

PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MINORITY WHIP

STENY H. HOYER

Tuesday, April 29, 2014

11:03 a.m.

Mr. Hoyer. Good morning. How is everybody?

Q Very well. Yourself?

Mr. Hoyer. Terrific.

Q Good.

Mr. Hoyer. I hope that all of you had some time to take a break from all of us, as exciting as we are.

As you know, we have two appropriations bills on the Floor today and -- not today, but this week -- and suspension bills, of which the expat bill that Mr. Carney has sponsored that was voted on suspension and failed is back up under a rule.

Let me go to the Republican spring agenda. The Republican spring agenda is noteworthy for what it does not include, which are the major issues we believe that the Congress should be dealing with.

Number one, of course, is comprehensive immigration reform. Speaker Boehner has indicated he wants to move immigration. And I think all of you have seen numerous quotes of numerous Republicans, including former Speaker Hastert, who over the last two weeks have indicated that they believe that comprehensive immigration ought to pass. In fact, Peter King and Aaron Schock and John Shimkus, Cathy McMorris, and many others have made observations that they think immigration reform is timely and ought to be moved.

Speaker Boehner said, quote, "I've had every brick and bat and arrow shot at me over this issue just because I want to deal with it," which is positive, that he wants to deal with it. And he has indicated he wants to deal with it. And he put forth five points that he wanted

to discuss. He said that we get elected to make choices, we get elected to solve problems, and it is remarkable to me how many of my colleagues just don't want to; they will take the path of least resistance.

Speaker Boehner, I would suggest, is taking the path of least resistance. He is not putting the bill on the Floor. The bill would pass if he put it on the Floor. When you have these predecessors, Speaker Hastert, indicating that we ought to pass this bill, when you have many of his Members, including members of his leadership, saying we ought to pass this bill, when you have Members having press conferences -- I think Mr. Kinzinger and Schock, in particular, had a press conference that we ought to pass comprehensive immigration reform.

There is significant sentiment for doing this, not just on our side of the aisle, but on their side of the aisle, as well. Again, I refer you to the quote, "Let the House work its will," which was one of Mr. Boehner's mantras when he was seeking to have Republicans take over the House. This is a perfect example of his not doing what he said he was going to do, because it would pass.

Unemployment insurance I think falls in the same category. The Senate has passed it 59 to 38 with pay-fors. We don't think it ought to be paid for. We can discuss the irony of what they think ought to be paid for and not paid for, perhaps, in answer to questions. But the unemployment insurance bill, we now have 2 1/2 million people who are left without any support because of the Republicans' refusal to bring unemployment insurance to the Floor.

Minimum wage is another issue on which we have over 70 percent of the American people supportive, but it is not included in Mr. Cantor's agenda.

The Voting Rights [Amendment Act], we very much hope we can reach bipartisan agreement and move that piece of legislation in response to the Supreme Court's undermining the protection of voting rights in America, which ought to be central to what our democracy is about.

And then, notwithstanding the fact that they want to build an America that works, according to Mr. Cantor, in fact, there is no job creation legislation included within their agenda for the coming months. And if they were sincerely interested in building an America that works, they would work with us to do just that.

The economy is growing, not as fast as we would like it, but it is growing. The stock market has doubled in value since President Obama took office. Millions of jobs have been created, but, again, not enough. And one of the problems is the Congress has been dysfunctional, and, as a result, the economy is not as confident as it otherwise would be.

I mentioned the minimum wage. A hundred and ninety-five House Democrats have signed on to the discharge petition, which means to raise the minimum wage, which over 70 percent of the American people think ought to be done; would only require some 23 Republicans to vote for it. We think there are clearly 23 Republicans who believe the minimum wage ought to be increased.

Economists say it would spur the economy -- again, a growth item

if you want an America that works. If you pay them, they are more likely to work, and if you pay them a living wage, they are more likely to work and help grow the economy. So we think that that is a jobs growth issue. Because if you pay people more, they are going to spend more. Ours is a consumer-driven economy, so that would be the case.

Sixty-five Republicans supported the minimum wage in 2007. And you recall, when we took office, one of the first things we did was to raise the minimum wage to \$7.25, and 65 Republicans voted for it.

And, again, this is another issue where if Boehner puts it on the Floor I think it will pass. So that Boehner and Cantor not putting it on the Floor are the only reasons, in my opinion, that immigration reform is not passing, unemployment insurance is not passing, and the minimum wage is not being raised, simply because they don't put it on the Floor. It has the votes.

We are going to continue to urge passage of the minimum wage because we think it is critically important. The minimum wage, as I've told you, and you're perhaps tired of hearing about it, but the American people really needs to know that if people were making the same minimum wage they made in 1968 in America today, they would be making \$10.77 an hour -- said a different way, 67 cents less than we are proposing to raise it 2 1/2 years from now.

So that there is no doubt why the middle class feels squeezed; they are squeezed. Now, the middle class, per se, is not making minimum wage, but, obviously, the minimum-wage impact on them and their jobs and on consumers is slowing the economy and slowing their growth, as

well.

Now, let me say lastly and then turn it over to you, the appropriations process is beginning. That's good news. The appropriations process is beginning, as it usually does on both sides of the aisle, with the military construction bill, because that's probably the least controversial of the 12 bills.

The legislative bill is also moving. That's essentially at last year's levels -- little tweaks here and there, but essentially at last year's level. Both those bills passed out on a voice vote out of committee.

The 302(a) allocation has not been formalized yet, but it was in the Murray-Ryan bill, which said it was \$1.14 trillion. [Whip Hoyer misspoke, its \$1.014 trillion]. Presumably, Ryan, who has the authority on the legislation to set the 302(a), will do that.

And then the 302(b)s, which are simply the allocations of the big number by the Appropriations Committee to each subcommittee that passed out these bills without having a 302(b). And the only reason I mention that is because we still don't know what the allocations are going to be for the subcommittees dealing with education, with health matters, with the interior, with law enforcement, et cetera, et cetera, and defense, for that matter, although we presume that, consistent with the Ryan-Murray agreement, the firewall will be honored and there will be figures very close to last year's omnibus in this year's budget.

So let me conclude with, I was disappointed that Mr. Cantor made the observation in his preview of the coming months that -- he pointed

to the appropriation bills as another opportunity to press a partisan agenda, and which he says, "an opportunity to enact conservative policies through policy riders," many of which he knows will not pass as standalone bills at all and which will simply undermine the appropriations process, not help it.

And that's unfortunate, but it's not surprising that the appropriation bills are now once again going to be used for partisan purposes.

Let me stop with that.

Q The Speaker met today with House Republicans to discuss his remarks from last week. And he made the case that -- Republicans coming out of the meeting said this -- that he said he was only kidding, teasing, his remarks weren't mocking but kidding his Members, and that the real problem on immigration reform isn't the House Republicans but the President of the United States.

I just wondered what your read of the comments by --

Mr. Hoyer. Okay. Before I do that, let me -- apparently, this was the National Journal that said "an opportunity to enact conservative policies," not Mr. Cantor. I was wrong, and I want to clarify that.

Q Thank you.

Mr. Hoyer. Don't want to put words in Mr. Cantor's mouth that aren't there.

Q Mr. Roskam did say it.

Mr. Hoyer. Okay. There you go.

In any event, back to your question.

Q Yeah, what was your read of Boehner's comments?

Mr. Hoyer. That he was accurate. That was my read; he was accurate. And the truth apparently hurt, and so he says he was kidding. But I think he was accurate.

Q With that said, though, it sounded to some that he was speaking to a lot of different constituencies. He was speaking to the White House to get air coverage. He was speaking to his Republican House Members to say, guys --

Mr. Hoyer. Initially or now?

Q In the remarks in Ohio last week. You know, he was speaking to his Republican Members ostensibly maybe to say, guys -- and trying to bring them on board.

Mr. Hoyer. That was my presumption.

Q Okay. But, I mean, do you view that as he was trying to spin it, you know, or just --

Mr. Hoyer. Of course he was. What I said was, I don't think he was kidding when he said that to his local paper. I think that was -- I think that's what he believes. I think he was accurate on that. And, obviously, no one ought to be surprised he had a reaction from his Members, who don't want -- and I'm sure the Speaker was not surprised.

But I think he was speaking the truth to his local paper, but I think he had to explain it to his Members who didn't like thinking their Speaker thought they weren't prepared to do things that were tough.

Q Sir --

Mr. Hoyer. But, you know, we all have multiple audiences when we speak. But, you know, I think my answer was correct. I think he was accurate, and I think that's what he believes.

Q Sir --

Mr. Hoyer. And let me emphasize that. He put forward five principles and said, these are the principles on which we ought to move forward. He didn't put those forward as a joke, did he? Did he say, I was kidding, I didn't mean it, I had my fingers crossed? No. I think he put them forward.

Now, the problem he has is his party immediately rebelled and said, we don't want to talk about this. And I think, in part, what his remarks to his local paper reflected was a frustration with his inability to do something that he says ought to be done.

Yes?

Q I'm going to ask you a political question. So, on the policy generally, when you talk about immigration and minimum wage and UI, the numbers show that, like you said, that there's a lot of support on the Democratic position on these issues.

But when we look at it in the context of 2014, it doesn't seem to be translating into the races and into what's happening. And, if anything, it's interesting that the latest projections show that Republicans -- independent projections say that they'll gain three to five seats, is the latest from the Cook and the Rothenberg.

So, I guess, what's your take on that? What is the connection between people supporting where Democrats are on the policies but

Republicans seem to have the clear advantage on these races?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I don't accept your premise they have a clear advantage on these races. I do accept your premise or your statement that some people think that the Republicans may pick up seats, including people who have a pretty good handle on, you know, analysis. I think you just can't dismiss them.

You know, I travel all over the country. We have got some extraordinarily good candidates, number one. Number two, people do agree with us on the issues. Number three, we've raised more money this quarter, as we have in past quarters, than every other committee combined, notwithstanding the fact we're in the minority -- not combined. No other committee, DSCC and the Republican campaign committee in the Senate, the DNC and the RNC, none of them have raised as much money as we did. So our contributors are very enthusiastic. They believe that we can win. I believe we can win. I believe we can pick up seats.

When you put those three together -- and you go back to 2006. I don't know whether you've heard me say this, but I was then Minority Whip at that point in time, too. In July I can remember pretty vividly a question almost exactly like your question, saying, you know, everybody is saying you guys can't win back the House, da-da-da-da. And I said, look, I think we can win 30 seats. In fact, we won 31. Nobody thought that was the case. And I based it not so much on being able to say I think A, B, C, and D can win, but that I saw the context of the election.

Now, the other context that I have not yet mentioned is the extraordinarily unpopular position of the Republicans in the House and the Senate in terms of obstructionism and in terms of negativity. They show up on every poll, where the Democrats are substantially more popular than the Republicans.

So you've got a context in which I think that we've got good candidates, we're raising good money -- let me give Arkansas as an example. We now have no Members in Arkansas, no Democrats. We've had Democrats in the recent past. I just was with Jackie McPherson, who is the mayor of Heber Springs. I've done an event with Mr. Hays, Mayor Hays of North Little Rock, and James Lee Witt, who I think everybody knows. I think in Arkansas we can win the governorship. Pryor, who was supposed to be in trouble, is ahead. One poll showed 10 points, but every poll has showed him ahead in that race.

So I think that we're in a good position to win back the House. And so I'm not one of those that's a doom-and-gloom person. And the fact that you accept the fact that we are ahead on almost every one of the major issues, and we're even on the economy. So I think we're doing okay.

Yeah?

Q Back to immigration for a second. What do you think is the window for something possibly getting done? The spring agenda from Cantor doesn't mention it, as you said. And it's going to get only tougher and tougher for Boehner to bring something to the Floor --

Mr. Hoyer. I agree with that. I think sooner rather than later.

Q -- as we get closer to November. So what is the timeline?

Mr. Hoyer. I think the timing needs to be, both on immigration -- well, on all of these issues, they're very pressing issues. Probably the most pressing is unemployment insurance, because we have 72,000 people every week who fall off the wagon of support that they had. But immigration reform, Voting Rights Act, minimum wage are all critically important issues that we ought to move sooner rather than later, which is why it's a shame that we've been essentially spinning wheels.

I mean, if I asked you to write a column about the most substantive thing we've done this year, you'd have to think about, well, what is that, what can I write a column about? The 3 weeks we were here before we took the Easter break, nothing really of much significance happened.

So we have time. What we need is the will to put immigration reform on the Floor, because it would pass. And I think this is a judgment of the Speaker. Mr. Cantor doesn't have it on his agenda. He hasn't been talking about it, although he says on a regular basis it's broken, which is what Hastert, Schock, Kinzinger, and others, McMorris Rodgers, they're all saying we need to fix this system -- Peter King. So it's not like it's just Democrats saying this, when you have the former Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, saying we need to fix this and we ought to act on something.

But you asked me on timing. Sooner rather than later. And, yes, it does get tougher, which is your premise.

Q Before August?

Mr. Hoyer. Oh, yeah. Yeah. We need to do it before August.

Q Could it happen in the lame duck? Well, not so much on UI, but for some of those other things.

Mr. Hoyer. You know, every time -- my guys behind me cringe when the answer is "could something happen," because my honest answer is things could happen.

But we need to do immigration reform now, and it gets worse every week. The President is going to try to address some issues to try to alleviate some of the effects of a broken system.

Q Let me just follow on Sue's question, because I think in 2006, you looked back to then, and there were all the naysayers, and you said you'd win 30 but you won 31.

Are you predicting Democratic gains in this election, or just that it's not --

Mr. Hoyer. We're going to pick up seats, yes.

Q Yes.

Mr. Hoyer. Yeah. I'm not predicting a number --

Q And where? I mean, where are those going to come from?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I just talked about Arkansas, where we have zero seats and we have three opportunities. Mr. McPherson's in Marion Berry's seat that we held just recently. And I think that James Lee Witt is probably one of our best candidates in the country, in terms of his reputation. He was an extraordinary leader of FEMA, good candidate, businessman, and I think very, very suited to Arkansas. The mayor of North Little Rock, mayor for five or six or seven terms of

North Little Rock, Hays.

So there are some specific examples. I think Gwen Graham in Florida. I don't want to go throughout the country, because I'll forget people.

And I think our incumbents are doing well. You know, I think we're going to hold all of our seats.

Q Your analysis of the election landscape, you mentioned how popular all of the election-year items -- minimum wage, UI, immigration --

Mr. Hoyer. Couple that, though -- I said that, but also the public's disaffection --

Q Right.

Mr. Hoyer. -- with the leadership and the performance of the Republican Party in the Congress.

Q So the one part of that equation that you didn't mention, of course, is the ACA. And I wonder if you give any credence to -- real credence, like, legit -- to the notion that, sort of, the Republican blitzkrieg strategy on Obamacare, essentially running on that alone, is substantially wavering; or if you believe what so many other Democrats believe, is that that, coupled with the President's unpopularity, in The Washington Post this morning, really is a bounce on you guys.

Mr. Hoyer. I think health care, at worst, is going to be a neutral in this election. I think the Republicans have put their eggs all in that basket. There are five Governors, Republican Governors, who are

now running ads. Only one of them, the Governor of Florida, is using health care in their ads. The reason being, I think, that their pollsters are telling them, look, this is not the Holy Grail of this election.

I think Americans are becoming more comfortable with the Affordable Care Act, rightfully so. I think, for one thing, a lot of Americans are figuring out that their employer insurance that didn't change, and so, you know, they're -- I don't know whether any of you fall in that category, as you had your insurance, you now have the same insurance, and, you know, it's not as much of a worry to you.

Medicare is the same way. A lot of people on Medicaid now that weren't and that have some assurance. And a lot of people -- all the facets that I've mentioned 100 times about the good aspects of it.

So I think, at worst, it's a neutral at the end.

If you look at the Florida race, Alex Sink, millions of dollars were spent almost exclusively on the health care. We won independents by 22 percent. Unfortunately, you know, not a lot of people showed up. Not a lot of independents showed up, not a lot of Democrats, and, frankly, Republicans. They showed up a little better than we did, but not much better than we did, but enough to -- so Sink lost by 1.9 points.

But the point I'll make to you: If health care was the be-all, end-all -- and that was before the 8 1/2 million have signed up, when that figure came out. Independents we won by 20-plus points. So that indicates to me that health care is not the coup de grace that the Republicans would hope it would be to Democratic hopes.

Voice. Last question.

Q One of the things that Speaker Boehner has said he wants to do and has to do this year is reauthorize the Export-Import Bank, which I believe its loan authority expires at the end of the fiscal year. Yet, last week, when the administration sent out this request, Chairman Hensarling described it as having the earmarks of crony capitalism.

Do you see the party, the Republican Party, on a collision course on this issue? Is there a scenario under which this will lapse, at least till after the election?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I hope not. As you know, I'm a strong supporter of the Export-Import Bank. As you know, when we reauthorized it, every Democrat voted for it and over 100 Republicans voted for it, so it passed handily.

But about 90-plus Republicans voted against it -- the same mentality when they voted against TARP, when they voted against the auto bailout. The two are not, they're not analogous because the Export-Import Bank, of course, makes us money, as you know.

But I think Mr. Cantor is a proponent of the Export-Import Bank, as well as Mr. Boehner. And I agree with him 100 percent; we ought to pass it, and we ought to pass it as soon as possible. And I'm going to be talking to the leadership on the Republican side about working to get that done.

Clearly, if we don't do that, notwithstanding Mr. Hensarling's view, what we do is unilaterally disarm. Because, of course, every

one of our competitors around the world is, in fact, facilitating exports of goods, which is what this does.

So I'm very hopeful that it will pass. Mr. Boehner and I -- Speaker Boehner and I agree it ought to pass. It ought to pass before we leave here for the election break. The sooner, the better. I think it'll give confidence to our manufacturers. You know, I have a Make It in America agenda. Export-Import Bank, as you know, is part of that agenda. And it ought to pass, with a majority of Republicans.

Here's an issue -- here is an issue where, bring it to the Floor. In this case, a majority of Republicans, I think, are for the Export-Import Bank. At least --

Q But wouldn't the Speaker be forced to flout regular order if the chairman of the committee of jurisdiction is against the bill?

Mr. Hoyer. Heaven forbid if they would flout regular order. Oh, my goodness. Of course, they have open rules, you know, because that is --

Q They don't want to repeat what happened with flood insurance, though, do they? That was pretty ugly.

Mr. Hoyer. They knew they had to get it done.

Mr. Hensarling represents the minority view of his party on this issue, in my view. And his view, I think, is undermining of the ability of America to grow its exports and to keep jobs here and to create more jobs. And I think that if you're pro-jobs, if you're pro-growth, as I am and as I think that Mr. Boehner is and I think Mr. Cantor is, then Export-Import Bank is one of the arrows that you ought to be using.

And I would hope they would bring it to the Floor sooner rather than later.

And that's a bill -- and here's a perfect example, Export-Import, where we could forge a large bipartisan majority, as opposed to simply fighting about something. I think we're -- you know, the leadership on the Republican side, except for Mr. Hensarling -- maybe there are others, but certainly Mr. Boehner and Mr. Cantor, I think, are for it. We ought to put it on the Floor, and we'll pass it.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:33 a.m., the press conference was concluded.]