as well as industrial policy legislation designed to make sense out of U.S. economic policymaking.

As these legislative initiatives bit the dust one after another, Reagan and his GOP congressional allies countered with their own brand of worker "protection" proposals:

- The infamous Hobbs Act amendment to have prison-like conditions made a federal crime.
- A bill to take away the legal right of injured workers to sue when hurt by faulty equipment.
- Balancing the budget on the backs of workers by taxing the value of their fringe benefits, such as health care coverage.
- A plan to strip unions of their First Amendment right to communicate with their members on political issues.
- A bill to permit legalized wage chiseling through a "pay less" youth subminimum.
- Amendment to weaken "Buy American" requirements in existing federal programs.
- An increase in Medicare costs for retired workers.
- Proposals to repeal the eight-hour workday.

This special section carries labor's 1984 report card on Congress including the votes on major issues of concern to the AFL-CIO in the second session of the 98th Congress. Congratulations have been sent on 13 key issues---"R-right" or "W-wrong"---on the basis of the positions of the AFL-CIO and the legislation. Sensations have been voted on 11 key votes. This package also includes: the cumulative voting record and cumulative "right" percentages of each congressional Democrat as elected in the House or Senate. With the voting records you can see which congressman has been most supportive of the Congress and the movement and the nation.

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1. Corporate Abuse of Bankruptcy Law Threatened to Destroy Worker Benefits

A serious threat to every protection in the unique contracts of American workers arose in 1984. Following the example of Continental Airlines, company after company used the bankruptcy law to cut employees' unions and arbitrarily shred collective bargaining agreements, fire workers, alter work rules, and reduce pay and pension benefits. The union-busting misuse of federal bankruptcy law was sanctioned by the Supreme Court in the 1978 decision. If left intact, this ruling threatened the nation's long-standing system of collective bargaining and undermined union-won benefits like health care, pensions, seniority and work rules.

On the day the court handed down its ruling, the AFL-CIO went to Congress to reverse it. The AFL-CIO sought legislation to require a company in financial distress first to obtain the permission of a bankruptcy court before it could modify or reject its collective bargaining agreement. Then, if the company was found to be truly in financial distress, it would have to engage in collective bargaining to reduce pay and benefits only to the extent necessary to save the company. In the process, the company would have to open its books to the workers' representatives, and management would have to assume its share of pay and benefit costs.

An overwhelming bipartisan majority in both the House and Senate agreed with labor's position. The House, the collective bargaining protection provision was included as part of a larger omnibus bankruptcy bill. When the bill reached the House floor, the key vote came on the procedural question of the debate rule under which the bill would be considered by the full House. The rule was limited to allow only specific amendments. Conservative Republicans, backed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and others in the business lobby, attempted to defeat the debate rule in order to get at the collective bargaining safeguard. Their effort was resoundingly defeated by a 242-166 vote on May 21. Later, Congress approved the bankruptcy bill and it was signed into law. The new law not only nullifies the Supreme Court's Bankruptcy decision and puts a stop to corporate abuse of federal bankruptcy law, but also safeguards the integrity of union contracts by compelling employers to engage in good-faith bargaining over any contract changes necessary to allow the firm to reorganize to stay in business.

For — Right. Against — Wrong.

2. Trade—Saving U.S. Steel Jobs

Despite record budget deficits, the Reagan Administration's "do-nothing" trade policy has tarnished the credibility of America's trade deficit, the Reagan Administration's "do-nothing" trade policy has tarnished the credibility of America's able to do the work, and few prosecutions would be provided foreign workers entering the United States.

While these deficits continued, the U.S. steel industry continued to be bled by free trade practices by the importing countries. Because of this, steel imports captured a record 33 percent of the U.S. market, and steel employment fell to less than 60 percent of 1979 levels.

Congress passed legislation giving the President stronger enforcement powers against unfair steel imports and capping on him to reduce those imports to 17 percent of the U.S. market.

For — Right. Against — Wrong.

3. Bracero Program—Importing More Foreign Workers

After rejecting amendments to strengthen the immigration bill with respect to limitations on foreign workers, the House turned around and approved an amendment by Rep. Leon Panetta (D-Calif.) to re-establish the discredited "bracero" program. This program, which was killed by Congress in 1964, had permitted the importation of hundreds of thousands of foreign agricultural workers who displaced U.S. farmers and migrant workers under American working standards. Bracero workers were subjected to some of the worst abuses of exploitation in our nation's history. These abuses were recorded in an award-winning expose by the late Edward R. Murrow in the famous television documentary film, "Harvest of Shame."

Under the Panetta amendment, not only would the bracero program be given new life, but no termination date was set for it. Unlimited numbers of foreign workers would be admitted into the U.S. to do agricultural work. No government determination was required to certify that there were insufficient domestic workers available to do the work, and few prosecutions would be provided foreign workers entering the United States.

For — Wrong. Against — Right.

4. Protecting U.S. Jobs from Illegal Immigration

The AFL-CIO has long opposed the heavy flow of illegal immigration, which not only reduces job opportunities for unemployed Americans but undermines U.S. labor standards as well. Illegal aliens, meanwhile, are often the victims of the worst kinds of worker exploitation. To stop the flow of illegal aliens, the primary solution is to remove the lure of employment opportunity. The only way to accomplish this is to impose tough penalties on employers who hire persons unauthorized to work in the United States.

In 1984, the AFL-CIO joined the coalition in the omnibus immigration bill to toughen penalties against employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens. While the original legislation contained such a bill, the bill that emerged from the House Labor Committee had been substantially weakened. For example, the committee bill failed to require an employer to check the documentation of those hired unless the employer had been notified previously by the Attorney General that it had hired an undocumented alien as an employee. This would make it nearly impossible for even the most vigilant employer to determine that an employment was with an unauthorized worker. Other provisions would impose a new and excessive and time-consuming that would impose severe penalties on employers who hired unauthorized immigrants. The bill was not enough in time for the full House to act on it. Finally, the enforcement process was too cumbersome and time-consuming that no field enforcement could stay off any penalty for years.

As a result, when the final bill came to the House floor the AFL-CIO backed an amendment by Rep. Gus Hawkins (D-Calif.) to remove the omnibus immigration bill. This bill was clear that the bill was not the employer's intention was to require that the employer's inspections were made standard and a new and a new procedure was established to inspect the employer's process. The Hawkins proposal would have furthered the existing discrimination in hiring, working, and referring to the basis of race that Congress acts as its national origin or status as an alien. Despite these improvements, the House passed the Hawkins amendment by a 166-253 vote on June 11.

For — Right. Against — Wrong.

5. Contracting Out of Civil Service Jobs and Public Services

Since 1981 federal government workers have been pressured by the Reagan Administration to accept layoffs, arbitrary cuts in pay and welfare, and new -hired-and -benefits. In 1984 conservatives have passed bills to end until
6. Trade: Restricting Special Import Privileges

The first major trade bill, the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988, was a major change in the existing system of import restrictions. The bill, which was signed into law by President Reagan on August 12, 1988, included provisions to reduce the number of import restrictions and to allow for more flexible trade agreements. The bill also included provisions to protect American workers and industries from foreign competition.

7. Setting Labor Standards for Foreign Workers

The bill includes provisions to ensure that foreign workers are paid fair wages and are protected from exploitation. The provisions include requirements for employers to provide training and education to foreign workers, and to ensure that they are not subjected to discrimination or harassment.

8. Failure to Reform Immigration Laws

The bill includes provisions to reduce the number of legal and illegal immigrants entering the United States. The provisions include provisions to increase border security, to increase the number of deportations, and to reduce the number of temporary visas.


The bill includes provisions to increase the use of domestic energy resources, and to reduce the dependence on foreign oil. The provisions include provisions to increase the production of domestic oil and gas, and to increase the use of renewable energy sources.

10. Environmental Protection for Workers and Families

The bill includes provisions to protect the health and safety of workers and their families. The provisions include provisions to increase the enforcement of safety and health regulations, and to reduce the number of workplace injuries and fatalities.

11. Saving Education Funds from Further Cuts

The bill includes provisions to increase education funding, and to reduce the number of cuts to education programs. The provisions include provisions to increase the funding for education programs, and to reduce the number of cuts to education programs.
another way to attack federal workers: the contracting out of traditional public services to the private sector. For government, contracting out can often mean higher costs of services, poorer quality of services, decreased accountability by government officials, and increased corruption within government. For government workers, contracting out is a club to be used against them when they seek better pay, benefits or working conditions. Under the Reagan Administration, contracting out has taken many ridiculous forms including the unsuccessful attempt to turn the U.S. Weather Service into a private, for-profit enterprise.

During 1984 the Reagan Administration tried to contract out the administration of 30 Job Corps conservation centers currently managed by the Department of Interior and Agriculture. The Reagan Administration, which views the Job Corps facilities as a commercial activity, tried to turn their operation over to the lowest bidder despite the fact that the program is one of the nation's oldest and most successful federal job training programs.

During debate on a continuing appropriations bill, Rep. Jim Williams (Mo-Mo) offered an amendment to prevent contracting out of these services. By a lopsided 242-162 vote, the House overrode conservative Republican opposition and approved the Williams safeguard.

6. Failure to Reform

Although the AFL-CIO's commitment to support unions is evident in the rejection of both the House and Senate versions of the OMB's proposed contract for the Job Corps, this commitment has not been reflected in the current administration's efforts to reform the program.

For — Right — Against —
1. Protecting Union Political Rights

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), whose 1984 re-election campaign is expected to set a spending record of $20 million, attempted to legislate a sweeping attack on the political spending rights of unions. The Helms amendment would have prohibited unions from using dues money for educational activities, such as voter registration; group-outreach drives and political communications to union members. He would have denied unions the right to finance the cost of political action committees, a right now granted under federal election law to both unions and corporations. The broad reach of the Helms amendment would have applied to both federal and state elections. Further, despite the fact that federal election law treats union and corporate activity equally, the Helms amendment would not have limited in any way the right of corporations to spend their treasury funds for the same activities. The obvious purpose of the Helms amendment was to restrict the right of unions to exercise their First-Amendment right to communicate with their members on political issues, prevent unions from encouraging their members to participate in the democratic election process, interfere in unprecedented fashion with the right of states to enact their own campaign finance rules, and destroy the neutrality of the federal election act with regard to corporate and union treasury spending in federal elections.

Realizing that the Helms amendment was nothing more than an anti-union attack promoted by the National Right to Work Committee, the Senate again rejected the Helms amendment as it had done in 1982. But this time it was rejected by an even larger margin. On May 22, the Senate voted 65-32 for a motion by Sen. Charles Mathias (R-Md.) to table and thus kill the Helms amendment.

For tabling — Right. Against tabling — Wrong.

2. Restoring Health Insurance for the Unemployed

One of the important recession relief programs pushed by the AFL-CIO was legislation to provide health care benefits for the unemployed. When workers are jobless they usually lose health care insurance. Since most jobless workers are unable to pay the costly premiums for private insurance and are not eligible for Medicaid, they and their families must do without basic medical care.

With more than eight million persons jobless for much of 1984, the AFL-CIO continued to push for a program of health care for the unemployed. During debate on a tax increase bill, Sen. John Heinz (R-Pa.) offered an amendment to make $700 million in federal grants available to the states to provide health care benefits to the long-term unemployed. As it did in 1983, the conservative-controlled Senate rejected this amendment by a 59-37 vote on Apr. 11.

For Right — Against — Wrong.

3. Failure to Win Tax Relief for Construction Workers

In 1984 the AFL-CIO backed legislation to permit construction workers to deduct their ordinary and necessary business expenses from their income taxes, just as other taxpayers already do. This tax deduction was necessary because, under current law, the constraints and limitations on travel and business expenses do not adequately reflect the unique circumstances in the construction trades. As a result, many workers are unfairly treated. Today’s construction workers are frequently employed in trades that are far from home.

Under current federal income tax law, traveling expenses (including meals and lodging) are deductible if they are incurred while away from home in the pursuit of a trade or business. But such employment must be temporary and expected to last a short period of time. Traveling expenses incurred in connection with employment that is considered to be of indefinite or indeterminate duration generally are not tax deductible. But in the real world of construction, job-related travel expenses do not lend themselves to the distinction between temporary and indefinite employment. Thus, there is uncertainty and inequity in denying these workers an income tax deduction for legitimate costs associated with their jobs.

During Senate debate on a miscellaneous tax bill, Sen. John Melcher (D-Mont.) offered an amendment to incorporate this long-overdue tax clarification. Senate Finance Committee Chairman Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kans.) successfully killed the Melcher proposal, tabling it by a 50-31 vote on Apr. 12.

For tabling — Wrong. Against tabling — Right.

4. Fair Corporate Taxes

The corporate share of tax revenues to operate the federal government has fallen from 25 percent in 1965 to 6.5 percent in 1983. Individuals—mostly working families—have had to make up the difference. The largest change in big-business tax contributions to the federal government came as a result of the 1981 Reagan tax bill, which cut the effective corporate income tax rate by half at a loss of $175 billion over five years. The corporate tax system is so loophole-laden now that in 1984, about 90,000 corporations will pay no taxes. Most firms in the chemical industry, for example, not only did not pay taxes in 1983, but received $211 million in refunds or write-offs to reduce future taxes.

To correct this gross inequity, Senators Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) and Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) during debate on a miscellaneous tax bill offered an amendment to impose a minimum 15 percent tax on corporate profits in excess of $100,000. The amendment was designed to restore a small measure of fairness and raise $19.1 billion over a five-year period. Despite the fact that the nation faced a staggering $200 billion deficit, the amendment was rejected by a 63-30 vote on a standing motion by Finance Committee Chairman Robert Dole (R-Kans.) on Apr. 12.

For tabling — Wrong. Against tabling — Right.

5. Balancing the Federal Budget

In 1981 the AFL-CIO and other organizations predicted that the Reagan tax cuts, which included steep reductions in the taxes paid by the middle class and corporations, would hemorrhage the federal treasury at a cost of hundreds of billions of dollars a year as revenues. By 1984 this prediction had come true as the nation staggered toward a $200 billion Reagan budget deficit—more than the total accumulated deficits of every president from George Washington through Jimmy Carter. As deficits mounted and the CIO proposed a range of tax reforms designed to reduce the deficit under control. One of them—a 10 percent on the individual tax credits—would have reduced the full tax break for those earning $45,000 a year and ended the tax windfall for the rich to $570 million. When in June 1983, the Senate rejected this tax reform.

During Senate debate this year, a broad range of language was introduced to reduce the deficit, Sen. John Chafee (R-R.I.) offered another take-back reform amendment. For three years the indexing of the tax brackets enacted as part of the Reagan tax act has been a sinequanum and the Chafee amendment would have restored it, growing less the three-year period, mostly from increased borrowing to ignore its revenue impact. Sen. Chafee, chairman of the Finance Committee, tabled and then killed the amendment.

For tabling — Wrong. Against tabling — Right.
6. Unfair Higher Telephone Costs

As a result of the Communications Act of 1934 and subsequent regulatory action by the Federal Communications Commission, the government for the last five decades has pursued a policy of promoting reasonably priced, universal telephone service for all citizens. The result of this federal policy is that 92 percent of all Americans now have access to the nation's telephone system. This public policy was, however, jeopardized following the court-ordered breakup of American Telephone & Telegraph, which precipitated an anticompetitive regulatory rule by the FCC, now under the conservative control of Reagan appointees. The FCC proponented to allow a flat charge on residential and small business phone users for the right of access to long-distance service whether they use such service or not. The fee originally was to go into effect in April of 1984, starting at $2 per month for residential consumers and rising yearly until 1990.

The AFL-CIO strongly opposed the access fee. Labor charged that the fee, when combined with increases in local rates, could raise local phone bills by as much as 100 percent, undermining the principle of universal telephone service. The AFL-CIO also pointed out the unfairness of a proposal which would penalize the 17 percent of all telephone customers who make no long-distance calls.

In the Senate the key vote came on a bill sponsored by Sen. Robert Packwood (R-Ore.) that would have temporarily banned FCC imposition of the access fee. The bill also included an important pension rights plan that would allow employees of the new telephone companies created under divestiture to transfer their pension rights to their new employers. However, one day before the vote, the FCC announced that it was postponing implementation until at least June of 1983. The FCC counter-moved clearly undercut Packwood's effort as the Senate, by a 44-40 vote on Jan. 26, agreed to a motion by Sen. Bob Goldwater (R-Ariz.) to table consideration of the Packwood bill. (The pension protection provision was later included in an unrelated bill which was signed into law.)

For tabling — Wrong. Against tabling — Right.

It's Bottomed Out—It Says Here!

7. Restoring a Civil Rights Law

In early 1984 the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a regrettable decision that undermined federal civil rights law, overturning a lower court decision which had found sex discrimination at Grove City College in Pennsylvania. The court's conservative majority narrowly construed the provisions of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 which barred sex discrimination in any educational "program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." Although Grove City College is a recipient of federal financial assistance, the court majority defined Title IX's "program or activity" language so narrowly as to reach only the school's student financial aid program, rather than the entire school as the lower court had held. The result of the decision was to undermine the federal law's comprehensive prohibition against sex discrimination in education programs. To keep the Grove City College ruling from applying to other civil rights laws.

8. Increasing Senior Citizen Health Care Costs—1

No sooner had the Senate rejected the revenue-raising curb on indexing (see Senate vote #41), than it voted for an increase in Medicare costs for the aged — as a way to reduce the federal budget deficit. At present senior citizens and disabled Medicare beneficiaries spend an average of 20 percent of their limited incomes on medical care. The tax bill reported by the Senate Finance Committee would have compounded this financial burden by increasing the Part B Medicare premium and by taxing the Medicare deductible. Part B is a medical insurance program that pays up to 80 percent of the reasonable charges for a range of elderly health care services, including doctor and outpatient hospital care, outpatient physical therapy and home health care. The AFL-CIO charged that if medical care costs continued to rise at the present pace, which is greater than the inflation rate in the rest of the economy, monthly Medicare premiums would also increase at rates far exceeding the annual cost-of-living adjustments for social security benefits. It was further estimated that if the Finance Committee bill passed, premium increases by 1990 could consume 30 percent of this annual cost-of-living increase.

During debate on the tax increase package, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) offered an amendment to eliminate the increase in the Part B premium. The conservative-controlled Senate, however, rejected the Kennedy amendment and thereby voted for the Medicare increases when it agreed by a 58-36 vote to a tabling motion by Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kans.).

For tabling — Wrong. Against tabling — Right.

9. Increasing Senior Citizen Health Care Costs—II

After the defeat of the Kennedy Medicare amendment, Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) countered with an amendment designed to restore $588 million of the total $9 billion in Medicare increases proposed by the Finance Committee. The Baucus amendment would have eliminated the proposed increase in the Medicare premium.

For — Wrong. Against — Right.

10. Working Women—Child Day Care Services

With working women and single-parent households comprising an ever-larger proportion of the U.S. labor force, one of their most pressing needs is for affordable and adequate child day care services. In the absence of a comprehensive child day care program, many women have already had to abandon their jobs and turn to welfare. For others, turning their children over to "day care" kids is the only alternative. The AFL-CIO has long been on record in support of federal assistance to establish programs providing infant care, day care, after-school child day care services at affordable rates.

During Senate debate on legislation designed to upgrade mathematics and science education in the nation's schools, Sen. Don Young (R-Minn.) offered an amendment to provide $15 million in seed money over the next three years to establish after-school day care programs using existing schools and other such facilities. Although such a bill had been unanimously passed by the House, Senate conservatives voted 51-42 to reject the amendment by Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) offered as an amendment to the bill.

For — Wrong. Against — Right.

11. Promoting Democracy Abroad

In 1983 Congress authorized a new program to help promote democracy internationally. The National Endowment for Democracy is designed to promote the growth of democratic institutions abroad. The NED was established in response to the need for additional funds to support democracy programs worldwide. It was authorized to award grants of $10 million to $12 million annually in funding. NED grants have been awarded to such organizations as Amnesty International and the South African Council of Trade Unions. The AFL-CIO through its Free Trade Union Institute is a participating organization in the Endowment program.

When the 1985 funding authorization for the Endowment reached Congress, it stood at $1 million. A strong effort was made to cut the Endowment's funds. While more dramatic cuts ultimately were eliminated, the Endowment's funds were reduced from $1 million to $8 million. The Endowment's funding was adopted by a 62-30 vote. In June, the conference later agreed to a spending level of $18.5 million for the Endowment.

For — Wrong. Against — Right.