

U.S. SENATOR BARACK OBAMA

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



Over the past two months, the Senate has debated vital legislation concerning our country's involvement in Iraq, the way we care for our veterans, and the future of children's health care. Throughout the fall, the Senate will continue debating the funding of important government programs and agencies, and I am committed to offering innovative policy proposals to address today's most pressing challenges.

As many of you continue to recover from this summer's flooding back home, President Bush's decision to declare six counties as federal disaster areas is a step in the right direction to begin the rebuilding after the destruction. I am proud that the Illinois congressional delegation came together to ensure this disaster relief request was granted and that residents of the six counties will get the help they need. I will continue to work to ensure these funds are allocated quickly for all affected Illinoisans.

While we successfully passed many bipartisan bills in September and October, I was extremely disappointed that the President decided to veto health care for poor children in Illinois and through the country. In the coming months, I hope Democrats, Republicans, and the White House can work together to ensure our nation's most vulnerable children have access to the health care resources they need.

As you've read in our local papers and watched on the evening news, our country's top military commanders in Iraq and officials at the Defense Department came to the Senate to answer critical questions about the progress of the war. Along with my colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I had the opportunity to demand answers about the progress of the so-called troop "surge." We are facing tremendous challenges in Iraq, and I will work with my colleagues to bring our troops home as soon as we can.

This newsletter provides a brief summary of some of the issues I've been working in the Senate. If you have questions or ideas, please feel free to contact me through my offices in Illinois or Washington, D.C.

Sincerely,

Barack Obama

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In an effort to provide more information to our constituents regarding current issues and legislation in Congress, we are forwarding October's Legislative Update to you from Senator Obama. We hope that this update will be informative to you, your organization, as well as others you may know. Please feel free to forward this information on to others.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT OUR D.C. OFFICE AT (202) 224-2854 OR ANY OF OUR OFFICES IN ILLINOIS.

Pursuant to Senate policy, newsletters, petitions, opinion polls, and issue alerts and other electronic communications cannot be initiated by this office for the 60 day period immediately before the date of a primary or general election.

Stay up to date with Barack's work in the Senate and on issues of importance to Illinois at: <http://www.obama.senate.gov/newsletter/>

NOVEMBER 2007

MAKING HIGHER EDUCATION A REALITY

The first bill I introduced as a Senator was to make college more affordable for every American, and on September 27, President Bush signed a bill into law that takes an important step towards achieving that goal. This legislation will provide \$20 billion in new student aid and benefits and will increase the maximum Pell Grant by \$500 next year to \$4,800 and to \$5,400 by 2012. This translates into an additional \$77 million in need-based grant aid for low-income Illinois students, and an additional \$836 million over the next five years.

The Senate also passed legislation that includes an important proposal I introduced earlier this year with Congressman Danny Davis – the Predominantly Black Institutions Act. For decades, colleges and universities that largely educate African American students have played an integral role in giving our students the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today's economy. This bill provides federal grants to approximately 75 urban and rural colleges and technical programs that serve a large number of African American students – many of whom are the first in their families to attend college. This funding will invest in a new generation of leaders by strengthening these institutions.

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VIDEO!*

BATTLING CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Childhood obesity has become an epidemic in the United States. It is estimated that 1 out of 3 children in America today are overweight. The good news is that we know how to fight it, and with proper nutrition and exercise we can reverse this trend. To promote better nutrition and physical education in our schools, I introduced the Back to School: Improving Standards for Nutrition and Physical Education in Schools Act of 2007. This bill requires

that federal nutrition guidelines for school food be updated and revised based on a recent report by the Institute of Medicine. In addition to the new guidelines for nutrition, the bill would require schools receiving grant money for physical education to adhere to standards established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This legislation is a step in the right direction towards reversing the trend of childhood obesity.

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN FROM DANGEROUS TOYS

As the father of two little girls, I share the concerns of parents about the large number of recent toy recalls. In addition to introducing legislation both in 2005 and this year to ban lead contaminated toys from making it to our store shelves, I have called on federal agencies, as well as President Bush, to immediately implement tougher protections. Following September's massive toy recall, I called on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee to hold hearings to ensure all agencies, including the Consumer Product and Safety Commission, are doing everything they can to protect our children from dangerous products manufactured abroad. As the holiday season approaches, we must continue to be vigilant about these safety concerns.

PROTECTING OUR SERVICE MEMBERS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

With thousands of American service members suffering every day from the less visible wounds of war, reports that the Pentagon has improperly diagnosed and discharged service members with personality disorders are deeply disturbing. Over the last six years, Defense Department records indicate that over 22,500 personality disorder discharges have been processed; or an average of 10 service members have been discharged per day, every day in that time. Discharges based on personality disorders can result in the loss of healthcare benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as the repayment of enlistment bonuses, which can send injured service members and their families into debilitating debt.

In October, the Senate approved legislation I introduced to limit the Pentagon's use of personality disorder discharges. This provision will add additional safeguards to the Defense Department's use of this discharge and mandate a comprehensive review of these policies. This is an important first step, and I will continue to fight for additional safeguards as well as the establishment of an independent review board to examine questionable cases in which service members were forced to fight a second war at home. Given our service members' courage and sacrifice for our country, it is our moral obligation to ensure that they receive the care and benefits they deserve.

SECURING THE HOMELAND

Securing nuclear weapons and weapons-usable material at their source is the most direct and reliable way to prevent nuclear terrorism. To ensure our safety, we must do everything in our power to show that we are protecting our existing arsenal and ensuring that other nations do the

same. The Senate passed an amendment I introduced with Senator Hagel (R-NE) that will ensure that our nuclear arsenal is safe and accounted for by 2012. This proposal requires the President to develop a plan to secure all nuclear weapons and weapons-usable material at

vulnerable sites around the world. It is imperative that we continue to build and sustain a truly global effort under an aggressive timeline to secure, consolidate, and reduce stockpiles of nuclear weapons and weapons-usable material to keep them out of the hands of terrorists.

OVERSEEING PRIVATE SECURITY CONTRACTORS

I am greatly troubled by the news stories about Blackwater USA private security personnel killing 17 Iraqi civilians in September. This incident has brought to light many questions about the role of private contractors in Iraq. With taxpayer dollars funding an estimated 48,000 private security employees in Iraq, it is essential that we understand their role and ensure that they are not escalating the violence in Iraq.

In February, I introduced the Transparency and Accountability in Military and Security Contracting Act (S.674), which would require federal agencies to report to Congress on the number of security contractors, the military and security equipment they use, the number of contractors killed and wounded, and any disciplinary action taken against them. I am pleased that in September, the Senate included provisions from this bill in a larger bill to authorize the Defense Department's activities for the next year.

But we need more than just transparency. In early October, I introduced the Security Contractor Accountability Act, which requires accountability for contractors operating in Iraq and Afghanistan by subjecting them to U.S. criminal law. This bill also establishes FBI special units to investigate allegations of criminal misconduct by contract employees.

PROTECTING OUR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

Voting is one of the most important obligations we have as Americans, and no one should ever come between our citizens and the voting booth. In November 2005, I introduced the Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Act, which passed the Judiciary Committee this month. This bill will enact strict punishments for those seeking to intimidate voters or keep them away from the polls on Election Day. It is absolutely essential that every American be able to express their opinion on Election Day.



PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY IN OUR TAX SYSTEM

It is essential that those companies our government hires, whether in the United States or abroad, comply with American law. In every single appropriations bill that the Senate has considered so far, I have offered an amendment to require all contractors to certify that they have filed their federal tax returns and that they have no outstanding federal tax liability. If Americans are required to pay taxes so should the companies we hire. I am pleased that this amendment has been included in six appropriations bills so far.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR IDEAS, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT ME THROUGH ANY OF MY OFFICES IN ILLINOIS OR WASHINGTON D.C.

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