

PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MAJORITY LEADER,

STENY H. HOYER

Tuesday, June 16, 2009

11:00 a.m.

Mr. Hoyer. Good morning.

At 8:30 a.m. -- oh, this is -- I did open the House for the former Members.

We are going to go in at 12:00. We will consider several bills under suspension. We expect to consider the conference report on the supplemental. We also expect to begin consideration of Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriation Act, and the last votes will be this evening, sometime.

Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, we will continue the CJS appropriations bill. We will do the Homeland Security Appropriations Act. Representative Price's bill. And we also expect to take up the articles of impeachment against Judge Samuel Kent, who, as you know, was found guilty but has refused to resign, so the committee -- I don't know whether it was unanimous vote, but an overwhelming vote -- voted to impeach him. I don't expect that to take a long time, but I do expect to act on it.

The supplemental provides -- in excess of 80 percent of the bill deals with the funding of our troops, who have been sent by our country in harm's way in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Pakistan border, and is to fund those troops for the balance of the year.

The bill also includes three other items, a number of other items, but primarily it includes the IMF funding, which the President pledged the United States to participate with our partners in the G-20, which made a determination to bring

investment in economic growth all over the world and to bring some of the poorest countries into a place where they are not as much a drag on themselves and on others, that there would be additional assistance given to them through the mechanism of the International Monetary Fund Loan Guarantee Programs.

The President indicated that we would do our part, which is about 20 percent, of the pledged money from the G-20 states. I have handed out for you a -- which I have used. IMF funding is critical to our recovery and security.

Again, I want to stress that 80 percent -- this is a \$5 billion item in an \$800 billion bill. So it is a relatively small portion of the bill. But the Republicans are acting as if somehow the President of the United States has done something that Presidents haven't done for 40 years. In fact, we have included quotes here from Ronald Reagan, George Bush, the first, and George Bush, the second, other Republicans indicating how important they believe this funding is.

In addition, we respond to the assertions that somehow this is going to help Iran or it is going to help Hezbollah or somebody else. We don't believe that is accurate. The United States plays a significant role in the decision-making process, and we think this is largely a rationalization for the Republicans' expressed intent to oppose the funding for the troops. And they are going to say, well, we voted for it before. Obviously in the legislative process, it wasn't in our bill. It was added in the

Senate bill. The President believes it is important. Previous Presidents have believed it was important. We believe it is important.

In addition, the World Health Organization has now declared the swine flu or the H1N1 flu as the first worldwide flu epidemic in 41 years. As a result, this bill carries some \$6 billion to \$7 billion in funding, expanded funding to address the immunization issue. I think that is critically important.

And I think this bill is critically important for the stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan. We hope that the Republicans do not conclude that saying no is the politically most advantageous place for them to be. I indicated that in my colloquy with Representative Cantor last week.

Secondly, on health care. Health care, as you know, is one of two major issues that we hope to confront; we intend to confront over the next 6 weeks, the other being energy. Health reform is not a luxury. It is a necessity. We need to bring costs down. Reforming health care will benefit all of our people with lower costs, greater choices and improved access to quality, affordable care. We want to fix what is broken and build on what works.

Opponents of reform, in our opinion, are playing politics of fear in the ways revisited to talking about this, that and the other, and what their asserting is simply not true. First of all, the bill that we provide for and offer will ensure choice, the

choice of insurance, the choice of doctors, the choice of hospitals. This has -- we have no intent of proposing that -- if Americans like what they have, then they can certainly keep it. That will be their choice.

It will expand and improve availability of high-quality care and help doctors provide the best treatment for their patients. We invested in that in the Recovery and Security Act, and we intend to continue to do that in the health care reform bill.

Furthermore, it will provide for a public option, but it will guarantee a level playing field. This is not a proposal to transist from what we have now to a new system. This is going to be a uniquely American system, again guaranteeing the choice that people want and now have. But it will also guarantee that there will be a level playing field for that competition between private-sector insurers and any public plan that is available to them. I expect that plan to be worked on this week, and perhaps we will see how the committee gets to either putting a plan this week or next week on the table for consideration.

Q Could you repeat that?

Mr. Hoyer. This week or -- the latter part of this week or next week, I expect to have a plan put on the table. I think we are making good progress toward that end.

Now, let me say something on the appropriation bills. We are starting on the appropriation bills today. I have indicated that we are going to complete the appropriations process in the House

in terms of the initial passing of legislation by July 30th, by the time we go on the August break. Nobody in the House, Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, likes omnibus bills. Everybody articulates a desire to follow regular order. To achieve regular order, we must have regular order.

There are 127 amendments that have been filed to this bill. In 2005, when the Republicans were in charge, there were 30 amendments filed to this bill, 30; 19 Republican amendments to their own bill and 11 Democratic amendments. In 2006, there were 46 amendments; 19 Republican and 27 Democratic amendments. They have filed 102 amendments. That is more amendments than they filed in 2 years, and I am getting the statistics because I was shocked by the number.

We want to have a process that is open and available to the minority as well as the majority. On the other hand, it is clear that if you gave 10 minutes, 5 minutes a side to 127 amendments, that is 21 hours. That is 21 legislative hours. That is probably 3 days or 2 very long days of work, and we will not be able to get 12 bills done in that context.

I am hopeful that Mr. Obey and Mr. Lewis will be able to reach agreement and that we will be able to reach an agreement with the Republican minority to move forward in a way that provides openness and availability of amendments but also that provides for the consideration of these bills within a time frame of regular order which has historically been followed and achieved

doing the bills individually and not being put in a position at the end of the process of bundling all these bills together and doing an omnibus.

You can't have it both ways. You can't filibuster by amendment and want to pursue regular order at the same time. You have to do one or the other. And hopefully we will do the other, meaning regular order.

Let me stop with that and give you your turn.

Q Mr. Leader, the Defense Authorization bill is being marked up today here. In this supplemental today, the conference committee stripped out the photo language, which results in the question about Guantanamo Gay. It seems like this Gitmo issue is still alive and is going to be talked about in some capacity, mainly driven by the Republicans for sometime here. Don't know if the Conaway amendment or Forbes amendment, what their chances are there, but I mean, that issue seems like it is still alive, even though it is not alive and present in this bill here today. How do you inoculate yourself against that as Democrats as the GOP continues to hammer on it?

Mr. Hoyer. The President made it very clear what his policy objective was. Many Republicans joined that, including George Bush in the latter days of his -- over 500 detainees have been released from Guantanamo during the course of the Bush administration. Over 500 detainees were released.

And President Obama told the American people that if he were

elected, he wanted to close down Guantanamo. He has set up a process to do that in a rational way that provides for the closure but also provides for the security of the American people.

. Obviously, I think your premise is probably correct that this is going to be pursued as an issue. I don't know that we can preclude that in every instance or that we are going to be about trying to do that in every instance. It is to say, however, that my view of the President of the United States is pursuing a policy to effect the closure of Guantanamo, which he said to the American people he would do if they elected him -- they elected him -- and do so in a way that preserves the security of the American people.

Q To follow up, do you think this is purely a political effort by the Republicans because historically they have painted Democrats as being weak when it comes to security issues and they see a vulnerability here?

Mr. Hoyer. They have historically done that. I am not going to go through my whole litany of the last century. But in the last century, without going through the litany, if you think about it, it was Democratic Presidents that led the confrontation of those who would undermine freedom and democracy by force throughout the last century.

Now, Ronald Reagan did as well. But all the times that we confronted communists, contained communists, confronted Nazism and fascism, there were Democratic Presidents that led that effort. Bill Clinton did so as well in Bosnia and brought down and stopped

genocide without losing a single American troop to hostile fire. So I think it is a weak argument at best, but it is an argument they continue to make.

Q On the program cuts, spending reductions recommended by the various committee chairmen in response to the request from leadership, do you anticipate those will be reflected in this year's spending bills, or is that more of a longer-term process?

Mr. Hoyer. I think, in some respects, they may be. When you say "anticipate," obviously the Speaker directed them, and we had to put in our rules that they would do so.

As you know, the Tanner amendment essentially to the rules saying you have to look at waste, fraud and abuse. We want to get rid of waste, fraud and abuse. It is an ongoing, never-ending process of doing so. But my expectation is that will be reflected in some of the bills, but it will also be an ongoing process as well.

Q Is there any kind of ballpark figure as how much savings are recommended by the Chairmen?

Mr. Hoyer. As much as they can find. I don't have a figure?

Q ABC plans to air a prime-time show out of the White House, but it refused to allow the Republican National Committee representation on that show. Is it wrong for ABC to do that, excluding opposing voices?

Mr. Hoyer. I am not familiar -- ABC did a very substantial coverage with the President and the First Family. What are they

going to do the coverage on? I ought to know more about it, I guess, but I don't. Are they doing it on a subject?

Q It is about health care reform.

Mr. Hoyer. Without putting you to the trouble of doing that, this is not the DNC. This is the President of the United States elected by all of the American people to be the leader of our Nation. ABC is covering the President in his capacity as President and as a principal player in policymaking in our Nation.

I will refrain from personal references, I suppose, of the RNC's leadership. But, you know, if Mr. Boehner or Mr. McConnell or others want to comment, I am sure ABC would cover them. So I don't want to make a comment on their covering the President on his position on health care.

As you know, he had a health care forum, which was a bipartisan forum in the White House with -- as a matter of fact, Senator Grassley and Senator McConnell and other Republicans making comments and were covered by the press.

Q Mr. Leader, on the schedule, you did not mention climate change. Are you expecting it next week? And do you have any concern that if it doesn't come up next week, that it would be a negative sign, loss of momentum?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, let me say, let me refresh your memories; you may not have remembered that I said this. I have said that it was going to come up either the last week in June or the first week that we came back in July, and I have said that consistently.

So, from my perspective, if we do it next week, that will be consistent with what I said. If we did it the first week back, because it is what I said. I think the chairman of the committee, Mr. Waxman, clearly wants to get it moving and resolved from the House so that he can concentrate full firepower on the health care bill. But I think that is understandable.

As you know, there are significant discussions going on, particularly between Ag and Energy and Commerce, Mr. Peterson and Mr. Waxman, with reference to resolving some of the differences that they have. We will have to see how they proceed. I was talking to the Speaker yesterday. She was in some of those meetings last week, as you know, and she believed that they were positive. And progress is being made, but I don't want to predict that progress is going to be made rapidly enough for us to do this next week.

But I would be of the opinion still that the schedule that I have been telling her about the last 3 months is still applicable, either next week, which is the last week before the July 4th week, or the first week we come back.

Q Mr. Leader, has the White House indicated to you or have you discussed with them at all a plan to classify the photos in question to sort of take it off you guys' plate? It seems there is an impasse here, and that is the way out that people are talking about. Have you heard what they are going to talk about?

Mr. Hoyer. I think the President has made his position

pretty clear in terms of those papers -- photos. And I think that, in passing the supplemental or in reaching agreement on the supplemental, Mr. Lieberman and Mr. Graham both indicated that they were, you know, that if either the White House by executive order or legislation precludes those photos from being released, which the White House agrees with them, may well pose some danger to our troops in the field currently because it exacerbates and inflames individuals who might then carry out greater terrorist efforts against our troops.

I think that we will have to see specifically what the executive order says, assuming there is going to be an executive order on those. But the administration hasn't changed its position. It made it very clear that they believe the release of these pictures is not appropriate.

I think the Congress made it very clear, certainly over here, that we don't think that FOIA ought to be simply struck in this instance. If the President makes an exception to FOIA, that is one thing, but precluding FOIA in this instance was not acceptable to the House.

Q The White House told you that they plan to do that soon?

Mr. Hoyer. I think -- I have reason to believe that they are looking to that as an option so that they can resolve this issue.

Yes?

Q Mr. Leader, do you expect to get a briefing sometime today on the pending White House proposal on financial regulation

and what kind of Democratic reaction do you expect from those proposals?

Mr. Hoyer. I don't expect a briefing today.

Anybody know about a briefing today?

There may be a staff level briefing, I am told. But I don't expect a briefing -- I don't have a briefing on my schedule today. So if there is a briefing, I am not in the loop.

But I have talked to Barney Frank. We have talked in these meetings, pen and pads, about financial regulation. Clearly the President believes, we believe, and Chairman Frank believes that doing regulatory reform is a necessary step for us to take following the debacle that occurred by the lack of effective regulation, part of which had nothing to do, in my view -- this is my view -- with the law, but with the philosophy of the Bush administration, which was simply, get out of the way; take the referees off the field; the financial community will regulate itself.

Greenspan said he thought that, and he made a mistake. I think he is right; he made a mistake. But I think that the former administration's regulatory philosophy was, just get out of the way, and everything will be fine. They got out of the way, and everything was not fine. And as usually happens when you take the referees off the field, the little guys get hurt, and an awful millions of little people who had nothing, no complicity in the failures that occurred and the risks that were undertaken. Some

people undertook risks they shouldn't have taken, but some people who knew much better shouldn't have given them the credit that they were extending. So I think we are going to move ahead on regulatory reform.

My thought is that regulatory reform will be very much focus of the Financial Services Committee next month and that either late next month, but more probably early fall, we will consider legislation dealing with regulatory reform.

Q Mr. Hoyer, are you confident that you have the votes on the supplemental?

Mr. Hoyer. I think we have the votes. "Confident" might overstate it. I think we have the votes, to that degree I am confident. I think that clearly there is controversy on this, as we have seen, as is self-evident. That is not a news flash to any of you. And one of the problems is we had some very deep-seated philosophical views that pursuing Afghanistan and Iraq with additional funding is not appropriate. A large number of our people believe that, and they voted that way. They voted that way under Bush, and they voted that way under Obama.

On the other hand, there is a conflict because they believe that, frankly, the funding for the troops in the field is appropriate until you take them out of the field. You just can't leave them there. So they are trying to make a point.

Now, what has happened is, there are, we saw last vote, 368 people who believe that funding the troops in the field is the

appropriate action to take. The Senate added IMF. The Republicans are now using IMF, in my opinion, to, number one, apparently it is a policy they don't like; but number two, to try to embarrass the Democrats, as if not funding the troops when you have 368 people in the House who want to do that will somehow be perceived by the American people as the Democrats not doing that, even though a majority of Democrats, a very substantial majority of Democrats, will vote for funding the troops.

So the Republicans -- we had 368. So that is at least 100 Republicans; 100-plus Republicans. I don't know exactly what it was off the top of my head, how many Republicans we got. But over 100. Well over -- as a matter of fact, we got all but three Republicans, I guess, voted for it, and well over 100 and 50 Democrats voting for it, maybe closer to 180 Democrats voting for it. Clearly a substantial majority.

The Republicans walked off the floor last year or the year before when we voted on and then laughed because the Democrats didn't have the votes because we have a division in our party, two-thirds, three-quarters the party believes as long as the troops are there, you have to support them.

Q Do you expect the vote today?

Mr. Hoyer. Today or tomorrow.

Q Today or tomorrow?

Mr. Hoyer. Yeah, I think -- but I think we are bringing it forward -- we are bringing it forward today.

Q One more real quick one. Technically, I think the transportation bill Mr. Oberstar is introducing today, you don't expect it to come up before July? But sometime in July do you think? No?

Mr. Hoyer. Chairman Oberstar has got a very substantial proposal, which I think is a bipartisan proposal, coming out of his committee. I think he is in conversations with the administration.

I think there will need to be some additional action taken with respect to the Highway Fund. As you know, we did some interim funding earlier in year. I think there needs to be some probably additional funding because I think the Highway Trust Fund is going to go to a place where it doesn't have funds left, and obviously, we don't want construction to stop. We are trying to -- that would make it much more costly to complete the projects that are underway.

But I don't expect -- we were hopeful that we could do something early June. But the schedule for the next 6 weeks is so crammed full with the Defense Authorization bill, as I mentioned, the Intelligence Authorization bill, 12 Appropriations bills, energy and health care. I mean, it is a very, very full and optimistic agenda. I understand that is a heavy load. So I doubt that we will be able to get other major pieces of legislation like the Highway Trust Fund bill in there. But I also believe that they have -- they are continuing to work on it. Mr. Oberstar is

working very hard.

Q If you are not going to raise the gas tax, where will you get the money?

Mr. Hoyer. I don't want to speculate on that. I don't want to speculate on that at this point in time.

Thank you very much?

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