# PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MAJORITY LEADER,

# STENY H. HOYER

***

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11:07 a.m.

Mr. Hoyer. Hello. How is everybody this morning? Good. Well, we are glad you're here. I'm glad you're here.

Energy, obviously one of the major issues confronting this country. Relying on foreign oil, Pickens is right, we need to change that. We passed a very significant energy bill in '07, the most significant energy bill. Contrary to the Republican claims in '05 that their bill was going to solve the problem, bring prices down, make energy readily available, obviously they were wrong. In fact, the opposite has happened.

We will be offering an energy bill on the floor today, which we believe does some very important things. We open up additional areas for drilling. And the American public believes we ought to utilize our resources. We share that view, as you know. We have indicated that 80 percent of the identifiable reserves are now open. We're going to expand that. And every State will be impacted on the coastlines. In addition, of course, Colorado and Wyoming and Utah will also be impacted in terms of the oil shale, which people say there is a lot of product there. The technology may not yet be available, but all of these options will be available.

Secondly, invest in energy sources for the 21st century, like wind and solar, which we did in the '07 bill, which we think we need to expand upon. Obviously, the American public realizes that if we're going to be energy independent, it will be because we

make a very substantial investment and develop alternative sources of energy.

One of the ways we do that is to, again -- we've tried to do this a number of times -- take those resources that the American taxpayer is now required to pay because of the energy tax breaks that the energy companies have been given, take those resources and put them into renewables. We think that is a much better investment of the taxpayers' money.

We also believe that companies that are making their largest profits in history don't need incentives to sell more product. They make a lot of money. That is the way the private sector ought to work. We think the Republicans don't understand the private sector if they think you're making the most profit you've ever made and you still need tax incentives to continue to do business.

We also, in this bill, focus on greater energy efficiency and conservation.

Hopefully the Republicans can take yes for an answer, hopefully, the Republicans that have been talking about all of the above, the additional drilling, which this bill provides for, and alternative sources and renewable sources of energy and investment in those, which this bill does.

We included, I think, in your packet a quote from Senator Cornyn, who is the vice chairwoman of the Republican conference, that said that -- "Republicans say they have had success blaming

Democrats for high gas prices for their refusal to allow offshore drilling. From a political standpoint, I think it does sort of muddy the message." What he means by muddying his message is a bill that expands offshore oil drilling, that expands drilling onshore, the options for that. And hopefully the Republicans will not simply opt for political slogans, but will opt for energy solutions, which we think our bill does.

Now, secondly, we have offered a lot of bills related to speculation; the Republicans voted no. Related to alternative research and development, the Republicans have noted no. Price gouging, the Republicans voted no.

Interesting enough, I met with the hotel association earlier today, and one of the two things they were talking about was price gouging and speculation ought to be dealt with, interestingly enough, because they're concerned about high gas prices precluding people, consumers getting to their hotels. So they are not known as the Democratic Party spokesmen. They're not necessarily opponents of the Democratic Party, but my point to you is that speculation and price gouging -- we see prices spiking in some places to $5 before the hurricane hit Galveston, not because oil supplies had precipitously dropped.

Now, let me say on the economy -- I'll try to be quick so we can do questions. Many of us said the President's economic program will not work. We were right. Dick Armey said, when he was majority leader, that President Clinton's economic program

would not work. He was dead-flat-wrong. We now see the worst economic conditions in our country in perhaps half a century or longer.

The Republicans essentially, and this administration, took the referee off the field. They don't believe in a referee. They don't believe in regulation. They don't believe in rules. They don't believe in playing by the rules. And as a result, we've seen crisis in large part because of irresponsibility, of speculation, of the incurring of great debt without any attachment to responsibility and ability to repay.

Senator McCain's comments, that mirrors President Bush's comments, that the economy is fundamentally sound. The stock market was at 10,548, give or take a point, on January of 2001. The stock market right now is at about, what, 20 -- I mean about 10, 6 or 7, less than a 3 percent rise in the value, which means, with inflation, everybody who had any investment has lost money in a 401(k) or Keogh plan or something of that nature, any savings plan or pension plan. They've lost money.

Unlike the Clinton years, where it went up 226 percent, it is up about 2.5 percent now. That is the stark failure of the economy and this administration's economic laissez-faire, take the referee off the field, let anybody do whatever they want to do and everything will be fine. Everything is not fine. And contrary to Senator McCain and President Bush, the American public knows it. And frankly, the investing community knows it as well, and that is

why the stock market has taken such a dive.

On the housing market, it is interesting, there was a quote, Mike Oxley, who was the Republican chairman of the Banking Committee, talks about regulation of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. He said, "All the hand-wringing and bed-wetting is going on without remembering how the House stepped up on this. What did we get from the White House? We got a one-finger salute." That is Mike Oxley, Republican chairman, Banking Committee. When the Republicans were in charge of everything, the White House said we are not going to support the regulations that were passed. And, in fact, in 1994, John LaFalce offered legislation on subprime, and we passed it, it became law, and Greenspan would not enforce it.

Republican policies have been a failure, and the American consumer and families are paying the price.

On ADA, I'm very pleased. As you know, I was the sponsor of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Senate has now passed its version of the Americans with Disabilities Act amendments to correct what we believe were faulty decisions by the Supreme Court. It passed the House with 407 votes, 17 votes opposed. It passed the Senate. They didn't have a voice vote on it, but it was therefore unanimous.

We are going to pass the Senate bill tomorrow, and hopefully it will be signed next week by the President. Hopefully, President Bush the first will be present. He was a strong

supporter of the ADA. This fixes and puts the ADA in a position of protecting people with disabilities who want employment and will not be able to be discriminated against, contrary to the Supreme Court ruling. So I'm very pleased that that is a big success.

Lastly, I just want to mention this. The Wall Street Journal reports that Governor Palin, not Mayor Palin, asked for $453 million in earmarks over the last 18 months for Alaska.

Truth-telling is important. Enough said on that issue.

Questions?

Q Barney Frank is talking about the possibility of creating a Resolution Trust Corporation-type entity that would buy mortgages and distressed debt. What do you think of the idea, and what is the prospect for this year of something like that?

Mr. Hoyer. We've had brief discussions on that, simply in Chairman Frank indicating he was interested in that, but we have not had any in-depth discussions on that.

And, as you know, the speaker and I are both focused on the September 26th adjournment. Quite obviously, this idea will have to be discussed with the Administration, will have to be thoughtfully considered. So it is unclear now exactly where Chairman Frank wants to go on that.

Q You're saying not this year?

Mr. Hoyer. No, I'm not saying that. I'm saying that I don't think it is going to happen in the next 14 days. We'll see what

the balance of the year holds for us.

Q One quick question on the D.C. gun bill, which is supposed to come up on the floor tonight. You and Speaker Pelosi have been strong supporters of more autonomy for D.C. The bill that is expected to pass would strike from D.C. gun laws --

Mr. Hoyer. You mean the amendment, the amendment that would be offered to the bill? Yes.

Q Exactly, yes. Exactly. Are you throwing D.C. under the bus for the --

Mr. Hoyer. I intend to oppose the amendment.

Q Right. But, I mean --

Mr. Hoyer. And Speaker Pelosi is going oppose the amendment.

Q Right. But you obviously let this go to the floor. So why are you doing that, given your other support for D.C.?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I'm still in the same place I was with D.C. I think that what we did was pass out of committee a bill which I think reflects our position that the District of Columbia ought to be pursuing the compliance with the Supreme Court decision and that the D.C. city council and the mayor ought to do that. That is still my position, and that is why I will oppose the amendment.

Q The Governor of Virginia has already decided not to allow offshore drilling because Virginia is not getting a cut. Do you expect any of the Governors to approve offshore drilling if they're getting nothing out of it?

Mr. Hoyer. The American public clearly believes that we

ought to utilize America's resources. This legislation reflects that view. I would hope that Governors of the respective States looking at this issue would respond to those very same constituents and provide for facilitating us becoming energy-independent and not relying on foreign oil.

Q Mr. Hoyer, last week you said that the auto loan guarantees would go on this stimulus bill --

Mr. Hoyer. If I said that specifically, I think I was responding to a question. But in any event, I did say that, but there are other options for that bill.

Q Right. Given that people are skeptical that the stimulus bill will make it through the Senate --

Mr. Hoyer. Yeah. And there are other options being discussed.

Q Are you going to put it on the CR --

Mr. Hoyer. There are other options being discussed. CR is one of them.

Q Is it going to become law before you adjourn, or will it become -- do you think it will become law before the election?

Mr. Hoyer. We're supporting it. The vehicle is still being discussed.

Q Mr. Hoyer, what do you see are the issues surrounding Mr. Rangel? I know that there has been a lot of talk, maybe formally or informally, about that. But what are the potential issues here that do trouble some in your party about him still

being the Chair of Ways and Means?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I think there have been questions raised in newspaper articles. Chairman Rangel has asked that the Ethics Committee, the Committee on Official Conduct, Standards of Official Conduct, Chairman Rangel has asked them to look into that. I would hope they do so expeditiously and resolve that matter.

Q But is there a cloud that in any way, regardless of whether or not --

Mr. Hoyer. Any time a question is raised, questions are raised and there are questions. Chairman Rangel, to his credit, has asked the Ethics Committee; nobody had to initiate the request. Chairman Rangel, himself, has initiated that request. And my hope is and belief is that the Ethics Committee will respond to it immediately -- it may not be tomorrow, but immediately in the sense that now, starting now -- and would respond to Chairman Rangel's request and remove that cloud or determine whether or not there is cause for further action.

Q Do you think he should give his gavel up?

Mr. Hoyer. No. I don't think there is any reason. He has done exactly what a Member should do, and that is asked the Committee on Official Conduct to review all of the matters and all of the issues that have been raised. My expectation and my request of the committee would be that they do so and they do so now.

Q Considering the glacial --

Q Is Mr. Rangel's position and the question of what he has done any kind of potential political liability for you guys?

Mr. Hoyer. Any time questions are raised about politicians it is a political question. But the fact of the matter is we have a process.

That process -- and let me anticipate your question in terms of the glacial -- I would hope that they would consider it now and would consider it expeditiously.

Q Could be done in 14 days?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I don't know if it could be done in 14 days. I don't want to prejudge the time frame which that will take. But I would hope it would be done expeditiously and thoroughly by the committee.

Q It appears in the Senate the deal is coming together which would see renewable energy credits fully offset and others, such as the R&D and the tuition, only partially offset.

Mr. Hoyer. Well, it is better to do something half-right than not to do it at all. And we'll certainly try to move the paid-for extenders on the energy issue with dispatch; in other words, soon. We haven't gotten it from the Senate yet, but I look forward to getting that part of it. The part that is not paid for, we'll look at, but we want to move the energy extenders paid for. We said that at the beginning. We moved it some months ago. We're sorry that it has taken so long for the Senate to do it, but

we think that is a very important piece for us to pass. And we will make arrangements for the energy extenders which the Senate passes paid for be passed through the House and sent back to them.

Q How likely is a second economic stimulus package? What might it contain? What are its prospects for passing?

Mr. Hoyer. I talked about how the economy, as the result of administration policies, is in very bad shape, and our ability to respond has been substantially weakened by the irresponsible fiscal policies that have been pursued over the last 8 years by this administration, or 7 1/2 years by this administration, which has taken a $5.6 trillion surplus and now turned it into a well-over-$4 trillion deficit, which undermines our ability to respond effectively.

Having said that, we believe that a stimulus package is called for. And we are working on a stimulus package right now. Mr. Obey is working on that. I would hope that we would be able to consider that in the near term. It could be this week, it could be the first part of next week.

I expect infrastructure to be a major portion of that because we need to invest in our infrastructure but, more importantly, create American jobs.

We also need to address the energy crisis that people who have limited means are going to have on their heating and their air conditioning bill. Air conditioning bill largely being summer, largely being in the Southwest where extraordinary --

there are more deaths as a result of the lack of air conditioning than there are the lack of heat in America.

I was astounded to hear that, but that is what I learned at the -- where is the newspaper I was at? Arizona Republic. The Arizona Republic. I'm assuming that is correct.

Q That is why you couldn't remember the name.

Mr. Hoyer. Maybe. The Republic, right, that's right. The Arizona Democrat would have come right to me, right?

[Laughter.]

In any event, we think that LIHEAP will be a part of that.

Obviously, unemployment insurance. We see unemployment spiking. It went from 5.7 to 6.1 in 1 month. That is a very healthy, unfortunate rise. We think the States need help. I mentioned last week Medicare, Medicaid, FMAP in terms of Medicaid. We're looking at that as a component part. Job training may also be under consideration.

I think it will be limited, simple, straightforward, will deal with jobs and economic stimulus. But I think there is a very great possibility that that will be moved to the floor either later this week or the first part of next week.

Q Mr. Hager, the acting director of OPM, said yesterday that he thought that you two were probably not that far away in terms of that proposal you had for a 4-day workweek to save energy for Federal workers.

And what is your understanding now of -- you know, he sent

you a letter and responded to you. But what is your --

Mr. Hoyer. Actually, he responded to me, and then I responded to his letter. His initial -- it was an interesting response. I don't know whether you saw all of the response, but the response was, "We don't like your idea," and he attached to it an OPM memorandum which said almost exactly what my letter said, which I sent back to him. And I said, "Well, your memorandum says this will save money, save gas, you know, help on recruiting and all that sort of stuff. So I'm glad that we're now closer together." And he is looking at the memorandum that he sent to me ironically.

So it makes sense. Nobody is saying -- John Boehner's response was "big boon for Federal employees." It's not a big boon for Federal employees; they have to work a 40-hour workweek. Whether they do it 4 days or they do it 5 days, you know, is presumably the 40 hours they are getting their work done.

And the proposal, which seems to me to make eminent sense, which is what the memorandum said, saving gas. You take 20 percent of the Federal workers. Now, we're essentially a one-industry town, you know. Most of the people that come into town come in to work for the Federal Government. You take 20 percent of them off the roads every day, which means you have 80 percent of the people working in the offices. The offices are operating.

There may be exceptions, obviously. This is not a mandatory

program. Obviously, you may have an office that needs 100 percent of its security, listeners at NSA or something. Obviously, if that is the case, you do that. This is an optional program.

But it seemed to me to make a lot of sense. I'm glad that Hager and Hoyer now are closer together. And I'm looking forward to getting his letter that says that, now that he has told you.

But I'm hopeful that we can pursue this, because I don't see any downside to it at all.

Q Are you still intending to adjourn or at least go away for the election by the end of next week?

Mr. Hoyer. "Go away"?

[Laughter.]

No matter what they want, we're not going away. We stand here prepared to fight on the beaches, to fight in the neighborhoods. You know, we are not going away.

Let me say something about the scheduling. The 26th of September is the last day, essentially, we are scheduled to be here, and then the next week on the 29th the Jewish holidays begin, I believe, at sundown and go to -- we always take off for the Jewish holidays. The following week there is another Jewish holiday. The following week there is an Italian holiday called Columbus Day, where the Italians claim that Columbus discovered America, when, as I told you last week, we all know that Leif Ericson discovered America. He just didn't have a good PR guy like those Italians.

[Laughter.]

My father was, as you know, born in Copenhagen, as Mary Beth has told everybody in the world. So the fact of the matter is we've got 3 weeks in a row that there is going to be maybe 2 days, 2 1/2 days you could meet. All of you know that the Members on both sides of the aisle will be very enthusiastic about interrupting, 30 days before the election, their ability to say to the people, "I have done a good job; would you re-elect me?"

So, as a practical matter, I looked at the schedule, the 26th of September seems to be the last practicable date -- I spoke awfully fast on all that, didn't I -- that we can meet. We believe that we can get work done that needs to be done.

Secondly, we haven't had a very productive relationship with the United States Senate on passing stuff. We passed regulation of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in April of '07 -- April of '07. It didn't pass until 17, 18 months later. We just passed it not too long ago.

And, you know, this is constantly going back and forth. We didn't seem too productive with the administration either. But we think their priorities are not our priorities and we didn't have agreement, which is why the appropriations process has not proceeded the way I would have liked. I would have liked to have passed our bills seriatim, one at a time, had full consideration on the floor, as we did last year. That was not to be, unfortunately.

Q Is it possible for a lame-duck session?

Mr. Hoyer. The truthful answer: Of course it is possible; we hope that is not going to happen.

I don't think lame-duck sessions are particularly productive. I think that, first of all, you have a lot of Members who either have left the Congress, are not going to be subject to re-election or were defeated. And, therefore, to some degree, you have a significant group of people who are no longer responsible too constituents for what they do in voting. Now, you have the same thing with Members who are going to retire voting now. I understand that. But if we could avoid a lame-duck session, I would like to do that.

Q You said Barney Frank's proposal couldn't happen in the next 2 weeks. I thought you suggested, well, maybe later in the year. But now you're saying --

Mr. Hoyer. Well, what I'm saying is we are scheduled, for the reasons that I have just told you, which I think hopefully you think are reasonable. It's not like we made up something; it's just that we have limited time.

The reality is -- Chairman Frank mentioned this -- very significant policy issue, very significant undertaking, obviously going to take some time to discuss. My only point was it seemed to me very difficult to conceive of us doing a major step like that. We are going to have to work closely with the administration. Even the stimulus package, on which we were all

onboard, took us, what, 45 days, from House initiation to Senate passage, the middle of February or the first week in February I guess, somewhere in that neighborhood. That was my point.

Now, whether or not -- if we come back, you know, and this is moving ahead, Chairman Frank may be having -- is he having hearings on it did he say? He didn't mention that. He mentioned the idea. Now, whether or not -- I don't know whether he scheduled hearings on it or not.

But I will talk to him tomorrow. We meet tomorrow, and I'll ask him.

Q -- part of the stimulus package, disaster aid --

Mr. Hoyer. I think disaster aid, again -- sort of like the answer I gave here -- it is going to be on a vehicle. I think, clearly, we want to respond to the floods in Iowa, the Midwest. We want to respond to the hurricane, not just in Texas but any other consequential -- and we have two hurricanes now that we need to respond to.

So the answer is, whether it is on the stimulus, whether it is on the CR, whether it is on some other vehicle. We've got defense bills pending, both appropriations -- you know, we want an appropriation bill, and also the defense authorization they are considering in the Senate. I mean, so there are vehicles moving that we hope are signed.

So the answer to your question is that we will do a disaster aid bill. Strike that. We are going to do disaster aid. It is

not going to be a separate bill; it will be on something.

Thank you all very, very much.

[Whereupon, at 11:35 a.m., the press conference was concluded.]