

AFSCME 2001 Voters' Guide

Vote Descriptions

SENATE

Ashcroft Attorney General Confirmation

President Bush nominated a controversial former U.S. Senator, John Ashcroft, to the top law enforcement position in the country as Attorney General. Ashcroft's record in the Senate and as Missouri attorney general called into question his stand on civil rights, school desegregation, women's rights and workers' rights and his fitness for the position.

AFSCME opposed his confirmation, which passed the Senate by a vote of 58-42 on February 2, 2001.

Repeal of Ergonomics Standard

The Senate caved in to business interests and voted to kill the ergonomics standard that was issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). After 10 long years of work to develop a safety and health standard protecting American workers from carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive motion injuries, the U.S. Senate debated for only 10 hours and ultimately voted (S.J.Res. 6) to repeal this important worker safety regulation.

AFSCME opposed the resolution, which passed the Senate by a vote of 56-44 on March 6, 2001.

Inadequate Funding for Public Services

The Senate approved the congressional leadership's budget plan for 2001 (H.Con.Res. 83) which called for the adoption of an unprecedented \$1.35 trillion tax cut, which primarily benefits the wealthy without providing adequate funding for necessary public services including education, the environment, health care and public infrastructure. Without adequate funding, thousands of AFSCME member jobs could be at risk.

AFSCME opposed the resolution, which the Senate adopted by a vote of 53-47 on May 10, 2001.

School Renovation and Construction Funding

The Senate defeated an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary School Act (S. 1) by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) which would have authorized federal funding to help states and local school districts repair their most dilapidated public school buildings.

AFSCME supported the amendment, which the Senate defeated by a vote of 50-49 on May 16, 2001.

A Real Prescription Drug Benefit

The Senate rejected on a procedural vote an amendment to the tax bill (H.R. 1836) by Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) that would have prohibited a reduction in the tax rates of wealthy taxpayers until Congress has enacted and the President has signed legislation to provide a real prescription drug benefit.

AFSCME supported the amendment, which the Senate defeated on a procedural motion by a vote of 51-48 on May 21, 2001.

Protecting the Social Security and Medicare Trust Funds

The Senate rejected on a procedural vote an amendment to the tax bill (H.R. 1836) by Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) that would have provided necessary funding to ensure the long-term solvency of the Social Security and Medicare trust funds by striking the tax rate cuts, as well as the repeal of the tax paid on the estates of wealthy Americans.

AFSCME supported the amendment, which the Senate defeated on a procedural motion by a vote of 60-39 on May 21, 2001.

Tax Cuts for the Wealthy

The Senate approved legislation (H.R. 1836) slashing taxes by \$1.35 trillion over the next 10 years by reducing tax rates, providing relief from the "marriage penalty", and phasing out the tax paid on the estates of wealthy Americans. The bulk of the tax breaks would go overwhelmingly to the super rich without providing adequate tax relief for average taxpayers, and it would result in crowding out adequate funding for domestic needs.

AFSCME opposed the legislation, which passed the Senate by a vote of 58-33 on May 26, 2001.

Undermining Public Schools

The Senate defeated an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (S. 1) that would create government-subsidized vouchers to pay for private education. These vouchers would undermine public schools, where most Americans educate their children, by diverting scarce tax dollars to private schools. They could also cost thousands of AFSCME member jobs.

AFSCME opposed this amendment, which was defeated by the Senate by a vote of 58-41 on June 12, 2001.

Public Employee Coverage under Patients' Bill of Rights

The Senate rejected an amendment to the Bipartisan Patient Protection Act (S. 1052) that would have removed state and local government employees from coverage under the bill. Under the amendment, over 16 million public employees, their dependents and retired public workers would have been denied federal patient protections such as the right to emergency room treatment or the right to see a specialist when needed.

AFSCME opposed this amendment, which was defeated by the Senate by a vote of 53-44 on June 28, 2001.

Passage of the Patients' Bill of Rights

The Senate approved the Bipartisan Patient Protection Act (S. 1052), a comprehensive package of consumer protections. The bill would ensure such basic protections as access to emergency room treatment and to specialists when needed. The bill provides a review process that allows patients to appeal treatment denials by the health plan to an outside medical expert. It also would hold plans accountable when their denials for treatment injure or kill patients. Importantly, the bill would ensure that health care professionals are able to speak up for their patients when their care is jeopardized.

AFSCME supported the legislation, which was passed by the Senate by a vote of 59-36 on June 29, 2001.

Collective Bargaining for Public Safety Officers

The Senate failed to end an extended debate on an amendment to the fiscal year 2002 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education spending bill (H.R. 3061) that would have provided collective bargaining rights for public safety officers, including corrections officers, emergency medical technicians, police and firefighters.

AFSCME supported ending debate but the Senate rejected the motion to end debate by a vote of 56-44 on November 6, 2001.

Real Economic Stimulus

The Senate rejected allowing a vote on an amendment sponsored by Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT) that would have provided federal assistance to the states to deal with the nation's economic downturn. In addition, funding would have been provided to temporarily boost our nation's economy and for unemployment and health care benefits of displaced American workers.

AFSCME supported the Baucus amendment, which required 60 votes for adoption, but the Senate on November 14, 2001 failed on a vote of 51-47 to allow the amendment to come up for a vote.

HOUSE

Repeal of the Ergonomics Standard

The House of Representatives caved in to business interests and voted to kill the ergonomics standard that was issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). After 10 long years of work to develop a safety and health standard protecting American workers from carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive motion injuries, the House debated for only an hour before voting to repeal this important worker safety regulation (S.J.Res. 6).

AFSCME opposed the repeal of the standard which passed the House by a vote of 223-206 on March 7, 2001.

Reduction in Income Tax Rates for Upper-Income Taxpayers

The House of Representatives approved a bill (H.R. 3) that would lower federal income tax rates by restructuring the five tax brackets into four new tax brackets. The legislation would unfairly reduce tax rates for the wealthy without fairly reducing rates for average, working taxpayers and it would lead to reductions in important domestic programs in order to pay for the tax cuts.

AFSCME opposed the legislation, which was adopted by the House by a vote of 230-198 on March 8, 2001.

Inadequate Funding for Public Services

The House of Representatives approved the congressional leadership's budget plan for 2001 (H.Con.Res. 83), which called for the adoption of an unprecedented \$1.35 trillion tax cut, which primarily benefits the wealthy without providing adequate funding for necessary public services like education, the environment, health care and public infrastructure. Without adequate funding, thousands of AFSCME member jobs could be at risk.

AFSCME opposed the resolution, which the House adopted by a vote of 221-207 on May 9, 2001.

Undermining Public Schools

The House defeated an amendment to an important education bill (H.R. 1) by Rep. Richard Armey (R-TX) that would have diverted taxpayers' dollars away from public schools where most Americans send their children. The Armey amendment would have allowed students in low-performing schools to use federal funds to pay for private schools, thus draining money from public schools where the need is greatest.

AFSCME opposed the amendment which the House rejected by a vote of 273-155 on May 23, 2001.

Tax Cuts for the Wealthy

The House of Representatives approved legislation (H.R. 1836) which calls for reducing taxes by \$1.35 trillion over the next 10 years by reducing tax rates, providing relief from the "marriage penalty," and phasing out the tax paid on the estates of wealthy Americans. The bulk of the tax breaks would go to the super rich without providing adequate tax relief for average taxpayers and it would result in crowding out adequate funding for domestic needs.

AFSCME opposed the legislation, which passed the House by a vote of 240-154 on May 26, 2001.

Religious-Based Discrimination

The House narrowly approved President Bush's "faith-based" initiative, the Community Solutions Act of 2001 (H.R. 7). H.R. 7 would permit religious-based discrimination in federally funded programs for the first time in over 60 years and would trigger personnel and service cutbacks in the nation's infrastructure of public and nonprofit social services agencies by converting federal social services grants into vouchers.

AFSCME opposed this legislation, which passed the House by a vote of 233-198 on July 19, 2001.

Gutting the Patients' Bill of Rights

On a near party-line vote, the House approved an amendment to the Bipartisan Patient Protection Act (H.R. 2563) that severely weakened the enforcement features in the bill. While the bill's basic protections were kept intact, the amendment took away the ability of consumers to enforce their rights under the bill and to hold managed care plans accountable when they wrongly deny or delay care that causes injury or death to a patient.

AFSCME opposed this amendment, which was passed by the House by a vote of 218-213 on August 2, 2001.

Sham Economic Stimulus

The House approved a so-called economic stimulus plan (H.R. 3090) giving huge tax breaks to the wealthy and corporations while providing inadequate relief for American workers. Instead, AFSCME supported a measure targeted to provide a temporary boost to the economy and to the states and to extend and improve unemployment benefits for displaced workers.

AFSCME opposed the bill which passed the House by a vote of 216-214 on October 24, 2001.

One-sided Trade Authority

The House narrowly passed a bill (H.R. 3005) granting the President the right to expedite negotiation and implementation of trade agreements with foreign countries, with no provision to allow Congress the authority to improve proposed trade agreements. The bill would rule out congressional action to include or strengthen workers' rights or environmental protections in trade agreements.

AFSCME opposed the bill which passed the House by a vote of 215-214 on December 6, 2001

Inadequate Worker Benefits in Economic Stimulus

The House passed yet another phony stimulus bill (H.R. 3529) with a 13-week extension of unemployment benefits, plus more tax breaks for the wealthy and large corporations, rather than providing increased unemployment benefits, health coverage to the unemployed and direct aid to the states. The House leadership plan was grossly inadequate, in contrast to the real economic stimulus plan that AFSCME supported.

AFSCME opposed the bill which passed the House by a vote of 224-193 on December 20, 2001.