

PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MAJORITY LEADER

STENY H. HOYER

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

11:30 a.m.

Mr. Hoyer. Good morning. Almost made it good afternoon. I apologize. I am sorry about the electronic devices. I am going to have a fire sale.

Well, we had a good week last week, had a good week yesterday. Long day. We had a good week last week and we have had, I think, a very, very positive 90 days. I'm going to go over that in just a few minutes with you.

This week, of course, we follow that with the budget. The budget needs to pass by April 15th. We're going to pass it this week. It will continue our, I think, commitment to and performance of passing meaningful legislation in a timely fashion that will make a difference in the lives of Americans.

Mr. Spratt has worked very, very hard with all of our committee chairs, with all of our committee members, with all of our caucuses, the Black Caucus, The Progressive Caucus, Spanish Caucus, Blue Dogs in fashioning a budget. Unfortunately, it was not covered on C-SPAN. I thought the debate was excellent on the budget consideration. It restores fiscal responsibility and accountability. It balances the budget by 2012. To that extent it is over a hundred billion dollars better than the President's budget, making sure programs are running efficiently and eliminating wasteful spending. It prioritizes as well middle class tax

cuts, and we do not raise taxes.

The assertion by the Republicans is that our budget is the largest tax increase in history. You have heard that language before. The budget adopts the Republican-passed and President Bush-signed expiration date of their tax cuts. They did that; they did it without Democratic support or help, and so they are now complaining that we somehow because we don't adopt 4 years from now in 2011 -- we are having trouble focusing on our issues here. Did Boehner give you these?

Let's get serious. This is serious business we are doing. The attack is serious because the only substantive attack they have is to say that we are doing what the Republicans did, that is, phase out their tax cuts in 2010. Not '08, not '09, not '10, but after '10, so that this is far in the future. We don't raise any taxes, contrary to the President's budget which raised substantial hundreds of billions of dollars in fees and because of the AMTs not being fixed, \$247 billion tax increase on middle income taxpayers just by the failure to propose a fix in the AMT.

We propose a fix in the AMT and provide for that. It will be paid for. Obviously that is left to the Ways and Means Committee to do, but the budget anticipates a fix of the AMT, which will be budget neutral. We reaffirm our support for the child tax credit, the marriage penalty

relief, 10 percent tax bracket, all consistent with PAYGO. We'd instruct for those to be paid for.

More investment is included for the right priorities, we believe; health care for our children, SCHIP, care for soldiers and veterans, education for a 21st century workforce and growing the economy, and energy independence and global warming. All of those are contemplated by the budget as being provided. And for strengthening our national defense. We mirror the President's level of spending on defense but we focus on priorities which the President doesn't focus as much on, nuclear nonproliferation being one of those, veterans and active duty health care being another.

The fiscal policies that have been pursued by the Republicans over the last 6 years have been the most fiscally irresponsible of any Congress in which I have served. They undermine a \$5.6 trillion surplus, took it to over a \$3 trillion deficit. I notice Mr. Gregg had a letter in this The Washington Post saying we did not deal with Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and that somehow we were not being real. Of course they didn't do that either, either in this budget, although there are substantial cuts in Medicare and Medicaid which will adversely affect providers and patients and they do not make any fix in their budget.

We expect to pass our budget on Thursday. We will start debate on it on Wednesday and we will pass it on Thursday. Let me give you the rest of the schedule for this week. We'll consider two rules today, Hawaiian home ownership bill and the rail security bill. We will then go directly to the Rail Security Act and take that to completion.

We'll consider four bills under suspension, including Katrina housing tax bill and three health bills, early detection of breast and cervical cancer and stroke, education and prevention, and a bill on emergency medical services. Finally, we'll consider the Hawaiian housing bill. The last votes today will be between 7 and 8:00.

On Wednesday we'll finish the housing bill. That was on suspension, and as you know, got approximately 260 votes but did not get the required 292 societies. So it's coming under a closed rule, will be considered, as I said, and we'll vote on it probably Wednesday morning. We'll then go to the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act, which is the response to the Walter Reed failures and the failure to treat our veterans properly and our active duty personnel coming back from Iraq properly.

And then on Wednesday afternoon, late afternoon we'll go to the budget debate. We expect to have 3 substitutes; Black Caucus we expect to have a substitute, Progressive

Caucus we expect to have a substitute, and Mr. Ryan will have a Republican substitute, Mr. Ryan being the ranking member. We do not believe the Blue Dogs will be offering a substitute, which they have sometimes and other times have not. We don't expect them to be offering a substitute. And then we expect to pass the budget. Notwithstanding the false claims of the Republicans.

Again, in closing, let me say the first 100 days, which we are now approximately in, have been as productive a Congress as I have been in. We did our ethics package, we adopted the rules, we did the Six for '06, which I won't repeat for you. We did the CR, which was the eight appropriation bills left on the table when the Republicans left. We did an Iraq resolution, very historic. For the first time in 6 years or 4 years of the war, the Congress deigning to suggest policy.

We are going through it, so you see it in back of me.

We did a meth and clean water bills, established the Select Committee on Global Warming, dozens of hearings on climate change, over 140 full committee oversight hearings, on Katrina, Walter Reed, U.S. Attorneys, national security letters, Iraq, and others. So we have had a full docket of activity.

There are asterisks on these, because obviously, we have a couple of days left to go. But you will see on roll

call votes the last three Congresses, all less than 90. We have done twice the number of roll call votes. I would suggest to you in the list I have given to you they were substantive issues, these are not just quorum calls. These are substantive pieces of legislation that passed.

Suspension bills, we have done three times as many suspension bills as were done the last Congress, and twice as many as in most. Bills passed under a rule, again, you see the substantial difference. And the days in session. While some of you will observe that we haven't worked every week 5 days a week, that is true. We are not working 5 days a week here this week. We won't be meeting Friday because we're before a break. But you will see that we have worked substantially more in this timeframe than was worked in the previous three Congresses.

So we believe that we are doing what we said we would do, and doing it effectively in passing through the House. We are working with the Senate and we're looking forward to the Senate passing that legislation and going to conference.

We're going to do -- I see my friend Mr. Platkin here. We had a procedural procedure used last Thursday or Wednesday I guess it was to derail the D.C. Voting Rights Bill which would have given to Mrs. Norton the right to be a full member of the House of Representatives and fully represent the some almost 600,000 residents of the District

of Columbia.

It was not the motion to recommit substance that was the issue. We would have dealt with that. What we could not deal with was the motion to recommit to report back promptly as -- this is esoteric and the public would glaze over, I understand that, but there is a motion to report back forthwith, immediately. In other words, it goes immediately back on the floor and we would have voted on it. This was report back promptly, which simply means it goes back to committee, effectively killing that.

This week, as you can see, is a very full week, but I intend to have the D.C. bill back on the floor the first week that we return and I expect it to be in a position where we will not be -- not have the procedural problems that we confronted. Okay.

Q Can I ask you about trade? Do you expect a bill on trade?

Mr. Hoyer. Chairman Rangel has briefed the leadership. He's going to brief the caucus on his proposals on trade. He's been in discussions, I don't know that there have been negotiations, discussions with the administration. Obviously there are a number of trade bills pending. TPA is also of concern to the administration, I understand that. But I think Mr. Rangel is prepared, with the agreement of the caucus, if that occurs, to proceed on discussions with

the administration on what we believe needs to be a trade policy of the United States. That is obviously policy which properly is set by the Congress of the United States, although negotiations are carried out by the executive department. That's what we're talking about, that's what we think we have, and that's what we intend to offer to the administration and hopefully proceed from that point.

Q As a unitary approach, do you think there is any realistic chance that they will accept Mr. Rangel's proposal?

Mr. Hoyer. It's not a unitary -- it's not a unitary success policy that they're following. The complicit, complacent rubber-stamp Congress is gone. The American people expect us to work together. They don't expect the President to order the Congress or, frankly, the Congress to order the President. However, the Congress has the authority to order the President if we can override his veto. Now whether we can do that or not, in the final analysis the Founding Fathers gave to the Congress policy making authority. The President obviously has a check and balance on that with his veto.

We are hopeful that the President will sit down at the table and understand that the Constitution gives the Congress the authority and responsibility to make policy. It gives to the President the authority to carry out that

policy. Mr. Rangel is offering the policy.

Q In the beginning of this debate Mr. Rangel made a lot of bipartisanship, at least within Congress, in coming up with --

Mr. Hoyer. He and McCrery have been working closely together.

Q This is not a Democratic proposal?

Mr. Hoyer. I didn't say that. He's going to be discussing this with Mr. McCrery. I hope Mr. McCrery will agree. I think those of us who historically have been very much in favor of trade have also talked about we need fairness in trade. We ought not to be simply a recipient of everybody else's goods. We ought to have open markets with our trading partners so that our goods can get in. We ought to have fair competition as it relates to workers' rights in those countries with whom we trade. There ought to be environmental protections, which obviously, in light of global warming, affect us all and affect the cost of products.

So what we are saying is we need to pursue a policy that is more equal and fairer than we think has been the case where the United States has been the importer of choice for every country in the world, or the importer of choice, they want to export to us.

Q Do you expect this week with regard to these

negotiations on the pending trade agreements, or is it possible there could be a delay on the Latin America agreements?

Mr. Hoyer. I think Mr. Rangel and Ambassador Schwab and Mr. Paulson will be discussing that, but I think there may be some flexibility.

Q Beyond D.C. vote, what do you see coming up for the remainder of when you guys come back in the spring?

Mr. Hoyer. The remainder of the spring, assuming we pass the budget, then we're going to have to have a budget conference, obviously; we're going to have a resolution, the Senate is working on its supplemental now. We'll have to resolve that as soon as we get back.

Clearly those are important. We have a number of other pieces of legislation that we will consider out of the Financial Services Committee, including TRIA, the insurance, re-insurance bill. We're going to be going relatively quickly to the defense authorization bill in early May; we're going to be doing appropriation bills in May; all of June will be primarily, not exclusively, but primarily, and we're going to meet 5 days a week every week in June so that we can pass our appropriation bills in a timely fashion.

Q You didn't mention some of those big ticket things like immigration.

Mr. Hoyer. Immigration, we are hopeful to have

immigration marked up in committee in June and have it on the floor in July. The Senate -- we were hoping the Senate would go first, we still hope the Senate will go first on that. They had essentially, as you know, worked out a bipartisan bill in the last session -- the last Congress. We are hopeful they can do that again. If they can, fine. If they can't, we're not going to simply not proceed simply because the Senate doesn't proceed.

Q Global warming?

Mr. Hoyer. Global warming, we expect to have, I talked to Mr. Dingell morning in the chairmans meeting. The leadership and Mr. Dingell and Mr. Rangel and others who are going to be involved in this, Collin Peterson, Bart Gordon, chairman of the Science Committee, chairman of the Ag Committee, Mr. Skelton, are all discussing this and we expect a policy to be in the works in June.

Whether or not there will be a comprehensive bill or we will move individual bills has not yet been decided. Both options are possible.

Q I listened to the debate on D.C. obviously very closely, and there is a sort of supposition that real people don't live here, that we're sort of vessels of the Federal Government. Early on, Nancy Pelosi wrote Speaker Hastert a letter saying that there are no statutes in Statuary Hall that represents District residents. The District Government

has now funded that, said wait until Democrats get into control, and that will be a visible signal that actual people live here and are celebrated in some way.

Why hasn't that bill moved in Congresswoman Millender-McDonald's House administration committee. Are you favoring that and can't that be done very quickly?

Mr. Hoyer. I think the answer to your last question is most things can be done very quickly, it's whether they are done very quickly. Mark, I really haven't discussed that with the Speaker or with Ms. McDonald at this point in time.

Q I would reference that letter that Pelosi sent to Hastert, which she never got a response to, and they said well, wait until Democrats are in charge. It does couple with the D.C. vote.

Mr. Hoyer. I agree with that. I really believe, though, that you're a real living example that real people live here. I don't need a statue to tell me that.

When you say the Congress, every Democrat, when this bill comes to the floor, believes that there's going to be real people represented by Ms. Norton.

Q Is Mr. Taylor going to vote for this bill?

Mr. Hoyer. I didn't say every Democrat is going to vote for it. I hope they do. What I said was every Democrat believes there are real people living here. I don't want to speak for the Republicans, who I presume

believe the same thing.

Dave.

Q Are there discussions with the Senate on the post-veto conference?

Mr. Hoyer. We had a leadership meeting this morning and we discussed -- they haven't passed theirs yet, so they need to pass theirs and we need to get to conference on that, but clearly, there are going to be discussions on that, yes. Frankly, I think we'd like to reach out to the President and see what --

Q You would anticipate when you go to conference you would have some reaching out?

Mr. Hoyer. I think we ought to reach out to the President and say Mr. President, this is not a unilateral government, it is a separation of powers, and the Congress of the United States, assuming we do, has taken some action. You obviously disagree with that.

Where are the areas of compromise? We all want to fund the troops. No one wants to micromanage the war. So neither the President nor ourselves want to micromanage the war, and we don't believe that setting deadlines, particularly deadlines as far away as August 31st of 2008 is micromanaging. And I pointed out to you, as you know, that every Republican leader voted for time lines in Bosnia. Every one of them. I think we ought to reach out.

Q If he starts to cast this as a shut-down government argument, how do you respond to that?

Mr. Hoyer. You mean shut-down the war argument? It's not going to shut down the government?

Q They're already starting to portray this as, even though they are in the middle of a fiscal year, the troops will actually run out of money until the supplemental is resolved.

Mr. Hoyer. In the first instance, the troops are going to run out of money. This administration has never once funded properly this effort in Iraq or Afghanistan. Never once. The fault, Dear Brutus -- that was not correct -- lies in the administration. You get the point, as butchered as Shakespeare was at that point in time.

The point is clear though that if they had properly anticipated the cost of this war and ask asked for the proper funds for this war, we wouldn't be in this situation. If the Republican Congress had passed appropriate budgets to fund this effort, we wouldn't have been in this position. We're in this position, however, that \$100 billion, \$145 billion is underfunded.

We're moving it and we moved every dollar they asked for and then some in this supplemental.

Q Have you any indication that the White House wants to talk?

Mr. Hoyer. Do I? We've met with the President three or four times, and the President keeps saying he wants to work in a bipartisan fashion. We're prepared to do that.

Dave, you had a follow-up.

Q Last year the sup ran into June?

Mr. Hoyer. Under Republicans.

Q I understand. Are you able to say that you will work this out by May 1st or Memorial Day?

Mr. Hoyer. Am I able to say that? No, I'm not able to say that. I hope that's the case.

Q So at what point do you think you would make this outreach to the President? Would that be before the conference starts?

Mr. Hoyer. There's no plan to make an outreach. My response was that I certainly think that talking to the President about how we can resolve an impasse that he anticipates there being when you have the legislative branch and the executive branch have a difference of opinion on the policies that ought to be pursued, the proper thing to do is to have those entities talking to one another. I'm hoping we can do that.

Q If I could follow up on the D.C. vote, how do you intend to get around the procedural issues raised by the Republicans. Are you considering --

Mr. Hoyer. Successfully?

Q Are you considering not allowing them to do motions to recommit?

Mr. Hoyer. No, we don't need to do that. What happened here is that we adopted PAYGO. When we pay for things -- you recall the amendment to the water bill which had to do with maritime licenses. I don't know whether you remember, but some of you remember.

Obviously the maritime license had nothing to do with the water bill, what it had to do with was PAYGO. So what we've done by adopting PAYGO is to very substantially broaden the germaneness rule and so we find ourselves in a position where we need to address that or we're going to be on every bill, whether it's a water bill, a D.C. voting rights bill, whatever, to an amendment that is totally unrelated to the substance of the bill. We don't think that's appropriate, we don't think that serves the legislative process, and we're going to address that.

So the answer to your question is over the next 15 days I'm going to be working very hard and my staff is going to be working hard and the Speaker is going to be working hard to assure that we pass that bill in a way that is acceptable to the majority members of the House and the Senate.

Q How about absolute discipline on motion to recommit like the Republicans did?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, the Republicans didn't have absolute

discipline. What I told you before is we're not interested in got-you amendments.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:06 p.m., the press conference was concluded.]