

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.



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U.S. Senator Barack Obama

Legislative Update

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A message from Senator Obama

Dear Friends,

This summer, the U.S. Senate completed several important pieces of legislation, including improving health care for our service members, strengthening congressional ethics rules, providing more educational opportunities for women and minorities, and reducing threats to our national security. I hope the President will enact these important bills into law.

Back home, as many of us experienced first-hand, severe flooding caused significant damage in our communities this summer. I am committed to working with state and local officials and relief organizations to ensure our cities maintain the capabilities to quickly restore power, repair roads, and rebuild damaged homes. We also must take significant steps to strengthen our infrastructure to safeguard our communities from future destruction.

As a state, we must work together to address the escalating violence in our communities. In July, I visited the Vernon Park Church of God on the South Side to discuss recent violence in our Chicago neighborhoods. I am continuing to reach out to community groups and church leaders to develop innovative ways to confront these challenges.

With the Senate resuming its work at the beginning of September, we have been debating vital legislation concerning our country's involvement in Iraq, veterans' care, and many other issues.

As your Senator, I am fighting for Illinois' working families, children, seniors, and veterans by writing legislation, supporting bills, and speaking out on issues that are important to you. Here is a look at what I've worked on during the summer and fall for all of you back home.

If you have questions or ideas, please feel free to contact me through any of my offices in Illinois or Washington, D.C.

Sincerely,

Barack Obama

Changing the Culture in Washington: Promoting Open Government

One of my top legislative priorities since I entered the Senate has been to implement tough ethics reform to change the way business is done in Washington. In January, I joined with Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) to introduce the Lobbying and Ethics Reform Act (S. 230). Earlier this year, the Senate passed an ethics and lobbying reform package that included many of the provisions I proposed – including a ban on lobbyist gifts and meals; restrictions on privately-paid trips; changes to corporate jet reimbursement rules; longer post-employment restrictions for senators; and earmark reform. This legislation also includes a mandatory

requirement that lobbyists disclose for the first time the amount of money that they raise for candidates and political action committees. I am pleased that President Bush signed this bill into law in September.

We must continue to ensure we promote transparency and oversight in the Congress as well as in the executive branch. I joined with Senators Bob Casey (D-PA), Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) to introduce an amendment to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations bill that would withhold

federal homeland security contracts from companies that have not paid their federal taxes. Our government should not reward companies that fail to pay their taxes with federal contracts. Working Americans don't get a free pass if they are unable to pay their taxes when they are due, and corporations shouldn't either. This amendment will ensure that corporations that receive taxpayer funding play by the rules, and it will increase transparency and accountability over how our money is spent. I am proud this legislation passed.

Protecting Our Military Families, Caring for Our Wounded Soldiers

We owe our wounded service members returning from war the best health care possible. In February, Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) and I introduced legislation to provide job protections to family members caring for wounded service members recovering from combat-related injuries. This proposal was endorsed by veterans, service members, and their families. And I'm pleased that it passed the Senate in July.

Also, in July, the Senate passed a number of other provisions from the Obama-McCaskill bill, including: improving living conditions at military facilities; enhancing mental health care for recovering service members; providing health care to family members assisting recovering service members; and reforming the broken military disability review process.

Given the thousands of American service members currently suffering from service-connected psychological injuries, reports that the Department of Defense may be improperly diagnosing service members with personality disorders are deeply troubling. Since 2001, over 22,500 service members have been discharged from military service for pre-existing personality disorders. Because some of these service members may have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries during combat, I introduced legislation with Senators Bond, Boxer, McCaskill, Murray, and Lieberman to institute a moratorium on future discharges until a new review process is put into place. Providing our service members and their families with the care and compassion they deserve is one thing we can still get right about this war.



Making America more Competitive

To restore America's competitiveness, we must recruit a new generation of science and technology leaders by investing in diversity. I was pleased that the Senate included three of my proposals into the America COMPETES Act of 2007. My initiatives will increase the participation of women and underrepresented minorities in the professions of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, establish a mentoring program for women and minorities in those fields, and offer competitive state grants to support summer education programs. Through mentoring and expanded summer education programs, we can guarantee that all students and professionals have the opportunity to lead America to its next big breakthrough

Higher education remains out of reach for far too many students in Illinois

and throughout the nation. In July, I was proud the Senate passed the Higher Education Amendments of 2007, which included my proposals to improve teacher training by establishing teaching residency programs and to create a new federal designation for "Predominately Black Institutions." In addition to easing the unprecedented financial burden facing today's college students, this bill will provide teachers with the preparation they need to serve children in high-needs school districts and invest in a new generation of leaders by funding colleges and universities that serve predominately African American student populations. We must continue to break down any barriers that are preventing students from pursuing a higher education.

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

ï new to the Website: Video!ï

Safeguarding our Environment & protecting our Children

Everyday we face increasing environmental challenges, and we must do all we can to protect our families from toxins and pollution. Throughout July and August, we learned about more and more toy recalls due to lead contamination. In the wake of Mattel's increasing recalls, I immediately wrote to the Senate Commerce Committee to request that it consider my *Lead Free Toys Act*, which I authored in December 2005. This bill would require the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to issue regulations classifying any children's product containing more than a trace amount of lead as a banned hazardous substance. I believe that the CPSC should be taking proactive steps to prevent lead contaminated toys -- and indeed, all dangerous children's products -- from making it to store shelves. As the recalls became more prevalent, I called on the U.S. Trade Representative, the Toy Industry Association, and the President to take immediate action to protect our children. I will continue to protect our children from hazardous substances, while addressing gaps within the government's regulation process.

I also joined with Representative Louise Slaughter (D-NY) to reintroduce the *Lead Poisoning Reduction Act*, which requires all child care facilities to be certified lead-safe within five years. The Environmental Protection Agency has endorsed key parts of this proposal with a rule that would require mandatory lead-safety training and certification of our schools' contractors. We must act on these basic precautions to keep our children healthy and our schools lead-free.

In our state, the level of mercury in the fish we eat continues to remain high, posing a particularly acute health threat to pregnant women and children. As a result, I reintroduced the *Missing Mercury in Manufacturing Monitoring and Mitigation Act*, which prohibits the use of mercury in chlorine or caustic soda manufacturing by the year 2012. This legislation was prompted

by an in-depth report published by the Chicago Tribune that highlighted the extent of mercury contamination in the fish eaten by Americans. We know that mercury can cause serious developmental problems in children and problems affecting vision, motor skills, blood pressure, and fertility in adults. Cost effective technology is available today to transition these plants to safer production processes, keeping all of us and our environment safer and healthier.

As Rockford and Winnebago County residents recover from the destruction caused by flooding, we must ensure our communities can not only rebuild homes and repair infrastructure, but also safeguard themselves from future natural disasters. I urged the Congress to quickly pass the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (WRDA) conference report, which would provide resources to strengthen and repair the Alpine Dam at Keith Creek in the Rock River Basin. The bill currently before the Senate will provide Illinois water infrastructure priorities with the resources required to reinforce our dams, locks, and ecosystem restoration projects from extreme flooding.

With the recent news that the State of Indiana and the BP Whiting Refinery agreed to allow increased pollution into Lake Michigan, which borders Illinois' shorelines, I called on Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman Barbara Boxer (D-CA), to hold hearings to examine the issue. However, BP's announcement that it will operate the Whiting refinery at the lower waste limit requirements was an encouraging development. I hope this reflects a genuine commitment not only to protecting Lake Michigan, but also restoring it. We now have a real opportunity to continue our efforts to preserve the Great Lakes.

As a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, Reducing Global Threats

reducing our global threats is one of my top foreign policy priorities. In July, the House of Representatives passed the *Iran Sanctions Enabling Act*, which I introduced in May. Iran continues to use the revenue it generates from its energy sector to finance its pursuit of nuclear weapons and support for terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Along with a sustained diplomatic effort and toughened multilateral sanctions on Iran, divestment is a useful tool that state and local governments can use to increase economic pressure to persuade Iran to end its dangerous policies. In August, I urged my colleagues to immediately pass this legislation.

I also joined with Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) to introduce the *Nuclear Weapons Threat Reduction Act*. This legislation would require a comprehensive nuclear threat reduction and security plan, while developing greater capability to identify the source of any nuclear-weapons usable material that might be used in a terrorist attack. Additionally this bill would create an international nuclear fuel bank, strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency, and reduce global nuclear arsenals. It is vital that we continue to work to prevent nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists groups.

According to a recent report by the Government Accountability Office, the U.S. military cannot account for almost thirty percent of the weapons transferred to Iraqi forces in 2007. As a result, the U.S. may be inadvertently providing arms to all sides of Iraq's civil war. I wrote to Secretary of Defense Gates requesting a detailed explanation and assessment of the accountability measures and recommendations for reforming the system.

Standing Up for American Workers

Instead of providing incentives for employers to outsource and move their headquarters overseas, we need to ensure American workers are protected with good jobs and good benefits. I joined Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) to introduce the *Patriot Employer Act of 2007*, which would provide a tax credit to companies that remain committed to supporting the American economy. Companies that maintain or increase the number of full-time domestic employees, keep their corporate headquarters in America, pay decent wages, provide fair benefits and support employees who serve in the military will receive the tax credit. These types of employers help maintain American competitiveness in the global marketplace, while keeping our workforce and our middle class strong.

Ensuring our workers receive fair compensation after discrimination is important. I introduced a bill that directly addresses the 1999 *Pigford* settlement of a discrimination suit brought by African American farmers against the Department of Agriculture. The *Pigford* settlement, approved in 1999, allowed black farmers to file claims against the USDA for failing to respond to racial discrimination complaints between 1983 and 1997. Because many African American farmers were denied relief under the settlement due to minor technicalities, this bill will provide these claimants with a fair review of their claims. These farmers deserve a clear and comprehensive review of their claims. And I am hopeful that any wrongdoing will be corrected in the coming months.

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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As our country remembers the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's devastation, it is vital that the American people, along with the federal government, continue to provide for those affected by this disaster. I joined with Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT) to cosponsor legislation to provide comprehensive housing relief for the hurricane impacted areas of the Gulf Coast. The measure would provide increased flexibility for housing funds that have already been allocated, provide new oversight of existing programs, and preserve public housing and assist evacuees with rental housing. Also, this bill would provide support for landlords and local communities who assisted evacuees with

housing.

The Administration's response to Katrina was not only a logistical failure, it was a moral failure. Instead of deploying the resources necessary to save lives and rebuild communities, we learned of another report that the Bush Administration had cut corners and buried the truth. I joined with Senators McCaskill to offer an amendment to the Homeland Security bill to initiate an investigation into why the Administration failed to respond to reports of a toxic gas contaminating FEMA-provided trailers and whether this environmental hazard continues to pose a threat to the victims of Katrina.

Providing Safe, Effective Health Care for All Americans

Across our cities and state, there are fewer issues that shows a greater disconnect between what the American people want and the way Washington works than health care. I voted to improve health care in the United

States, by supporting the expansion of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to cover an additional 3.2 million uninsured children. And I continue to urge the President not to veto this important legislation.

Another way to improve our nation's healthcare system is to hold our hospitals to high standards and provide patients with the information they need to make decisions about where to go for health care. I reintroduced a bill that would create report cards of hospital quality, including staffing levels, accreditation, availability of specialty services, hospital acquired infections, and emergency room crowding. This bill, which is based on my work in the Illinois State Senate, will help all Americans determine where our overall healthcare system needs the most improvement

Our nation's emergency departments are overburdened and ill-equipped to respond to the public health crises we must be prepared to face. I introduced the *Improving Emergency Medical Care and Response Act of 2007*, which would provide funding for programs that would enhance emergency care systems throughout the country. Recent reports indicate that our nation's emergency medical care system is not yet equipped to take on new challenges we could face in the coming years. This legislation would better coordinate public health, safety, and emergency services, streamline emergency communications and organize medical data and information to better serve the public.

Teen pregnancy can derail the plans of students with dreams of achieving professional success, and it's hitting minority communities particularly hard. I introduced the *Communities of Color Teen Pregnancy Prevention Act of 2007*, which would help prevent teen pregnancies in minority communities. This legislation would strengthen community-based intervention efforts for teen pregnancy services; establish a comprehensive national database to provide culturally and linguistically sensitive information on teen pregnancy reduction; and support research on teen pregnancy in communities of color. While the country's overall teen birth rate continues to decline, pregnancies in African American and Latino communities remain inexcusably high. We must develop innovative approaches to strengthen our community support networks and services to educate our teens about pregnancy and provide them with every chance to succeed in school and beyond.