

Requiem For Senator Robert Byrd

Posted By [Rob Sanchez](#) On 1 July 2010 @ 6:14

Sadly, a few days ago we lost a great statesman when Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) [passed away](#) at the age of 92.

American workers have very few friends in Congress — especially when it comes to stopping the job destruction that is being foisted on the public by government supported floods of legal and illegal immigrants. Capitol hill politicians just don't care that unemployment continues to increase as immigrants saturate the labor market with cheap labor. Byrd was a rare icon of the Senate who had a burning compassion to help American workers — and he never gave up until the day he died.

Byrd was a stalwart defender of the American workforce even when most Senators seemed far too eager to give our most cherished jobs to cheap foreign workers and money grubbing corporations. Often standing alone he fought against expansions of nonimmigrant visa programs such as H-1B, H-2B, and L-1 visas. He bravely opposed attempts by politicians to water down visa programs by gutting legislation that had protections for American workers. Byrd could always be counted on to stand apart from the herds of politicians that meekly submit to corporate lobbyists instead of doing what is right for the welfare United States citizens.

In 2005, an omnibus spending bill was drafted by the Senate. Unknowing to most people a humongous increase in the number of foreign workers was hidden in the bill. As many as [350,000 additional visas](#) for foreign workers on EB Green Cards, H-1B, and L-1 could be issued. Senators Specter (R-PA) and Kennedy (D-MA) were hoping that the provision, which was secretly authored by Microsoft lobbyists, could be slipped into the spending bill without debate or public scrutiny.

All went according to their plan, until the last minute when Senator Byrd stepped up to the podium. Byrd blew the whistle on the conspiracy and then argued for his amendment that stripped **ALL** immigration increases from the bill.

Sen. Byrd's patriotic legislation was co-sponsored by Senators Sessions (R-AL) and Durbin (D-IL). The AFL-CIO, NumbersUSA, and many other organizations joined the battle in support of the Byrd Amendment.

Be sure to watch the video of [Byrd's impassioned speech](#) because his skills at theater and drama cannot be appreciated without seeing him in action. For those of you that aren't phobic about videos outside of the youtube universe you can watch a better quality video on [ZaZona media clips](#).

His speech was shown on numerous TV shows. The following is an excerpt of Byrd's speech:

DEFICIT REDUCTION OMNIBUS RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2005 — (Senate - November 02, 2005)

[Congressional Record](#)

109th Congress (2005-2006)

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Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, we have almost completed the First Session of the 109th Congress and, incredibly, no serious debate about our immigration policies has occurred. Not a word. No serious debate.

The number of aliens residing illegally in the United States stands between 8 and 12 million. Let me say that again. The number of aliens residing illegally in the United States stands between 8 and 12 million—an alarming figure given the terrorism threat that confronts our country.

The level of legal and illegal immigration combined has surpassed historic records, causing increasing concern about the ability of our Nation to absorb the influx. Our roads, our schools, and our health care systems are overwhelmed and underfunded.

Go to any hospital in the area or in the surrounding area. Take a look at what is going on. The waiting rooms, the emergency rooms are overcrowded. Our infrastructure is just not ready for these influxes. We are being overwhelmed. Go to the emergency rooms at the hospitals. Go over to Fairfax Hospital, for example, one of the finest hospitals in the country. There they are on cots in the aisles. I know because I have been there. Our schools—how can we teach children when the schoolrooms are so overcrowded? What about our poor teachers?

Our infrastructure is just not prepared for this influx. Our roads are not prepared. And that infrastructure is being further worn away with the budget cuts included in this reconciliation bill. Right here.

Immigration is an issue that demands the attention of the Congress. Regretfully, we have been told that tougher enforcement actions will have to wait until next year. So imagine the surprise of Senators to find provisions buried deep, deep, deep in this budget bill that would authorize the Government to issue more than 350,000 additional immigrant visas each year to foreign labor seeking to live and work permanently in the United States.

This is baffling. Baffling. Baffling. It is baffling, I say. If we don't have the time to address the illegal immigration that threatens our national security, then how do we explain to the American people out there that we somehow found the time to raise the level of imported labor each year? How do we do that? How do we do that?

On pages 810 through 815, separate from the deficit reduction measures related to immigration fees, are provisions in the reconciliation bill that would raise the annual cap on employment-based visas and exempt the spouses and children of employment-based immigrants from that cap. In addition, those pages include provisions to increase temporary H-1B visas for high-tech workers by 30,000 each year. These are massive and destabilizing immigration increases, and they are hitching a free ride—hitching a free ride—on this reconciliation bill; a free ride on this reconciliation bill. Hitch on it to get a free ride.

It is bad enough that so many American jobs are moving overseas and wages and benefits here at home are being curtailed to compete with Third World labor and unfair trade practices. Now these provisions would make it more likely that working Americans will find themselves in competition with foreign labor for work in their own country and—and—is being done through this reconciliation process right here where the immigration increase is clouded by budget provisions and where debate and amendments are severely limited.

We are told that an immigration reform debate will take place early next year. Senators are casting themselves as tough—tough, man. Senators are casting themselves as tough on enforcement and

wanting to protect American jobs. Well, that pronouncement stands in stark, stark contrast to this effort under the cover of procedural protections and the guise

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of deficit reduction to increase the number of immigrants authorized to work in the United States by an astonishing 350,000 visas per year.

These immigration provisions are not necessary for the Judiciary Committee to comply with its reconciliation instruction, nor are they necessary to achieve the spending cuts embraced by the congressional budget . The House Judiciary Committee reported legislation to assess a \$1,500 fee on L-1 visas for executives and managers of multinational corporations and that savings provision more than satisfies the budget's reconciliation instruction. So I hope that Senators will join me in striking these unrelated immigration increases and limiting the judiciary portion of this bill solely to an increase in the L-1 visa fee.

So the amendment that I will send to the desk is identical to the House language, excluding the provisions related to new judgeships, and would raise the L-1 visa fee to \$1,500 per application. Again, this amendment simply strikes the unrelated immigration provisions and would still allow the Senate bill to meet its reconciliation targets.

My amendment has the support of the professional employee unions of the AFL-CIO, as well as immigration enforcement groups like Numbers USA and the Federation for American Immigration Reform.

AMENDMENT NO. 2367

I send that amendment to the desk and I ask Senators for their support.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from West Virginia [Mr. BYRD] proposes an amendment numbered 2367.

Not surprisingly the oligarchs and corporate panderers in the Senate were very angry at Byrd for exposing their plot to destroy jobs. Byrd's colleagues strongly rebuked him with numerous diatribes in support of H-1B. Byrd countered with probably the most important statement ever made about H-1B on the Senate floor by a Senator.

Mr. BYRD: The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO, has a letter addressed to all Senators endorsing the amendment. Just to quote a few words from the letter:

The 22 national unions represented by our organization strongly support the Byrd amendment and urge your vote for it.

Continuing, I speak again of the letter and call attention to these excerpts:

There is absolutely no economic justification for expanding the H-1B program.

Unemployment among professionals in H-1B occupations remains high

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Finally, it is worth pointing out that industry apologists for off-shore outsourcing of American jobs have long proclaimed that one of the benefits of globalization would be the creation of high end, high skilled technical and professional jobs for workers in the United States. These same industries now seek to contract the number of these very same high end job opportunities that should otherwise be available to highly skilled American workers by once again expanding the H-1B visa program.

On behalf of the 4 million professional and technical workers that are members of our unions, we urge you to oppose any action that would have the effect of making it more difficult for unemployed U.S. professionals to find work.

Mr. President, Senators will please take note of these words on behalf of these unions and the workers in the industries with which they are concerned.

The Byrd amendment was defeated by a vote of 85-14. [Lou Dobbs and Bill Tucker](#) couldn't have described it better:

TUCKER: And today, the Senate had the chance to say no to more H-1B's, but they didn't. Senator Byrd of Virginia (sic) offered an amendment to strip out the proposed visa increase out of the budget reconciliation bill. Lou, his amendment failed by a vote of 14-to-85.

DOBBS: That is appalling, absolutely appalling. And we thought it would be interesting to you to see who those 14 senators were who had the guts to say enough on this issue. Standing up for our middle class. Bill, tell us about these folks.

TUCKER: Well, what's interesting is, it's a bipartisan list. It tilts toward the Democrats — three Republicans, 10 Democrats, one Independent. But only one state Lou, where both senators voted to take the bill out, and that was Louisiana, where you had Landrieu and you had Vitter, Democrat and Republican, voting to take it out and debate the issue independently of the bill.

Senator Carl Levin (D-MI) [wrote a letter](#) to a constituent about why he voted against the Byrd amendment. It's a sad excuse for screwing American workers.

Of course it could be said that one speech during one day in Congress doesn't count for much because all politicians can talk a good game. Nobody can say that about Sen. Byrd however, because he was in the Senate since 1959 and tallied an extensive voting record that will be judged by history. The following excerpts from the [NumbersUSA report cards](#) show some of Byrd's milestone votes concerning guest worker visas and free trade issues. Overall he got a B+ career grade for immigration and an A+ on worker importation — an honor bestowed on very few members of Congress regardless of party affiliation.

- *1989-90*: Voted in favor of reducing worker importation by voting against S.358. That bill morphed into the Immigration Act of 1990 which contained a modified version of the H visa called H-1B.
- *1998*: Voted against S.1723, tripling the cap on H-1B foreign high-tech workers.
- *2003*: Voted against the worker importation program the Singapore Free Trade Agreement (H.R. 2739). The FTA had an [embedded](#) worker importation provision.
- *2003*: Voted against the Chile Free Trade Agreement (H.R. 2738) that permits an unlimited number of workers in Chile to enter the U.S. on L-1 visas. It also provided a new visa category called H-1B1.
- *2005*: Voted against S. Amdt. 387 to increase low-skill, foreign-worker importation with H-2B visas.

- 2005: Voted against the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) which had an embedded provision for a foreign worker importation program.
- 2005: Sponsored the Byrd Amendment to prevent large increases in foreign-worker importation.
- 2006: Voted against moves to increase work visas and in favor of provisions to protect American workers. Perhaps his most honorable achievement that year was to show that he wasn't afraid to oppose the ruling majority of the Democratic party who supported the perversity known as Comprehensive Immigration Reform (S. 2611). Byrd voted against the bill but couldn't stop it from passing in the Senate. Fortunately the CIR behemoth was ultimately defeated.
- 2007: Voted against numerous attempts by Sen. Edward Kennedy to raise the number of employment based visas. Byrd voted in favor of an increase in the H-1B visa fee, which passed the Senate but was ultimately watered down by lobbyists.
- 2008: Voted in committee against tripling of the H-2B visa cap.

Today Sen. Byrd made a final journey to the Senate Chambers. His body lay in repose in the Lincoln Catafalque, which was used to hold the coffin of Abraham Lincoln in 1865. Byrd's funeral will be held in West Virginia next Tuesday.

- NY Post: [Senator Robert Byrd lies in repose in Senate](#)
- NY Times: [Senate Stalwart Returns to Chamber One Last Time](#)

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