Labor plans to mobilize for health care, Employee Free Choice as campaigns fizzle

By Mark Gruenberg
PAI Staff Writer

SILVER SPRING, Md. (PAI)—Organized labor plans two mass mobilizations in August — and beyond — on health care and on the Employee Free Choice Act, interviews at the AFL-CIO Executive Council show. Both campaigns are to counter massive business-backed advertising blitzes against both health care revision and against the labor law, which is the top priority of the federation, Change To Win and other unions.

The campaigns were discussed at a meeting July 28 at the National Labor College here. The campaigns are needed because the Democratic-run 111th Congress is stymied by union-busting tactics — by employers and by their own majority — to put off decisions on the issues until it returns Sept. 7.

Five congressional committees are drafting the health care legislation. In two key ones — Senate Finance and House Energy and Commerce — it has stalled due to Democratic divisions. The Employee Free Choice Act is delayed because key senators discussing changes in that bill are involved in the health care talks, too.

The delays give unions time, and the need, to mobilize the staffers added.

The health care mobilization already started, and was going even as the council met. Unions arranged for 50,000 phone calls to be funneled to Congress on the issue on July 28. And on July 27, the Alliance of Retired Americans, an AFL-CIO, arranged two phone banks of 100 people each, to talk health care campaign strategy.

And the Employee Free Choice Act mobilization aims at the fact that Democrats now lack the 60 votes needed to shut off a planned GOP-led filibuster against the bill.

“That is the important thing to protest,” said AFL-CIO Organizing Director Stewart Acuff, who is directing the campaign. “That the measure by which an anti-union law will be judged,” he added.

The council reaffirmed its strong preference for the legislation's centerpiece:

Is single payer getting heard?

SILVER SPRING, Md. (PAI)—Stories vary, but apparently was a prolonged and sometimes testy discussion about health care within the AFL-CIO Executive Council, behind its closed doors, on July 28. At issue was whether the AFL-CIO should continue to support and push for the hybrid public-private health care revision legislation now moving through Congress, or abandon that and go with the rising sentiment within the labor movement for single-payer, government-run universal health care. Some 552 labor bodies, including 21 international unions, now back single-payer, which would abolish the private insurers.

Within the council, Californians, who twice pushed a state-level single-payer plan through their legislature, only to see GOP Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger veto it, argued strongly for movement-wide endorsement of single-payer.

Sheet Metal Workers President Michael J. Sullivan said his union’s campaign finance committee, which distributed $2.4 million to candidates in the 2007-08 election cycle, will give priority on funding that cycle. The National Nurses Association, strongly backing “Employee Free Choice Act” mobilization includes tens of thousands of letters, hundreds of thousands of phone calls, the largest march in the history of Arkansas, and a coalition of 1,500 businesses supporting the bill. It’s all designed to push senators in 10 states, including Arkansas, California, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Louisiana, and Maine, to support the law and

Pickwick harassing picketers, workers

by Todd Erickson, President Workers United Local 99

I have read about several union busting campaigns over the years but never expected to see one playing out the way it is at the Pickwick. Chris Wisocki has apparently dug his heels in and is refusing to get back to the table and give his workers a fair contract.

I want to let all of you know that tactics we have witnessed this employer using to intimidate his workers and get his message across that he is above the law when it comes to his workers’ rights.

You need to know that these workers on the inside are also under constant intimidation from the Pickwick’s management team. Workers on the inside are scared to support their union as the message has been made very clear to them that the Pickwick is in a new era and the workers should forget about how the Pickwick used to operate. It is not a family restaurant anymore. It is corporate run.

We have been dealing with this employer’s supporters spying on us as we exercise our protected and concerted rights, verbal attacks from customers smelling of alcohol, union employees allowed to come out and attempt to have a negative conversation about the union. On the inside there is no union talk unless it is in an anti-union capacity.

On Wednesday, July 29 a security guard was hired to stand out in front of the Pickwick. He is stationed there only when we have pickets going on. He told the picketers that they were not allowed to be there. Picketers stood their ground and told him that they were not leaving. These workers know their rights.

The guard told me that he is there to keep an eye on things and I informed him that we have been having issues with some anti-union supporters and I would gladly report any incidents to him so he can do his job.

Did Chris Wisocki hire him to continue to intimidate his workers and taint our picket line? I wonder what hiring a security company costs? Were they hired to keep an eye on the two ladies who were fired for having the courage to stand up for what’s right? They were fired for making use of their protected right to picket their employer.

The courage of these Pickwick workers inside and out is remarkable. Some workers through it all still wear their union buttons and show support for their union every day. They now work with reduced benefits and put up with verbal abuse by an agressive management team that is relentless in trying to divide the workforce.

We are not going away and will be in front of the Pickwick one day longer than it takes to restore workers’ rights at the Pickwick and get a fair contract. The support from labor has been incredible and we will not forget the support that we have seen for these workers.

As we get ready for the next phase of our campaign, we expect this employer to ramp up his efforts to continue to violate these workers’ rights and ultimately push the livelihood of his workers to the brink and continue to keep them under siege.

We have been outside of the Pickwick for almost four weeks and have spent over 90 hours on the line. A full time worker works an average of 2080 hours in a working year so I feel that we are just getting started in our campaign for justice for the Pickwick workers and hospitality workers everywhere.
Public pension hearing in Bemidji Aug. 12

The Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement (LCPR) has met outside of St. Paul, Sen. Mary Olson (DFL-Bemidji), who serves on the LCPR, suggested the commission hold a hearing in Bemidji, because the area is home to many retired state employees.

“This is an important opportunity for current and retired public employees in our region to learn more about their retirement accounts,” said Olson. “Given its location in the regional and national financial markets, it is more important than ever for workers to understand how their pensions are performing and what they can expect in the future.”

A recent issue of the Labor Capital Review stated that “In 2014, more than twice the number of workers age 65 or older will be working than were in 1984.”

The meeting will be televised for those unable to attend.

Citizens interested in learning more about the hearing should contact either the Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement offices at 651-296-2750 or lcpr@lcpr.leg.mn or Sen. Olson’s office at 651-296-4913 or sen.maryolson@senate.mn.

Correction

In the last Labor World an erroneous statement was made as to how Gary Eckenberg became a Duluth city councilor. Eckenberg was appointed to fill the seat vacated by Roger Reinert, after Reinert was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives.

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Labor Day Picnic donations lag

Donations to the Duluth AFL-CIO Central Labor Body’s annual Labor Day Picnic are coming in so slowly this year that there is cause for concern. In the past month only $625 was donated, bringing the total raised to $5,500 of the $8,000 needed with the picnic only a month. The picnic is free to Central Body-affiliated union members and their families but it relies on donations and volunteers to make it happen. Any amount helps.

Checks made out to “Labor Day Picnic” can be mailed to:
The Central Labor Body, Room 110, 202 London Road, Duluth, MN 55812.

If you or your group would like to help with any task that the picnic entails contact Picnic Chair Yvonne Harvey, 728-1779.

I.U.O.E. Local 70
Monthly Arrowhead Regional Meeting
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Dick Lally, Business Manager (651) 646-4566

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Comm. Serv. Liaison posting

The call is out for the job opening for AFL-CIO Community Services Director for the Duluth AFL-CIO Central Labor Body. The director serves as the liaison between the Central Body and the United Way of Greater Duluth.

Central Body President Alan Netland said candidate selection will be made according to the National AFL-CIO Department of Field Mobilization and the Memorial of Understanding between the Central Body and United Way of Greater Duluth.

• A screening committee representing local labor and the United Way will interview qualified candidates;
• The screening committee will select the candidate best qualified to direct the Community Services Program under the supervision of the Central Body.

Here is a brief AFL-CIO Community Services job description:

Key Responsibilities

A. Implement the following core programs: UCAN Training Services to the unemployed, Member assistance and advocacy, Special needs programs, Emergency needs programs including disaster services, Member awareness programs, and other programs deemed necessary by the Central Body’s Community Services Committee.
B. Promote and encourage labor participation in the United Way Campaign; Secure publicity and recognition for labor in the United Way Campaign; and, Cultivate the labor/United Way partnership;
C. Conduct special Community Services programs and/or projects as requested;
D. Attend all appropriate AFL-CIO/United Way functions;
E. Expand labor knowledge, use and support of community resources;
H. Fulfill administrative responsibilities such as: Complete an Annual Work Plan according to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Central Body and the United Way of Greater Duluth, and, Report periodically to the boards of directors of the Central Body, the United Way of Greater Duluth and the state, regional and national offices of the AFL-CIO on the activities of the Community Services Committee and programs.

Qualifications/Requirements

A. Member in good standing of an AFL-CIO affiliated union;
B. Knowledge of regional organized labor with a broad knowledge of the Duluth area labor community and its Community Services Program.
C. Extensive knowledge of the Duluth region, its cities, services, the volunteer and nonprofit sectors with specific understanding of the local and regional United Way system.
D. Comprehensive administrative, communication, marketing organizational and clerical skills, including but not limited to extensive work with computers.
E. Demonstrated ability to work with large and small groups as well as individuals.
F. Understanding of practices and principals of work teams and demonstrated ability to work with diverse populations from varied backgrounds.
G. Selection by the Duluth AFL-CIO Central Labor Body as its official representative.
H. Approval by the AFL-CIO Dept. of Field Mobilization.

Please send resumes with cover letter and references, postmarked no later than September 4, 2009, should be mailed to:
Alan Netland, President
Duluth AFL-CIO Central Labor Body
Rooms 10, 210
202 London Road
Duluth, MN 55812

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651.642.0182 www.team.mn.com 800.634.7710
Since NFL training camps opened Friday and I’m aware that double digit numbers (Joe Kapp’s 11) of you reading this wish there was a larger sports section in the Labor World, I’ll give in like Willy Loman.

If Al Franken was your favorite team’s football coach and you were playing the Health Insurance Titans in the playoffs to see if your Health Insurance Argonauts could make it to the Super Health Care Bowl and you were down 7-0 with 6.76 seconds left to play and being seated, basically said, “I just heard about this on Wednesday,” said MBG president and chief economist Chris McMillion in a phone interview. “That’s the worst loss ever. It’s never happened, or at least not since the mid-thirties.”

McMillion predicts the unemployment rate will continue to rise through the end of next year, reaching perhaps 11 percent nationwide. And when the economy starts to turn around, the rate will increase as people who have returned to school or stopped looking for work start looking again.

The Republican Party’s lead talking point for August was Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid saying, “we can’t afford to increase taxes to fund health care at a time when we’re shedding jobs”--has at least a year of shelf life in the campaign against health care reform.

This Day In History

August 5, 1931 - Some 1,500 jobless men stormed the plant of the Fruit Growers Express Co. in Indiana Harbor, Indiana, demanding they be given jobs to keep from starving.

The company’s answer was to call the city police, who rousted the jobless with clubs.

August 5, 1981 - President Ronald Reagan fired 13,000 federal air traffic controllers for participating in an illegal work stoppage. The PATCO strike was a watershed for American workers, both because it marked a new, anti-worker mind set on the part of the U.S. government and corpora-

The company’s answer was to call the city police, who rousted the jobless with clubs.

...In the Q&A a question from the audience brought up, “You take long to put together a progressive forum here and not invite labor.” I just heard about this on Wednesday,” said Netland. Said me too, but come on, ‘labor’s good theory but we’re not who intellectual progressives want to work with are we? They’ll save six for our pall bearers. As moderator Dr. Barry Kendall, Executive Director of the Commonweal..."The company’s answer was to call the city police, who rousted the jobless with clubs."

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The Duluth Building & Construction Trades Council unanimously endorsed Senator Tom Bakk (DFL-Cook) in his bid for Minnesota governor in the 2010 election. The endorsement came at the DBCTC's monthly meeting July 21.

“We’ve worked with Tom for many years on many levels and know where he’s coming from,” said DBCTC President Craig Olson. “He came to our meeting and gave one hell of a speech as a gubernatorial candidate to our delegates. We’d love to see Tom Bakk lead our state as a governor from northern Minnesota finally once again.”

(The last time there was a northern Minnesota governor was when Rudy Perpich of Hibbing left the governor’s mansion at the end of his third term in January 7, 1991. He had been sworn in Jan 3, 1983. Perpich had previously served from Dec. 29, 1976 to Jan. 4, 1979. He is the longest tenured of Minnesota governors and the only one to serve non-consecutive terms.)

The DBCTC endorsement is the first one Bakk has received. He first announced his exploratory campaign for governor in June 2008. That July he was encouraged to run by delegates to the Minnesota Building & Construction Trades Council (MBCTC) convention. The MBCTC held their convention last week in Rochester and Bakk was among those who addressed the delegates, but no endorsement was made.

Dick Anfang, who retired as MBCTC president, and was replaced by Harry Melander, stood in the way of a Bakk endorsement many trades members feel. Anfang has stated in the past that “that no one from the 218 area code could ever be elected statewide” one worker related. Bakk retired as a business representative for Carpenters Local 606 in Virginia in 2006. He had worked with the tools as a carpenter for 11 years prior to being named a business rep in 1987. Since his retirement the Carpenters have disaffiliated from the building trades on the national and most state and local levels.

Bakk has an associate degree from Mesabi Community College and a bachelor’s degree in business administration from UMD. The Cook native lives on Lake Vermilion.

He was first elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives in 1994, winning the DFL Primary Election against four other candidates. He held that seat for four terms, running unopposed in 2000, until winning the District 6 senate seat vacated by Doug Johnson’s retirement in 2002.

Like Johnson, who also ran for governor although he got into the 1998 race too late, Bakk has risen to lead the Senate Tax Committee, which has given him statewide exposure. He also serves on the Rules and Administration, Business, Industry and Jobs, and Environment, Energy and Business Lives on Lake Vermilion.

Bakk has established a website at www.bakk2010.com for his campaign.

The list of Democratic-Farmer-Labor announced and exploratory campaigns for Minnesota governor, including Bakk’s Iron Range buddy Rep. Tom Rukavina, is a long one, many with good labor credentials but that didn’t deter the Duluth Building Trades Council.

“Tom Bakk has forgotten more about our construction trades issues like prevailing wages, project labor agreements, OSHA, and organizing than all the other announced candidates put together,” said Olson.

Surprisingly, the list of Republican candidates is also a long one after Gov. Tim Pawlenty said he will not seek re-election. That party seldom puts together candidates as a group.

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Other candidates who have filed include Mike Akervik, Becky Hall, Dan Hartman, and Beth Olson. The other at-large seat up is held by Gary Eckenberg. When he was appointed by the council to fill Roger Reiher’s term after Reiher was elected to the legislature, Eckenberg said he would not run in this election.

Greg Gilbert will not seek re-election to the District 2 (precincts 8-13) seat he has represented so well for many years.

Patrick Boyle, son of former Wisconsin State Assemlman Frank Boyle, and Rob Wagner have filed for the seat.

In Duluth School Board races up for election all incumbents whose terms are up have filed for re-election.

Mary Cameron and Nancy Nilsen have filed to run again as at-large candidates. Also filing in those races are Maureen Booth, Bryan Jensen, and Tom Kaspar.

In District 1 (precincts 1, 4-7, 10, and five townships) incumbent Ann Wasson, Gary Glass, and Marcia Stromgren have filed.

In District 4 (precincts 23, 28-32, 34-36 (precinct 33 is in the Proctor School District)) incumbent Laura Condon has had Art Johnston file to oppose her.

All Central Body affiliated local unions’ members are invited to COPE (Committe On Political Education) screenings. COPE recommendations for endorsements will be considered and voted upon by Duluth AFL-CIO Central Labor Body delegates only at the monthly meeting immediately following screenings.

If there are questions as to who your union’s delegates are, submit a new list on union letterhead with an officer’s signature to the Central Body office, 724-1413 (phone and fax line), or email to laborworld@qwestoffice.net. New delegates with credentials can be sworn-in before the meeting and can then vote.

It takes a two-thirds vote of delegates present for candidates to gain an endorsement. The Primary Election is late this year on Tuesday, Sept. 15 with the General Election on Tuesday, Nov. 3.
Federal unions split from Obama's DOD on NSPS system

(PAI)--The nation’s defense workers unions have split from the Obama administration on the future of the controversial Defense Department’s so-called “National Security Personnel System,” or NSPS.

In so many words, unions for the 700,000 defense civilian workers -- including the 205,000 NSPS already covers -- are saying: “End it, don’t mend it.” A 3-member panel whom Defense Secretary Robert Gates appointed to review NSPS issued a report and recommendations in July saying the opposite.

The Bush regime pushed NSPS through the then-GOP-run Congress in 2004. Bush’s NSPS stripped defense civilian workers of collective bargaining rights, whistleblower protections, merit pay and even fairness in discipline.

Bush wanted to extend the anti-worker personnel system to all of government, and eventually to the private sector, warned AFGE President John Gage, whose 600,000-member union leads the continuing fight against the system.

The Democratic-run 110th Congress halted inserting new defense workers into NSPS. Obama halted the insertions, too, pending the review -- a halt Gage says DOD back-handedly evades. That review found the defense panel and Gage on opposite sides of ending NSPS.

Testifying June 25 to the panel, Gage said reconstruction wouldn’t work.

“NSPS is a failed system, disliked by employees under it and feared by employees concerned they will come under it. NSPS should be done away with completely, not tinkered with or modified. NSPS was created by people with ulterior motives, who tried to hide their real agenda from employees, their unions, Congress and the public. After Sept. 11, 2001, the department exploited the national fear of another terrorist attack and determination to protect our country to advocate for what was in reality a profound erosion of civil service protections and collective bargaining rights that had nothing whatsoever to do with national security,” Gage said.

Bob Oswold, the long time president of the Carlton County Central Labor Body, passed away Saturday at the Community Memorial Hospital in Cloquet. Oswold, 59, of Scanlon, had been battling pancreatic cancer for the past year.

Oswold led the Carlton Co. CLB for close to the last 20 years. His former vice president Tom Bellt said Oswold took that thankless job in spite of his many other activities and kept the Central Body going.

“The Cloquet Labor Day celebration would have died a quiet death a number of years ago but for Bob’s efforts to keep it going,” Bellt said in an email. “Many people have given of their time, some more than others, to pull off the celebration over the past many years, but Bob was the glue that kept it all together.”

Oswold was a leader in his USW/PACE Local 11-63 at Sappi, a vice president of the Minnesota AFL-CIO, active in his church, the Boy Scouts, the Cloquet Hospital Board, and the Minnesota Wood Fibers Council, among his many activities. He was a Vietnam War veteran of the U.S. Navy and a Navy Reservist.

Oswold’s visitation and funeral were held earlier this week. An online guest book is at www.nelsonfuneralcare.net.

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Building Trades members were on the Pickwick picket line on it’s first day.
Single payer health care is finally getting a look from leaders...

WASHINGTON (PAI)—Democratic President Barack Obama has nominated the required Republican, Brian Hayes, chief labor counsel for the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee’s GOP minority, to the last vacant seat on the National Labor Relations Board. By law, the board must be split 3-2 between parties.

Hayes’ name was packaged with those of two Democratic nominees, union attorney Craig Becker and pro-worker upstate New York attorney Mark Pearce, and sent to the Senate July 9. If the three are confirmed, they will bring the board up to its full 5-person membership for the first time since the end of 2007.

That’s important, because the NLRB rules on everything from who can be organized to labor law-breaking to which workers are in bargaining units. It has been hamstring at the board level for almost two years.

Since three other members’ terms expired, the remaining NLRB members, chair-designate Wilma Liebman, a Democrat, and Republican Peter Schaumber, have plowed through more than 300 cases. Each was decided by a 2-0 vote with a third “phantom” member not voting, to make a quorum. But a federal appellate judge in D.C. earlier this year ruled that whole procedure illegal.

The board lacks a real quorum, he said.

Before becoming a Senate staffer, the White House said Hayes, of Massachusetts, practiced labor law for 25 years and Republican Peter Schaumber, have plowed through more than 300 cases. Each was decided by a 2-0 vote with a third “phantom” member not voting, to make a quorum. But a federal appellate judge in D.C. earlier this year ruled that whole procedure illegal.

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