



*A Newsletter for Liberal Activists
from Americans for Democratic Action*

TODAY

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Fall Session to be Dominated by Iraq

The 110th Congress reconvened September 4th with the political future of the Democratic majority at stake as the direction of the war in Iraq is debated. The testimony of General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker the week of September 10th did nothing to assuage the dissatisfaction widely felt over the handling of the war by President Bush. Democrats must now decide whether to continue funding the war or use the power of the purse to bring the troops home. President Bush, in a speech to the nation from the Oval Office, announced he intends to keep at least 130,000 troops in Iraq indefinitely and asked Congress to provide the necessary funds to keep the war going through the end of his presidency. Congress will begin debating the 2008 defense budget in late September setting the stage for a showdown with the White House. To date, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid is not backing down from his promise to find a solution that moves American troops out of harm's way.

Other items on the fall agenda include funding for children's health care. Both the House and Senate passed an expansion of SCHIP, which provides health care to some of the nation's poorest children. The legislation is now in conference to produce a single bill for President Bush's signature which the White House has threatened to veto. Sensing a possible override however, the administration also began redrafting SCHIP regulations which would shrink significantly the program by imposing standards impossible for states to meet. ADA and our coalition partners are aggressively working with Congress to produce a bill that stops the White House's assault before any children lose their health care coverage.

ADA is also actively working to stop the expansion of NAFTA as Congress begins negotiating free trade deals with Panama and Peru. The Senate Finance Committee is quietly advancing these deals with some improvements in labor standards but still no protection for American jobs and wages and the environment in the core of the agreements.

Finally, the ADA Legislative Department is monitoring Congressional action on nuclear proliferation, hate crimes prevention, immigration, and employee non-discrimination, as well as further appropriations for the 2008 fiscal year. In a disappointing vote on September 18th, the Senate failed to reach cloture by a 57-42 margin to cut off debate on the DC voting rights bill.

The failure to achieve 60 votes and therefore move any legislation in the Senate is a clear display of the difference between a majority and a functioning majority. ADA's political and legislative departments are redoubling efforts to elect a veto-proof, filibuster-proof majority to Congress in 2008 and break the disgraceful logjam that is preventing real progress. Plans are also underway for vastly expanding ADA field operations which will rely on traditional grassroots organizing and voter mobilization to expand the number of liberals in Congress.

Chapter Spotlight

Americans for Democratic Action of Northeast Ohio held a public forum on immigration September 9th. The event took place at the Heights Library in Cleveland. The discussion focused on the situation faced by immigrants and migrant workers living and working in Northeast Ohio.

Speakers included Veronica Isabel Dalberg, a Latina activist who advocates on behalf of farm workers; and David Leopold, an immigrants' rights attorney. They discussed a May 18th raid in Painesville, Ohio, when over 40 immigrant workers were arrested. Many still remain incarcerated. Ohio's obsolete jails and prisons are being re-assigned as detention centers for immigrants.

Also speaking was Bryan Champion, president of an Ohio nursery and Board Member of the Wholesale Nursery Growers of America.

A lively question and answer session followed the speakers' presentations. NEOH ADA Chair, Maria Wilkinson, said "We feel a need to educate ourselves on the complexities of immigration issues. This discussion was really enlightening."

Trade Rules Put Affordable Medicines at Risk

By Holly Jarman, London School of Economics, ADA Education Fund Galbraith Fellow

A lot of people learn the hard way: it pays to read the fine print. Any complex agreement has pages of it, and there are always things hidden in there that you wouldn't sign on to if they were obvious.

The United States is currently finalizing a host of trade agreements with a lot of fine print, and if Americans knew what our government was signing on their behalf, they might not like it. Those agreements risk making our health care more expensive, less available, and less responsive to the needs of ordinary people.

International trade agreements are like contracts that countries sign, promising to change their behavior. And like any contract, they are enforceable - in this case, by the World Trade Organization's dispute resolution panels. If a country signs a contract that is bad for its citizens, its position in front of those judging it is no different from somebody who bought a rip-off car with a high payment: sorry, sucker.

But do Americans know what kinds of contracts George Bush's trade bureaucrats are negotiating on our behalf? Do you know what is in our trade deals with Colombia or Peru? Probably not. Trade policymaking is an undemocratic world of lobbyists, lawyers and bureaucrats whose orders are to do what the lobbyists suggest. This is a perfect environment for the special interests who benefit from the current health care system and would see their profits cut if all Americans were to have the health care they need. And they are working out how to bend trade policy to their goal of keeping the health care system profitable for them.

Take, for example, medicine and the right of American states to negotiate affordable drug prices for their citizens. This has become an issue in a number of states that are struggling to deal with ever-increasing health care costs. America's drugs are the most expensive in the developed world, and it is possible for states and individual Americans to benefit by forcing drug companies with equivalent products to compete, bringing prices down to an affordable level. The drugs are the same, safety is not compromised, and Americans get the drugs that they need.

Big pharmaceutical companies' profits come from their ability to restrict supply and sell at high prices. And, they defend their right to high prices with all the political weapons they can muster. If you run one of the world's most profitable companies, you can afford to fight policies that reduce those profits.

So when American states began to take action to reduce drug prices and give senior citizens a better deal, the pharmaceutical companies fought back. Their lobby group PhRMA filed suits in three states, claiming that the states' programs were illegal. They lost. Game over, right? The elected government of those states decided on a program and the courts decided the program was legal.

No. The pharmaceutical companies struck back through trade law. At the time, the United States was negotiating a free trade agreement with Australia. PhRMA and the drug companies got provisions written into the US-Australia free trade agreement that undermine states' ability to negotiate cheaper drugs.

This works for drug companies. They can work in the shadows, quietly inserting provisions into these complex, technical, and frankly, boring agreements.

It also works for service providers, insurance companies and everybody else who benefits from the health care system. A new report by the Americans for Democratic Action Education Fund, [Trading Lives](#), shows how importation of medicines, state health reforms and many presidential candidates' plans might violate provisions that are being inserted into global trade agreements such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

In other words, the United States is already signing agreements that will make it harder to buy affordable medicine. It will soon be signing vague statements that will make it harder to make sure every American can get health care.

The Bush administration doesn't seem to mind, strangely enough. Pharmaceutical companies, insurance companies, and some private health care companies think this sounds all right. Should ordinary Americans mind? Well, ask yourself. Would you like to make sure that American health care becomes more driven by greed, harder to get, and more expensive for ordinary people? If so, you'll like the trade policy agenda in health.

ADA Celebrates 60th Anniversary at June Convention

By Jim Clarke, Convention Chair

ADA's 60th Annual Convention was called to a close by Executive Committee Chair Allen Kukovich on Sunday June 24th after Delegates had been treated to a long weekend of policy debate, expert panels and celebration.



Representative Sander Levin (D-MI)

The convention began Thursday afternoon when delegates gathered in Commissions to review and rewrite ADA policies. The commissions worked swiftly this year to update ADA's policies and identify our most pressing issues. The results are in an easily-readable document entitled – ADA Action Agenda 2008 – which is a necessity for our lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill.

The delegates then turned to more celebratory activities that evening as ADA awarded Peter Yarrow of folk singing group Peter, Paul and Mary the Winn Newman Lifetime Achievement Award. Presented by esteemed journalist Helen Thomas, Peter accepted the award with a song rather than speech and received a standing ovation from the audience. Later that evening Michigan's Senator Carl Levin and his brother Congressman Sandy Levin, both student members of ADA in their youth, presented Congressman Levin's son, Andy Levin, the Reuther-Chavez Award. Andy received the honor for his work as founding director of the AFL-CIO's Voice@Work program.



Helen Thomas with ADA Member

On Friday delegates found a full schedule which included breakfast with Progressive Caucus Co-chairs Representatives Barbara Lee and Lynn Woolsey, the keynote address from ADA's President Congressman Jim McDermott, a speech by presidential candidate Congressman Dennis Kucinich and lunch with journalist and political commentator Eleanor Clift. That afternoon panels discussed new technological advances for political organizers and the upcoming 2008 election. The evening featured a live concert with Joe Uehlein and Joe Jencks.



Amy Isaacs with Peter Yarrow

Panel discussions and policy experts continued to offer lively discourse through Saturday and into the early evening. Iraq became the focus of the day early as delegates listened to Garrett Reppenhagen, an Iraq veteran and chairman of Iraq Vets Against the War. Mr. Reppenhagen was joined by Richard Klass, a retired Air Force colonel and Richard Weidman of Vietnam Veterans of America. Led by John Isaacs of the Council for a Livable World, the panel discussed the danger of ignoring the lessons learned in Vietnam and the perils which lie ahead. The day ended with a special screening of Robert Greenwald's film Iraq for Sale.



ADA President Jim McDermott (D-WA)

On Sunday an early plenary with Thomas Frank, author of What's the Matter with Kansas?, gave delegates an opportunity to hear his thoughts on how the political landscape has changed and how it has stayed the same since he originally published his best selling work.



ADA Board Member with interns

ADA wishes to thank all those who attended, sponsored, served on panels, gave fascinating speeches, provided entertainment or led policy commissions. Even after 60 years, ADA continues in its tradition of providing the nation with the very best of liberal ideals.

Check www.adaction.org for details of our 61st National Convention.

ADA's Working Families Win Continues Outreach in the Heartland

by Don Kusler, Project Director



The Working Families Win program is marching forward as 2008 approaches. Currently, six organizers are engaged in five states reaching out to their project communities on “pocketbook” issues such as healthcare, wages, jobs, and the impact of the global economy. Building on the success of 2006, WFW is focused on build capacity for change across the country for 2008. We plan to expand the program as early as fall 2007 to include dozens of new project communities.

Below is a report on current activities and plans for the remainder of 2007.

Pennsylvania: WFW organizer Phila Back is engaged in an aggressive effort to organize community education activities around healthcare and trade issues. Phila has organized and participated in numerous community events in southeastern Pennsylvania including issue forums, community center meetings, and local festivals. She is also building coalition support for her effort and plans to co-sponsor educational events leading up to the local elections this fall. In addition to working on healthcare, Phila is working with the Citizens Trade Campaign to build support and a statewide coalition around global trade issues. She is based in Reading.

North Carolina: WFW organizer Becky Gomer is working for the ADA Education Fund in the Charlotte area. She is currently organizing education and mobilization efforts around a local transit tax issue that Mecklenburg County residents will vote on this fall. Becky's work is filling a much needed gap in progressive education and action in the area and is leading and participating in many local coalitions allied with WFW's mission.

Iowa: Joe Bolkcom, a state senator from Iowa City, is organizing WFW efforts in eastern Iowa. Along with keeping tabs on Presidential candidates and urging them to support WFW's economic platform, Joe is conducting an aggressive healthcare road show. The tour of eastern Iowa is reaching communities that often get overlooked in policy and political debates. The purpose is to bring citizens, community leaders, and elected officials together to conduct community discussions about healthcare and desired alternatives to the current system.

New Hampshire: Jaime Contois continues to organize working families in New Hampshire around children's healthcare, pending trade agreements, and state housing issues. She is aggressively birddogging Presidential hopefuls in an effort to move the national debate on trade away from the current corporate driven model and toward a fair trade model that includes input from a wider range of affected constituencies such as labor and environmental groups.

Wisconsin: Organizers Will Altizer and Adam Warpinski are covering territory from Green Bay down to Kenosha. Each is playing a key role in educating their communities about state healthcare proposals, building coalitions in their communities, and working toward a successful 2008. Another key issue that the Wisconsin communities are working on is a state minimum wage initiative that would include a raise in base wages and remove future increases from the political process by indexing the minimum wage to an economic indicator such as the consumer price index. This is an important step toward introducing similar legislation at the federal level.

ADA and ADA Education Fund are proud of the success of the Working Families Win program and most especially of these wonderful organizers. Each one is making a real impact in their project communities and we look forward to doing even more in the months ahead.

If you would like to learn more about Working Families Win, visit our website at <http://www.workingfamilieswin.org>.

Galbraith Fellow Reports on Trade and Health

This summer the ADA Education Fund hosted Holly Jarman as part of the John Kenneth Galbraith Fellowship in Public Policy.

Ms. Jarman, a PhD candidate at the London School of Economics, examined how the trade agenda shapes our ability to select a health care plan that covers everyone. This groundbreaking analysis reveals how inherently unfair trade rules are making health care reform nearly impossible. She goes on to review the health plans of the 2008 presidential candidates and national health plan bills pending in the Congress.

“Trading Lives: Democracy, Health Care, and Trade in Services” is available at www.adaction.org. You may also order a copy for \$15 by calling 202-785-5980.

Former ADA National Director, Leon Shull, Dies at 93

It is with great sorrow that Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) announced the death of former National Director, Leon Shull, at the age of 93.

Known as “Mr. Liberal,” Leon was a driving force in liberal politics for more than 50 years. He began his career in the 1940s working to reform Pennsylvania politics and later in the 1950s led efforts in Philadelphia to ensure fair treatment of minority and women workers. He was instrumental in ending 50 years of corrupt Republican rule in Philadelphia through electing the reform leaders Joseph Clark and Richardson Dilworth. His efforts inspired civil rights leader Congressman John Lewis to say “Leon Shull personifies the very best in the American tradition.”



He served as ADA National Director from 1964 until his retirement 20 years later. ADA expanded greatly during those years and under Leon’s leadership spearheaded a national movement against the war in Vietnam. Other initiatives on which ADA worked during Leon’s tenure were campaign finance reform, full employment legislation, an increase to the minimum wage, and civil rights. His ability to articulate the real impact of these issues on the lives of Americans was legendary in Washington circles and many Members of Congress sought his guidance. Former ADA President Congresswoman Patsy T. Mink described him as “the conscience of America.” Congressman Barney Frank also said he was, “one of the people who helped me understand what the reality was and how best to take the issues I cared about.”

In retirement his activism did not stop. He became ADA’s best volunteer working in the legislative department; but perhaps his greatest legacy was organizing students and young people to join ADA and become activist themselves. Many of these young people who joined ADA went on to staff Congressional Committees or successfully run for public office. Very late in his life he became involved in the struggle for national health care and even after finally “really” retiring and moving back to Philadelphia he involved himself in legislative campaigns.

Leon died on August 25, 2007 in Philadelphia. He is survived by his wife Anne, daughters Susan and Jane, son-in-law Edward Schwartz, and granddaughter Ruth W. Schwartz. Contributions in his memory may be made to Americans for Democratic Action, 1625 K Street NW, Suite 210, Washington, DC 20006. People wishing to share their thoughts about Leon on ADA’s blog should go to www.eliberal.org.

ADA Reviewing Grim Census Bureau Data

The Census Bureau reported on the state of health care, income and poverty in late August, providing numbers that show most Americans have not benefitted from recent economic growth, and, in fact, are worse off than they were in 2000.

The number of Americans without health insurance rose by 2.2 million to a staggering 47 million in 2006. The chief cause of the increase continues to be the loss of benefits through employers, who are no longer able to afford the skyrocketing cost of premiums. 1.8 million full time workers lost their health coverage in 2006 either because it was dropped by their employers or they could no longer afford to pay for it themselves. Even the bright spot was marred last year as children without health care coverage, which dropped significantly between 1999 and 2004 due largely to the expansion of Medicaid and SCHIP, grew by 600,000 as those programs have seen their funding dwindle

The news was no better for income and poverty. While experiencing increases the last two years, median household income is still lower than it was in 2000 and 5 million additional people were living in poverty. The only group to see a decline in poverty were those over 65 years old. The data also suggest the only reason household income rose the last two years was because more members of the household were working, not due to an increase in wages. In fact, the only group to see an increase in income over the last six years were the wealthiest top five percent of earners. It is clear this period of economic growth has almost entirely benefitted the wealthy.

ADA Economic Policy Advisor Woodrow Ginsburg will incorporate the new Census Data into his annual report, “Income and Inequality” to be released in January 2008.

Pick a Fight!

ADA is looking for activists to form or reenergize chapters in the following communities:

Massachusetts (Boston)
San Francisco (Northern California)
Texas (Austin)
Washington, DC

Call 202-785-5980 if you want to pick a fight in your community!

Electrifying

ADAToday is going electronic. Members who have thoughtfully provided an e-mail address will receive an electronic copy of ADA Today and our widely anticipated Voting Record on the day it is released. Don't worry though, members without e-mail will still have a paper copy delivered to their door.

Please consider providing ADA with your e-mail. By going electronic, we are greatly reducing our production costs and can, therefore, put more of your money toward ADA's crucial programs. It is also better for the environment.

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