

July 24, 2006

Dear Representative:

On behalf of 1.8 million members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) who work in public services, building services and health care, I strongly urge you to oppose the Sunset Commission bills anticipated for a floor vote this week. Both the Government Efficiency Act of 2006 (H.R. 5766) sponsored by Representative Todd Tiahrt and the Abolishment of Obsolete Agencies and Federal Sunset Act (H.R. 3282) sponsored by Representative Kevin Brady, would give Commissions unparalleled power to make legislative recommendations to entitlement and discretionary programs or federal agencies on a fast-track process without debate, prohibiting amendments. SEIU is vehemently opposed to creating single-standing commissions that would have the authority to make intrusive and far-reaching changes to a number of programs that our members rely upon, including Medicaid, Medicare, Head Start, Child Care, and No Child Left Behind to name a few.

The factor that H.R. 5766 and H.R. 3277 have in common is that they create unelected, unaccountable commissions that would have the power to side-step Congress to revise or eliminate key federal programs. These proposals are being touted in the name of getting rid of wasteful or duplicative federal programs, when in reality they are shifting massive power away from Congress to the President and these lop-sided commissions. There is already a mechanism in place to review and evaluate the effectiveness of federal programs and agencies in the reauthorization, appropriations, and authorization process. Furthermore, the Government Accountability Office and the Inspectors General are already charged with oversight responsibilities—the Sunset Commissions would create unnecessary and expensive duplication of other effective accountability measures.

The number of federal programs susceptible to elimination or revision is countless at the hands of Sunset Commissions. Any of the 91 programs slated for elimination in the President's FY 2007 Budget could potentially be on the chopping block, such as the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), Vocational Education State Grants, and Even Start. Additionally, Sunset Commissions would have an opportunity to resurrect harmful policy changes to programs like Head Start by changing eligibility requirements, narrowing the comprehensive focus of Head Start or even block-granting it.

The bills go beyond making changes to key entitlement and discretionary programs. H.R. 5766 passed with a manager's amendment offered by Representative Thomas Davis that increased the scope of the commission to examine regulations as well as the constitutional basis for agencies and programs. The other measure would automatically eliminate federal agencies and departments within 12 years unless they are reauthorized.

SEIU urges you to oppose both Sunset Commission proposals (H.R. 5766 and H.R. 3282) when they are voted on next week.

Sincerely,



Anna Burger
International Secretary-Treasurer

AB:DH:gmb
opeiu#2
aff-cio, clc



ANDREW L. STERN
International President

ANNA BURGER
International Secretary-Treasurer

MARY KAY HENRY
Executive Vice President

GERRY HUDSON
Executive Vice President

ELISEO MEDINA
Executive Vice President

TOM WOODRUFF
Executive Vice President

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
CTW, CLC

1313 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

202.898.3200
TDD: 202.898.3481

www.SEIU.org

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