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Senate panel approves labor nominee Hilda Solis

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WASHINGTON

(AP) -- Rep.

Hilda Solis

edged closer

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labor secretary, after more than a month of delays over questions about her husband's unpaid taxes and her work for a pro-union group.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee cleared her nomination in a voice vote with only two Republicans voting against her. The action sends the nomination to the full Senate for a final vote likely this week.

A committee vote scheduled last week was abruptly postponed after news that her husband had paid about \$6,400 to settle outstanding tax liens against his auto repair

business.

White House officials said the Democratic California congresswoman and her husband were not aware of the liens until a newspaper reported them and that Solis was not involved in the business. But committee leaders said they wanted more time to review key documents.

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said President Barack Obama was not concerned about the delays and was confident the process was back on track. Gibbs said he hoped Solis would be sworn in soon.

Republicans had already stalled her confirmation for weeks after raising questions about her role as a board member and treasurer of American Rights at Work, a nonprofit group working to pass a bill to make it easier for workers to form unions.

The wrangling over Solis' ties to organized labor is seen as a precursor to a bitter fight to come over the Employee Free Choice Act, also known as "card check" - a bill organized labor is pushing that would make it easier for workers to form unions. Business groups and most Republicans adamantly oppose the measure.

Wyoming Sen. Mike Enzi, the committee's top Republican, has suggested that Solis' work for the advocacy group should bar her, as labor secretary, from debate over the legislation. But Solis said her positions did not involve lobbying and asserted that she would play a role in supporting the bill.

Still, Enzi and most GOP members on the panel voted to confirm her. Republican Sens. Pat Roberts of Kansas and Tom Coburn of Oklahoma voted no.

In a written statement, Enzi said the confirmation would not have been delayed if Solis had not omitted details of her positions for the nonprofit in paperwork filed with

the committee and in financial disclosures to the House. Solis has said the omissions were an oversight.

The latest delay in confirming Solis prompted unions, women's and Hispanic groups to flood lawmakers' offices with calls and letters urging them to confirm her.