

PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MAJORITY LEADER

STENY H. HOYER

Tuesday, May 22, 2007

11:36 a.m.

Mr. Hoyer. We are in already, as you know, and we have got 10 bills on suspension. We are going to go finish the Federal Housing Finance Reform Act, which as you know we had a lot of debate on under an open rule -- structured rule and the amendments had to be printed. But that was frankly very redundant. But what we did, as you noticed, was had Mr. Frank and Mr. Scott and other members of the Financial Services Committee continue the debate after 9:00 on Thursday. We held the votes until today. There are eight amendments, motion to recommit and final passage on that bill. The privileged resolution, which was filed by Mr. Rogers, will be voted on some time later on this afternoon.

On Wednesday we will go to H.R. 1100, the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site Boundary Revision Act. We don't think there is much controversy, but it was put under a rule just in case there is. This is Mr. Shuler's bill, it is very important to him. We will consider eight suspension bills, including a package of veterans bills.

At this point in time I will call your attention to this document which has been put together as we end the first 5 months of the session. I think hopefully you will find it helpful. It is a compilation of what we have done, and what we have done obviously from our perspective is what

we passed the House. Obviously we don't control the Senate. And just as obviously, Mr. Reid is -- Tim Johnson is out. It is a very close majority, and as a result, it is difficult to get things through the House, as we have all noticed. I think you will continue to be impressed by the comparisons. There was an article in the Washington Times about the do-nothing Congress, meaning us. And I think it is very instructive that if you look at roll call votes, we have done twice as many, just about, suspension bills, we have done twice as many bills passed under a rule, we have done more than twice as many in days in session. We have been in session for about 40 percent more days. And the work product reflects that. So I will certainly reject any assertion that we are not doing anything. I don't reject the assertion that we haven't gotten things to the President because the Senate has not been passing things.

On Thursday we will do the lobbying disclosure bill, and we will do the supplemental, I believe. On lobbying reform we did a lot in the ethics bill that we passed, the ethics rule that we passed. We banned lobbyist gifts, lobbyist travel, meals, et cetera, ended the K Street Project under the rule. The lobbying disclosure bill, as you know, also does that by statute. We thought all of that was very important to do. And the bill that is going to be brought to the floor is a good bill and has taken some time.

You may have some questions about it, and I will answer it at that point in time. In addition, Mr. Capuano continues to work and I would expect to have a rule offered by Mr. Capuano on ethics and the operations of the Ethics Committee and how the Ethics Committee will interface perhaps with an outside group or a group of nonmembers. Mr. Hill and others have proposed -- Baron Hill had proposed looking at ways in which we can give the Ethics Committee credibility and a focus, or greater focus.

On the supplemental, I am going to be -- Carl Hulse and I walked in and he said we are into obtuseness, and I -- or I told him I was going to be relatively obtuse. And the reason for that is, we are going to have a caucus right after this pen and pad and then we will probably have a press availability with the Speaker and myself and Mr. Emanuel and Mr. Clyburn, which would perhaps discuss in greater length. Mr. Obey has been working on this with the administration and with the Senate through the weekend. We are hopeful that we are close to agreement. Obviously both sides are in a position where neither can do something without the other. That is the reality. The Democrats cannot adopt a policy over the President's veto and the President cannot impose his policy as he has done for the first 6 years of his administration on the Congress. There is not a rubber stamp or a blank check here, and so we are

moving ahead on that, and we believe that the net result will be continuing to move towards a significant change in direction, a significant accountability on the Iraqi government and a significant assertion that benchmarks need to be met.

Let me just review the document because I went out of order from my notes that Stacey put together on this document.

You see the subject matters we have put in there. Defending our country, we spent significant time on oversight on Iraq, Iraq debate, Iraq legislation. Obviously we met a veto, but we think that the American public was very supportive of that bill, very supportive of benchmarks, very supportive of Iraqi accountability.

On growing the economy, we have moved in portions of the innovation agenda. The minimum wage we think is very important, the minimum wage will be, as I am sure all of you understand, in the supplemental that we send to the President this week. And I will say as an aside, the supplemental will be passed this -- by Thursday or by Friday or by Saturday or by Sunday. My implication to you is, as I said -- although apparently I was not quite as definitive as perhaps I should have been. But the Speaker and Leader Reid have both indicated we are not going home until we pass the supplemental.

On strengthening our families, passed the COPS bill, methamphetamine, Head Start. Head Start reauthorization, very significant. Preserving our planet, global warming, committees have been appointed. Biofuels Infrastructure Research and Development Act passed with overwhelming Republican support. House rules changes, lobbying reform, whistleblower, Freedom of Information Act all passed.

I think if you look at this list you will hopefully conclude that it is a pretty significant list of bills that we have passed through the House, and we are hopeful that much of that legislation, although more slowly, will move through the Senate and get to the President.

Okay. Your turn.

Q Did Mr. Murtha violate the House rules? And if he did, do you think he should apologize?

Mr. Hoyer. Mr. Murtha will have to do in terms of what he believes to be appropriate with respect to the last part of your question. With respect to the second part of the question, I think there has been an assertion made and that remains to be seen as to whether he said what he is alleged to have said, the consequences of that.

Q Ethics Committee?

Mr. Hoyer. I have said all along that I believe the Ethics Committee needs to take under consideration items that are made public that assert that violations of the

ethics code of the rules of the House have been made.

Q How is this allegation different from what Tom Delay did back during the prescription drug bill?

Mr. Hoyer. I think I have said on the subject what I am going to say.

Q You all on the Iraq, if I --

Mr. Hoyer. Yes.

Q You all on the Iraq funding bill are not going to push ahead with troop guidelines, deadlines, exits, that kind of thing, as I understand it. Isn't that a fairly significant concession to the other side? They seemed pretty strong on Friday that that was not in the cards.

Mr. Hoyer. Well, let me reiterate, Dave, what I said before. We can't pass something without the President's signature and the President can't pass something without our agreement. So we can be at a standoff and, you know, go back and forth with one another or we can come to an agreement. The President has made it very clear he is not going to sign a timeline. We can't sign timelines over his veto. But the fact of the matter is I think we have moved this debate very substantially forward in terms of accountability and demanding a new direction in Iraq. I think we are going to continue to do that this week. I think we will continue to do it next month. Certainly we will do it in July when Mr. Murtha's bill is on the floor.

We will do it in September when we probably do conference reports. So my point is, Dave, that I think we have moved the debate very substantially forward, and we will continue to do so.

Q Leader Reid has said that his party would pick up seats in the Senate because of the war. Do you feel the same way about your Chamber?

Mr. Hoyer. I think we are going to pick up seats in the House, yes. The answer to your question is yes. It is a little premature, the election is some months away, over a year and close to a half, but I think we will -- given what I think is our performance in the House and given the public's concern about the actions of the administration not only in Iraq but domestically as well, given the status of our standing in the international community, I think Americans will want a change in administrations as they wanted a change in the leadership of the Congress. I think they have gotten from the Congress what they wanted in the sense that they want action, they want things done, and we haven't gotten as much done as I think they want done. But in the House of Representatives I think we have moved very decisively in a number of areas that they think are important.

Q Mr. Hoyer, do you plan to have a no confidence vote on the Attorney General in the House as they are going to in

the Senate?

Mr. Hoyer. Senate bill is over here and we have a suspension bill on the calendar, as you know, today I guess, today or tomorrow. Today, yeah, we have on suspension the Senate bill, which in effect provided for vacancies in U.S. attorneys office where after 120 days the court could appoint somebody. Whether we have a no confidence vote or not, I think many of us have expressed -- I was asked if I think the Attorney General ought to resign, and I answered yes, I think he has lost the confidence of the Congress and I think he has lost the confidence of the American people. In that status, I think his continuing to hold the Office of Attorney General is not helpful to the Justice Department or to the administration, frankly, or to the country.

Q How much of the caucus do you think you can hold together on the supplemental that does not include a timeline?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I think we will have significant support of the supplemental. There are going to be a lot of things in the supplemental that I think an awful lot of members in the caucus will feel very important, and I think it will have language with reference to Iraq that I think, as I said before, moves us forward in terms of accountability, and moving in a new direction.

Q Will gasoline price gouging legislation be on the

floor?

Mr. Hoyer. Yes.

Q This week?

Mr. Hoyer. Yes.

Q What day?

Mr. Hoyer. Probably Wednesday, probably tomorrow.

Energy and commerce is doing something right now on it. We are very, very concerned. Obviously it is very difficult to affect short term the price of gasoline. We are somewhat at the mercy of the oil companies, OPEC. I talked to Chairman Conyers today about OPEC and about the possibility of price fixing by OPEC and having, obviously, an adverse impact on consumers. But this is a matter of great concern to the Speaker, to myself, to the leaders in the House and the Senate. We have met with Mr. Reid, met with Senator Reid and Senator Murray and Senator Durbin this morning. It is a great concern to my constituents, as you know, a lot of them half an hour, 45 minutes, an hour, hour and 15 minute commute rides. I think the price down home was about \$3.14. It is higher in other areas but I think it is about \$3.14. That is a great burden on our families. We have made energy independence as one of our major goals. Long term, the only way to meet this crisis is to make sure that we are not subject to being gouged by those who supply us oil from overseas and that we have alternative energy sources here at

home. Whether it is biofuels or other alternative fuels, we need to proceed as quickly as possible in developing them and becoming energy independent.

Q And just to follow on, do you feel that price gouging is occurring at the pump here right now?

Mr. Hoyer. Let me make it clear that most of us do not believe the retailers are an issue here. The retailers are really not making that much additional profit, as I understand. That is not true of the oil companies or the oil-producing states. They are making great profits, far beyond what they had any expectation of doing.

Q I had a quick follow-up on the no confidence question. What is the political --

Mr. Hoyer. For the Attorney General?

Q Yeah. What is the political downside to holding a no confidence vote in the House? Or is it more a question of you want to wait until the Senate does it and then the House will pick it up or do you think the Democrats will overplay their hand?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, the Senate is in a little different position than we are in terms of no confidence. After all, the Senate under the Constitution advises and consents to the appointment of the Attorney General. The House doesn't do that. But that does not mean that we couldn't act on it. There is not something pending, but we are taking action on

the appointment, and I think there is great concern, and a lot of us have expressed a lack of confidence in the Attorney General.

Q Fair to say it hasn't been decided if you do the vote, you want to wait for the Senate to act first?

Mr. Hoyer. No. I wouldn't go that far, but it is fair to say that we haven't decided.

Q Okay.

Q Mr. Leader, what do you think of the compromise comprehensive immigration proposal that is before the Senate right now?

Mr. Hoyer. I think it is pretty controversial.

Q Yeah.

Mr. Hoyer. That is self-evident. That is not a great disclosure for anybody in this room. Obviously this is a very difficult issue to resolve. We have said that we believe that a comprehensive immigration bill is necessary. First of all, to secure our borders. I think there is agreement on that. There are questions about ways and means to do so, but there is no question that our borders need to be secure, one. Number two, there is some dispute obviously, significant dispute as to how you move forward on the 11 or 12 million people who are here without documentation, without authorization to stay here. Senator Kennedy, Senator Kyl worked very, very hard to try to bring

together some -- thank you very much -- some agreement. They reached agreement. The President has given it his blessing. We have a different bill here. It will be the Gutierrez bill, flight bill, that I think will get hearings. Congresswoman Lofgren is meeting with a lot of people. And as you have heard me say, we expect to have this on the floor in July. We would expect to have a markup on this bill in June. Clearly the Senate bill and how it proceeds will have some impact on the debate and the consideration here. But you know, we will reflect the views of the House of Representatives. The issue of amnesty continues to be one that is inflammatory. The President doesn't believe this is amnesty. Obviously there is a way to earn your way towards legal status and I think permanent status. As a practical matter, I think that many of us believe that if you don't do that, you are not going to accomplish the objective of bringing what Senator Kennedy's phrase -- I say "under the table" and "on top of the table." He said "out of the shadows." But bring an awful lot of people who are working in this economy into the open and full participants in our society.

So you know, I think it is going to be a longer road than perhaps one expected. But I think we are going to work towards the end of passing a comprehensive immigration bill.

Q Mr. Leader, what should be done, if anything, about

the motions to commit?

Mr. Hoyer. Recommit?

Q Yeah.

Mr. Hoyer. I am compiling a paper. It is not ready yet. I am sorry. I wanted it ready today.

If you look at the motions to recommit and all this hullabaloo that has been raised about the motion to recommit, almost without exception the motion to recommit has not been used by the Republicans for substantive objectives. It has been used for political purposes, political gotcha games. As a result I think the public can have less sympathy for the crocodile tears that are shed. Having said that, you know, I want the Republicans to have a right to have a motion to recommit with or without the instructions so they can affect their policy goals. I think that is the process. I think it is a process that ought to be accorded to the minority, and I know that the Speaker does as well, and we intend to ensure that.

That does not mean, as I have said before, we said we were going to be fair and not stupid, that simply subjecting the floor to just ongoing political games is not necessarily something that we want to pursue. But I have no rules changes in mind at this point in time, and I have told Mr. Boehner and Mr. Blunt that I intend to discuss with them processes which hopefully we can agree on as fair. Frankly,

this discussion about the 1822 germaneness and no changes in the germaneness rule I am not impressed with. Germaneness is a very important concept, not only in the House but in the Senate. And germaneness simply says that if you bring an item up on the floor, that does not mean you have -- if you are talking about A then you can bring B through Z up on the floor. Why? Because you would never get through a debate. So germaneness means what germaneness means, and that is that it needs to be relevant to the pending matter. I think that is a fair concept. As President of the Maryland Senate, that was the rule that I adhered to. As a Member of the House of Representatives, I believe it ought to be the rule adhered to in the House. As long as the Parliamentarian says that the procedures are available, then we are going to follow the Parliamentarian's view.

Q Mr. Leader, there is a lot being said on the radio lately in conservative columns about House Democrats want to revisit the fairness doctrine. Is that true? Do Democrats want to take another look at that? What sort of priority --

Mr. Hoyer. I think there has been talk about the fairness doctrine ever since it has been changed.

Q You have been you say?

Mr. Hoyer. The fairness doctrine was changed when?

Q '80s.

Mr. Hoyer. 1980s some time. I forget exactly when but

ever since then, since it was changed, there has been discussion not only among Democrats but among others as well about the fact that it wasn't fair to change it, that giving alternative political voices the opportunity to be heard was fair. These are public airwaves. But there is no proposal that I know of that is pending to change the fairness doctrine at this point in time.

Q Do you think Democrats would make an attempt down the road to come up with some sort of equal time provision?

Mr. Hoyer. Other than general discussion about it, there is no proposal that I know of nor have we discussed a proposal towards that angle.

Q Mr. Leader, what do you make of the sort of behind the scenes difficulty in getting the lobbying disclosure bill to the floor, particularly with the bundling provision?

Mr. Hoyer. I think the bundling provision is a difficult provision. Some of you have talked to me about it. I have said, it is a difficult provision to draft as to how you define it, you know, what exactly bundling is, and you know, what are the criteria for judging whether you have bundled or not. And I think it has been difficult to get to. I think Mr. Van Hollen has worked very hard on it, and he will make a proposal on the floor as an amendment to the bill, and you know I think that is why it has taken so long.

Q Is it possible the bill will come to the floor

without it? Without the bundle?

Mr. Hoyer. I think the bundling is going to be an amendment.

Q Last question.

Q You said that the caucus meeting at noon is going to be about the supplemental. Will it also be scheduled with the trade agreement that was reached just a couple weeks ago?

Mr. Hoyer. I think that will be a subject, yes, Richard, but I would be surprised if the supplemental, which we have got to pass this week and we are going to pass this week, did not take up a good majority of the time.

Q And what is the status within the caucus at this point? How much discussion kind of reaction do you think there has been to the trade agreement that the Speaker reached?

Mr. Hoyer. There were some people who were concerned and have expressed their concern. I think that Mr. Rangel and Mr. Levin worked very hard. I frankly think the administration essentially adopted the proposal that was made by Mr. Rangel and Mr. Levin. I think it was a very significant step forward in ensuring workers' rights be honored by those with whom we enter into trade deals as well as environmental protections.

So you know I think that Mr. Rangel and Mr. Levin,

obviously Speaker Pelosi feels the same, did a very positive and effective job and reached an agreement with the administration that will be positive down the road for bipartisan trade work?

Q Thank you.

Mr. Hoyer. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:01 p.m., the press conference was concluded.]