PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MAJORITY LEADER,

STENY H. HOYER

***

Tuesday, May 4, 2010

1:05 p.m.

Mr. Hoyer. Good afternoon. Thank you very much for being here.

We meet at 2:00 today in order to consider several bills under suspensions, as you know. We're going to do the Haiti Economic Lift Program Act of 2010 on Wednesday. And Thursday we'll do the Home Star Energy Retrofit Act of 2010, otherwise known as Cash for Caulkers, which we believe will be as substantial as Cash for Clunkers was, a jobs program encouraging people to retrofit their homes which will be energy efficient, save us energy, and will also create, we think, thousands and thousands of jobs in the private sector. So we think that's good legislation.

The Speaker, as you know, had one of her economic forums this morning. I was there. Very productive, I thought. The bottom line was, as you would expect from the economists that were there who had been working with us over the years, that there was a consensus certainly in that group, unanimity in that group, that the Recovery and Reinvestment Act had made a very substantial difference, and that we created or retained well over 2 million jobs just from that program alone. The Home Star Energy Efficiency, though, which I referred to, is projected to create 168,000 jobs across the United States, allow 3 million families to make their homes more energy efficient and save them $9.2 billion

on their energy bills over the next 10 years. So from every perspective it has a very, very positive effect. And I'm hopeful that we will get some bipartisan support for that legislation when it comes to the floor.

Secondly, let me briefly reference we've had a real tragedy in the Gulf with respect to the oil spill. That is obviously far beyond what anybody projected that could happen. It is going to be therefore very, very important for us to look closely at why this happened, why we were not able to contain it more quickly. Clearly many representations have been made about how a spill of this magnitude could not happen. The administration's response has been very vigorous. They're working closely with BP, they're working very closely with the Governors in the community of Gulf States to try to minimize the damage to the coast, to fish and wildlife, and to the citizens. I think the administration has responded, as I said, decisively and quickly. The President was down there yesterday. Yesterday he was down there? Sunday, excuse me. Oh, yesterday was Monday, that's right. I keep thinking this is Monday. Down there on Sunday. I've spoken to Representative Melancon and others and offered any assistance that we can give obviously in the short term. They're not sure exactly what needs to be done. I think the President's decision to suspend any new drilling until such time as we determine exactly what caused this, we know generally what caused it, but why it was not mitigated prior to the explosion or why upon the explosion the

safety device to cap the well did not work properly. So we'll be looking at that.

Lastly, let me speak of the New York incident. I saw some of you at the dinner that we were at. Of course all of us didn't get the publicity that Luke got from the dinner, but notwithstanding that, I had no idea that this was going on. I saw Mayor Bloomberg at the dinner. But this is bad news in that someone would try to again hurt or kill innocent bystanders against whom there was no particular animus, which is by definition a terrorist act, but clearly we had an individual citizen act quickly and responsively, a group of citizens act quickly and responsively. The FBI and the New York Police Department responded very, very quickly and effectively. I think the fact that we have somebody in custody, and it's my understanding not only is he in custody but he's been cooperative, my understanding further is, I presume this is on the tickers already and you have this information, too, people have been arrested in Pakistan by Pakistan authorities who may have had some involvement in this incident. Obviously the person arrested, a U.S. citizen of Pakistani origin, but it would appear in this instance that we acted in a way that was very effective and successful.

However, having said that, it is clear that we are at risk here on this continent, as well as around the world, from the acts of terrorists of one type or another. We don't know exactly at this point in time who this individual was associated with. We'll

be finding that out over time. But it is clear that this administration holds national security and homeland security at a very, very high priority. Obviously, that was indicative of the administration's view when they submitted their budget, which is to make sure that the resources necessary for homeland security and national security are available as they are needed to effect the ends that keeps our Nation safe. Democrats are committed to that and working on that, and very frankly I think we've been successful at moving the security issue in a positive way. Been successful in Afghanistan, we've been successful in Iraq and been successful obviously and encourage our Pakistan allies to act in a way that gets at terrorists that are seeking refuge or have refuge in Pakistan and bringing them under control and into custody or eliminating them. And the Pakistani security people who have taken these two into custody that may have been involved in this incident I think are a perfect example of the successful steps the President and this administration have taken to ensure cooperation from the Pakistanis.

Let me stop with that and go to your questions.

Q Mr. Majority Leader, at the Pelosi event Dr. Blinder talked about the need to be efficient with the further creation helping the economy. You guys have been pretty adamant about safety issues like UI, COBRA, apparently TAMP should not be offset. I was wondering if there is any bearing on whether State and local, aid to State and local governments would not be offset

or should be offset?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, FMAP we don't think is going to be offset. There's some question on some of the other things. UI and Cobra and FMAP clearly have been agreed between the House and Senate that they are emergency matters that ought not to be offset. There was a lot of discussion in the meeting. It was a 3-hour meeting. I was there right up until the end. I was not at the press conference because I had an award that I received downtown. The group was -- I didn't hear the statement, this is Dr. Blinder?

Q Yes.

Mr. Hoyer. Both of them, almost everybody said the same thing with reference to the position of States and local governments. Very, very substantial reduction in revenues, very high risk of people being laid off; teachers, police, fire personnel being laid off. And in an economy that you're trying to resuscitate and keep people employed that's not a good thing, obviously. If we create 100,000 in the private sector, lose 100,000 in the public sector, there's a net zero there and that's not good for the economy. So there was a lot of discussion about how one of the high priorities needed to be assisting the State governments in particular and local government. I think there was an agreement on that. There was really no in-depth discussion about whether that ought to be paid for or not paid for, and we'll have to take that on an item-by-item basis.

Q Mr. Leader, isn't there when we caught a terrorist

suspect there was debate emerged about whether or not they should be Mirandized, a lot of debate? Do you think it's time for Congress to sit in and to clarify an emerging kind of area of law?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I don't know that it's an emerging area of law. This is a U.S. citizen arrested on U.S. soil and subject to the constitutional protections and constraints of every U.S. citizen. I don't know that that's -- obviously he is suspected of committing a crime. That is obviously putting together a device with the intent to kill people and to damage property. You know, even Glenn Beck, I understand, I didn't hear it, but even Glenn Beck says he's a U.S. citizen and he's deserving of constitutional rights. Nothing says that we can't convict and give appropriate punishment to people just because we give them their Miranda rights under the Constitution. So I'm not sure it's emerging. I think it's pretty much settled law and that this is a U.S. citizen. I don't think that's contested. And as I understand it, he was availed of the same rights that any other citizen would be given. Timothy McVeigh was treated in this way and Timothy McVeigh is arguably one of the single biggest terrorists we've seen in this country.

Mark?

Q Mr. Leader, can you explain to me the Puerto Rican situation, why there was a vote on the House? Sort of my understanding is directing the citizens of Puerto Rico to vote and do a two-step process for Congressman Gutierrez of Illinois. I

don't know if he voted against the rule, but issued a press release.

Mr. Hoyer. He voted against the rule.

Q And very much against this. And of course they have an ulterior motive. Do you see the day where Puerto Rico and D.C. can come in together with States similar to Alaska and Hawaii and is that a realistic possibility?

Mr. Hoyer. I don't think so, Mark. You know my view on this. The District of Columbia, we shouldn't have to make any deal about how the District of Columbia comes in. There are 600,000 people, they're American citizens, as are the Puerto Ricans American citizens. There's that analogy. But beyond that there's really not an analogy.

Q The analogy is Alaska-wide, that if they came in together, one was thought to be Democratic, one Republican, actually the reverse occurs?

Mr. Hoyer. Right. But you know that's a political consideration. I don't think the District of Columbia right to be -- have a voting representative in the Congress of the United States ought to be contingent upon a political judgment. In my opinion it's a principle judgment as to the rights of U.S. citizens. There is no thought, unlike Puerto Rico, that Puerto Rico citizens may, as Mr. Gutierrez argued on the floor, feel that they're different peoples. I don't agree with that, but I think that's his contention. And therefore may want to be an

independent nation or have some sort of sovereign relationship, Canada/Great Britain type of association. So there are two situations that are I don't think analogous and they're different. And very frankly, you know, I'm still focused, as you know, on trying to see whether we can get the District of Columbia done. It's interesting, as you know, that the gun provision which has been so problematic is now introduced as its own proposition and may be offered on other pieces of legislation as we contended during the course of consideration of D.C.

Q If I could just follow up on budget autonomy and the statutes. D.C. is craving for a victory of some kind. The Democratic majority in both the House and the Senate said it is a true enhancement of budget and legislative autonomy. What's the holdup there? And second, the statutes have symbolic significance of being part of America. Isn't now the time to go forward at least with those two measures?

Mr. Hoyer. On the budget autonomy issue and the second issue?

Q Legislative autonomy.

Mr. Hoyer. Legislative autonomy. Mark, I think as a practical matter my judgment is that legislative autonomy is, if you mean total autonomy where the Congress would not --

Q No, no, 30-day layoff?

Mr. Hoyer. I know. Have further jurisdiction over what is the seat of the Federal Government, seated for the purposes of

being a seat of the Federal Government, I frankly don't think that that would have, you know, large support. Hopefully, what we've been trying to do is to effect a rationale where the Congress of the United States does not exercise that authority on matters clearly of local relevance as opposed to dealing with the Nation's capital, as opposed to the city where 600,000 people live.

Q Mr. Hoyer, the former British Prime Minister Harold McMillan said that the biggest factor in governing was events. How do these two big events, the oil spill and the Times Square incident, affect how Democrats are going to govern in between now and the election, the idea that you have some people on the right carping about how the administration handled, is handling, or will handle the Times Square suspect, also some Republicans trying to say, well, you know, was this another Katrina down in the Gulf Coast?

Mr. Hoyer. Look, I think the Republicans are going to carp about whatever is done frankly, and that's their responsibility from their perspective, particularly in this political year. That's why Glenn Beck's observations are interesting, because they're at variance with some in the -- you refer to them as the Republican opposition, however you want to refer to them -- would say. You know, I think it doesn't have a great deal of credibility carping about that, because of course that's the way the Bush Administration handled it. Now, the fact that the Bush Administration handled people that way would not be the telling

event if in fact these people criticized the Bush Administration for doing it that way. But if you don't criticize your own administration for doing it that way and then you come around and try to criticize an administration that is not your administration of your party and say, well, now it is wrong, it wasn't wrong when Bush did it but now it's wrong, that I don't think sells. We got to be tough on people. We're tough on terrorists. That's our policy, that's our performance, and in fact we've been more successful. We're more successful in Pakistan, we're focused on where terrorism began, not began but was launched against us in Afghanistan, which the Bush Administration essentially ignored. And as a result, after 8 years, 7 years, had a festering, worsening situation inherited by this administration.

As it relates to the other event, the oil spill event, you know, I think that this administration responded promptly, quickly, focused, trying to get at the bottom of this. We all believe that we need to be energy independent, but we also need to be safe in the way we go about getting our energy. The "drill, baby, drill" crowd, which said there was no risk and, you know, just I think is going to be somewhat chagrined, maybe that's a bad word, we're all very, very, this is a very cataclysmic event that has occurred, and the threat that it poses to the Gulf Coast. But more broadly to all of us what's going to affect the Gulf, the Gulf Coast, and the oil supply in terms of prices, in terms of availability and all of that is going to be pretty consequential.

I think the administration's response is appropriate, has been appropriate. I think it needs to continue to be vigorous, focused, and effective in terms of getting at the bottom of why this happened and making sure that it doesn't happen again. And obviously BP has taken responsibility and indicates that it is going to obviously have a very substantial financial bill when this event is concluded so that the taxpayer doesn't foot the bill for this accident.

Luke?

Q Mr. Hoyer, thank you. I am sure we can get you a date with Elizabeth Taylor next year or something.

A Thank you so much, Luke. I need all the help I can get.

Q If you keep doing the electric slide.

Mr. Hoyer. However, can we talk about who you are going to get as opposed to Elizabeth Taylor? I may have some other choices for you. For those of you who may not know, I'm single. I want you to understand that it's not a problem.

Luke's perception of me is a lot older than my perception of me.

Yes, Luke, you had a question?

Q Yes, the politics of the oil spill.

Mr. Hoyer. We're all waiting.

Q Senator Nelson said today that drilling is a nonstarter now. One of the chief components of the Senate bill has been offshore drilling. As Senator Graham said, it's very important.

He says he won't go forward if there's no drilling provisions in there.

How do you see the future of this bill playing out? And now obviously with your Democratic colleagues who told us earlier they really want a new investigation in the safety mechanisms going on that's going to take a long time. Can you have comprehensive energy reform this year after this terrible oil spill?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I think the answer is you can have. As the President has said, we need to use our own resources, but we need to use our own resources in a way that is safe. I think what this accident raises is this is the first major accident since '84, I think is when I think the last major accident occurred. And we have to see why it happened, how it happened, what we can do to preclude it from happening again, and why the safety, the emergency mechanism to immediately cap did not work. I read a little thing, not a little thing but in the Post today where there was some supposition that the safety device could not come down and cap because of some other machinery the explosion may have put in the way or items. I'm not sure that's accurate, but it seems to me that's my recollection.

In any event, energy independence is still a vital issue for us. We cannot be hostage to, as you've heard me say, to those who sell us oil who may or may not care a whole lot about our security and who to the extent that we are more dependent can hold us subject to, hold us hostage to whatever price they want to impose.

So it's very, very critical that we continue to move ahead on energy independence. I think this spill makes that even more relevant, not less so.

Now, with respect to the spill I think we've got to make sure that we know why this happened and make sure that we have in place mechanisms that won't let it happen in the future to the best we can. So I think in the politics of the energy bill itself the need still remains energy independence. The need still remains in terms of adverse impact on the environment of various energy sources that we use.

Now, the Senate has had difficulties dealing with the energy bill outside the ambit of this bill. I'm sure that it's going to raise issues, as you indicated for Senator Graham, but also for Senators on the other side of the particular issue to which he referred. So we'll see what happens. I think from a political standpoint I think the President's response and no new drilling until we find out makes sense and I'm supportive of that.

Q Leader Hoyer, given the fact the number of legislative days between now and when the campaign is going to resume in full throttle for election is fast melting, what's left for Congress to be able to do realistically once we get done with financial regulation, the Bush tax cuts and appropriations bills and maybe some jobs legislation?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, jobs legislation continues to be a number one priority for us and fiscal balance. You know, I keep saying

those two. And I think that if you ask the Speaker she would say the same thing, so I think this is not a question of difference of opinion; so jobs and fiscal responsibility, two major.

Now, you mentioned, which falls into a responsibility issue, regulatory reform. Clearly we want to get that bill done. Clearly we're doing some things here. The appropriations process and the budget, and the budget still remains a challenge for us. The Speaker and I both are very hopeful that we can pass the budget, and we're working on that and we're going to continue to work on that.

There are a number of pieces of legislation which are very important pieces of legislation pending in the Senate, food safety being one of those that I think is very important. Clearly, as you mentioned, the tax cut issues will have to be resolved between now and December 31st because on December 31st, of course, the '01 and '03, the tax cuts return to what they were at that point in time in January. The estate tax falls in that category as well. We're going to have to deal with the estate tax. Obviously, you know, we would like the Senate to move a lot of the bills that we move that were relatively noncontroversial back to us. But I think those items are certainly; the appropriation bills, the budget, the regulatory reform, food safety. There are a number of others. I don't have the list right in front of me to tick off to you, but there are a number of other pieces of legislation we think are important and we would like to move.

There is talk as you know about immigration reform. We feel very strongly that immigration reform is necessary. I have read the paper today where the overwhelming majority of Americans think that immigration reform is necessary. I think that border security and the component of that is essential. I think the administration is very concerned about that, as was the last administration, but we haven't done as good a job as we need to do. So that's a possibility if the Senate can move them. As you know, we pretty well said in the House that it's going to be subject to the Senate's moving a piece of legislation. Right now there does not appear to be any kind of bipartisan agreement in doing that, however, which will be necessary I think to move it. But I think it's important to do.

Q This is the second time in about 5 months that there's been an attempted terrorist attack that did not happen because someone, a regular citizen reacted. You and Speaker Pelosi have praised the FBI and the police department in their reaction to it, but isn't there something --

Mr. Hoyer. I also said the citizens responded very responsibly.

Q Yes. But isn't there something Congress or the Obama administration should be doing to make sure that it doesn't even get to that point, that they're preventing -- is there something more that can be done to catch these before they get to the point where there's a smoking vehicle?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, the answer is we need to do everything possible and we need to empower our law enforcement officials to do what is necessary to detect, intercept and prevent these incidents. Obviously it is very, very difficult to do so in the sense that you know there are a lot of threats out there. It's a much more complex threat than you had in a bipolar world where you have a lot of individuals, a lot of organizations, very small groups and individuals. In this case we were fortunate. In the Timothy McVeigh case we weren't. Timothy McVeigh we didn't identify quickly enough.

So we have been fortunate to the extent that these attempts appear to be relatively amateurish in the sense that the effected end was not realized. But citizens did act diligently. And I might say that we need to all be on alert, all of us, all 310 million of us need to be on alert to inform law enforcement authorities as soon as possible, immediately, when one sees suspicious activity as this vendor did in Times Square. He saw what appeared to be, you know, something unusual beyond just simply, you know, a car that was, you know, I don't know, maybe had a radiator blowing off steam. He thought this was something much more serious than that and he immediately contacted the NYPD. The NYPD responded to this incident and cleared the area in case the explosion had gone off, and then sometime later, significantly later, removed the vehicle to a safer place. You want to do everything you possibly can. And I believe that, as I said

earlier, the President's exempting homeland security and national security from any kind of fiscal constraints is an indication that they want to make sure that our people have the resources they need. I think there's much greater communication. The Bush administration was involved in that, the Obama administration has been involved in that, sharing of information. I think that's critical, so that individual pieces of information can be analyzed as having a relationship to one another as discrete as opposed to being discretely and sort of stovepipes being considered, well, this is that, this is that, but you don't put it together.

You know, I think every administration, the Bush administration, the Clinton administration, have tried to do what they could to preclude incidents from happening. It is extraordinarily difficult because of the numbers and the fact that, I don't know the facts on whether we knew anything about this guy, whether he had manifested any kind of thing that would have caught our attention before this or not. I do understand, as I understand, he had no previous criminal record of any type. Am I accurate on that? I don't think so. So that you know your question is a good question, but it's difficult to answer because you've got to do everything you possibly can and then pray that you get also lucky, not because luck is what you want to rely on but because clearly it is such a difficult challenge.

Okay. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 1:41 p.m., the press conference was

concluded.]