PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MAJORITY LEADER,

STENY H. HOYER

***

Tuesday, June 29, 2010

11:30 a.m.

Mr. Hoyer. Good morning.

Okay, first of all let me start with expressing my sadness and regret, I will say something on the floor as well at some point, at the passing of Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia. I think all of us believe that Senator Byrd was one of the iconic figures in the United States Senate in our history. Of course, he was the longest-serving legislator in our history in the Senate, surpassing Senator Hayden just a little while back.

I had the opportunity to know Senator Byrd from the time I was an intern in the 1960s in Senator Brewster's office when I was at the University of Maryland and Georgetown Law School, where I just met him -- I obviously didn't know him during that period of time. But when I came to Congress in 1981, and shortly thereafter went on the Appropriations Committee, I had the opportunity of working with Senator Byrd from time to time. And I remember particularly warmly a time when he took me into his office, I went over to see him about something, and he had me come into his office and we spent about an hour in his Majority Leader's office, and he talked to me about the history of the Senate, the history of the Congress, and he gave me one of his paintings. I am sure most of you have seen it because he has given it to a lot of us, about the bridge, the covered bridge, which he did a painting of.

But he was an extraordinarily principled individual, an extraordinary memory of the procedures and the history of the

Senate and the Congress and an extraordinarily prescient individual and Member of the Senate, as it relates to the ramifications of policies adopted by executive departments on the relationship between the executive and the legislative departments.

The Senate will miss him, the Congress will miss him and the country will miss him and, of course, it goes without saying that West Virginia will miss him. So we all share in the loss of our country and of the great legislator and a wonderful human being.

Now, to the schedule, we met at 10:30. We have just had some votes. We will consider several bills under suspension of the rules, the Home Buyers Assistance Improvement Act of 2010 by Representatives Dahlkemper, Kratovil and Childers. That, as you know, extends the time for settlements under the Homeowners Assistance Program.

We also may well consider later on today or tomorrow the unemployment insurance legislation on suspension as well. I want to point out that in times passed we have, in the Senate, while that has been held up for some period of time, ultimately when it did come, first by Bunning and then by Coburn, when it did come, there were significant votes to pass the legislation. In the Bunning case, 78 out of 100 voted for it, 19 voted against it so that not every Member voted.

But in any event, we hope that that will pass and literally, I think, 1.5 million people that will be adversely affected if we

do not pass unemployment insurance. Obviously that will have a detrimental impact on the economy, and at a time when we are trying to keep the economy moving and growing, that would be not only a bad thing to do in terms of every individual who has lost their unemployment, but a very bad thing to do with respect to growing the economy.

Wednesday, Thursday and Friday we expect to consider the conference report on the Wall Street reform bill, and we also expect to act on the Supplemental Appropriations Act, which will be offered by Representative Obey.

Over the last 18 months, the Republicans have, in many respects, voted against every effort we have made to help Main Street, to help average working Americans, to make sure that they were being treated in a way that would help them either with respect to the economy, health care, fiscal responsibility, Wall Street reform. Wall Street reform we hope to act on this week and approve the conference report. We fought for fair rules, consumer protections, making sure that the meltdown of the financial community, which had such an adverse impact on millions and millions of Americans, would not reoccur.

On fiscal responsibility, trying to keep our budget in a place where interest rates remain low and that we create the kind of economy that we had in the 1990s where we created jobs rather than lost jobs, we brought the deficit down rather than explode the deficit, we have not gotten any help from our Republican

colleagues. We reinstated PAYGO without the help of the Republicans.

We are hoping to adopt a budget enforcement resolution this week that will cut spending below the President's budget, commits to considering long-term fiscal responsibility. The Republicans, of course, let PAYGO lapse and went on a debt-financed spending spree.

They do have an alternative, Representative Paul Ryan's plan. He is the ranking member on the Budget Committee. We will see whether or not at some point in time they support that. That plan, however, would result, we think, in the privatization of Social Security and an end to Medicare as we know it. We think that the American public are not for those priorities.

We are working to strengthen the economy and create jobs, but in almost every instance the overwhelming votes from Republicans have been "no" during this first 6 months and during the previous year.

On the jobs creation bill that we sent to the Senate, a number of Republicans have largely voted "no," almost unanimously in some cases. The small business lending bill that we passed 2 weeks ago to try to get credit, Mark Zandi spoke to the caucus, the Democratic Caucus today. He indicated that obviously one of the real problems is the seizure of credit for small businesses. We tried to effect that, pass legislation to do so.

With respect to the oil spill, we have been working to,

number one, stop the further risk that is being caused. BP obviously primarily and almost exclusively responsibility for working on stopping the spill itself, of course Republicans are apologizing to BP. You know, we focus on Barton as if Barton might be somewhat individual. He is not. Boehner said Obama overreacted to the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. He also says that we are overreacting to the financial crisis. His statement specifically was this is killing an ant with a nuclear weapon, a bill which, as I said, seeks to protect consumers and make sure that regulations are in place that will make it very, very unlikely that this will occur again.

So we think that throughout the course of this Congress, Republicans have sided with the special interests, the big interests, the corporate interests, against the interests of average working people. We think that was true in the health care bill as well. One of the things that Mr. Boehner pledges is that if they can, they will repeal the health care bill. Mr. Boehner is now saying that he thinks I have mischaracterized what he said.

Q You are saying that you are going to vote on the unemployment benefits extension straight up; everything else in the extenders bill is going to have to wait for another time?

Mr. Hoyer. No, I didn't say that at all. But what I did say was that we believe that passing unemployment insurance is critical for individuals, for families, for communities, for the country and for the economy. This is not something that is a

freebie that we simply say to people, well, sorry, you don't have a job, you don't have any money in your pocket, you can't buy food for your table, you can't support your family. That is going to have an effect, not just on those individuals, but on everybody.

So what we are saying is that, yes, we are going to move an unemployment insurance bill. That does not mean that we want to leave everything else on the table. Clearly, the House has done all those things.

So I am saying, yes, we are going to do this as we did SGR last week. Just saying "no," which is the Republican option, we don't believe is an option. These have real consequences. We want to make sure that people can sustain themselves when we have still an unavailability of jobs sufficient to take the people who are looking for jobs.

Q Can you just repeat what you said about the homeowners tax credit extension again and also do you have a specific day when you are going to take that up?

Mr. Hoyer. It coming up today. It is on the suspension calendar.

Q And what about fin reg?

Mr. Hoyer. Pardon me?

Q When are you going to take up the fin reg bill?

Mr. Hoyer. When it is ready. Not before, and we are hoping that that will be relatively soon. You are talking about the conference report. Where did this fin reg come from? This is the

Wall Street Reform Act. Fin reg, if somebody asked me about fin reg, was that you? Very quickly. Let's get back to order here.

Q On Wall Street reform.

Mr. Hoyer. Right. Mr. Russert has the right title now. We are recognizing him.

Q It is looking increasingly possible logistically that Mr. Byrd most likely will lie in repose in the Senate on Thursday, that the Senate will not be able to conclude this week. They are having difficulty getting the votes for it right now, especially now with his passing. What are you going to say to your Members if you can't get this done by July 4? Do you have actually have faith in the Senate being able to accomplish this later on down the road?

Mr. Hoyer. That was an unfair question. Do I have faith in the Senate? Do I have faith in the Senate? Let me remind you there is 300-plus bills, 70 percent of them pass with over 50 Republicans voting for them that sit languishing, crying out for attention in the United States Senate.

I don't know that the Senate has faith in the Senate that it can act, very frankly, and I think it is unfortunate that is the case. However, having said that, Senator Dodd is working very, very hard to make sure that he has the requisite number of votes for the conference report. There may be, there are discussions ongoing between Mr. Frank and Senator Dodd as we speak, and Senator Dodd is, as we speak, trying to make sure that he does, in

fact, have 60 votes for a conference report.

Q But what do you say to those Members who are facing tough reelection prospects to say you want another hard vote, another hard vote that may not be able to get through the Senate?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, what I said to them is that this is an important piece of legislation, overwhelmingly supported by the American public, which says that some very large financial institutions took risks which were unjustified and had an extraordinarily adverse impact, not just on the economy generally but on individual families, individuals themselves, on the economy and the loss of jobs and they are saying, hey, let's address this.

So I think this is a vote that is a positive vote. I am not surprised that Mr. Boehner believes that we are doing too much, and we are not apologizing to the large financial institutions for the trouble they caused our economy.

Q Congressman, on reg reform why are you delaying the vote? Last week Chairman Frank said --

Mr. Hoyer. This is Wall Street?

Q The Wall Street. Last week Chairman Frank said it would be Tuesday, now they are talking Wednesday. If you have got the votes why delay, and is there a chance that it may not actually come up to a vote in the House until after the recess?

Mr. Hoyer. I hope not. You know, is there a chance? My expectation is we are going to take up the regulatory reform bill this week. I don't think there is any --

Q But why the delay?

Mr. Hoyer. Because Senator Dodd, let me repeat, because Senator Dodd is working on making sure that he has the votes for the conference report.

Q You are saying you won't take it up until the Senate has 60?

Mr. Hoyer. No, I am not saying that. I am not saying that. I am not saying that, and I want to make that specifically clear that I am not saying that. We may well take it up whatever the situation in the Senate is. But we are trying to go work with the Senate to ensure that we both take up a version that does, in fact, have 60 votes.

Q Thank you. But is there concern on your side from those who want to make sure that the Senate can pass this bill because they don't want to walk the plank yet again and say, well, this will thing could go to the black hole?

Mr. Hoyer. Let me repeat, on walking the plank. My view is that the bill that the conference committee reported out enjoys very large support among the American public that is very angry at financial institutions which acted irresponsibly, took risks far beyond their capacity to sustain those risks if, in fact, the worst happened, and the worst did happen and required the taxpayers to step in so we did not fall into a deep depression. That was at the request of President George Bush, as you recall.

So my view is this is not a walking the plank vote, this is a

vote which says we are going to make sure that large financial institutions act responsibly, that consumers are protected, and that we do not have a reoccurrence of this kind of event.

So my view is when you ask, are we going to ask people to walk the plank, I don't think this is walking the plank, I think this is walking with the American people to respond to a crisis that caused our economy great stress.

Q Has Senate leadership or Senator Dodd communicated to you or any of the House leadership, Chairman Frank, suggesting that they can, in fact, get the votes.

Mr. Hoyer. They are discussing it. So if you are asking me have they have been talking, the answer is yes. Are they talking about the status of the conference report, yes, and they are continuing to talk, and I hope those talks bear fruit and bear votes.

Q The President over the weekend announced they were going to take steps to try to move forward with the South Korea free trade deal possibly by as soon as November. What are the details of that procedure and what is the reaction of the House?

Mr. Hoyer. I don't know the reaction of the House. There has not been a lot of discussion about that proposal at this point in time. Obviously we have three very large issues confronting us this week that we want to get done, so there hasn't been a lot of action about that. But I will tell you that my response was, when I talked to both the people at Treasury, an assistant secretary

who called me, and my discussions with White House Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, was that I said that I appreciate the actions that they have taken vis-a-vis Korea to have further discussions with Korea so that at some time in the future, presumably either late, very late this year or next year, that they would be in a position to send down a trade agreement with Korea.

I think that Korea obviously is a very significant trading partner with the United States. Europe and others are pursuing trade agreements with them, so I think that appropriate.

What I did also indicate was that I was concerned that Colombia and Panama, not nearly as significantly economically, but nevertheless very significantly in terms of our friends who have entered into agreements with us, and then I would hope that the Colombia and Panamanian agreements would be considered either contemporaneously or prior to the consideration of the Korean agreement.

Q And in your conversations, did you get anything back from them in terms of the timing of those agreements?

Mr. Hoyer. No. But I want to reiterate that I have met with our trade negotiator, Ron Kirk. I have had discussions with the White House about this issue, and my view is Kirk is expressing the view of the administration when he says he wants to see Colombia and Panama trade agreements move forward.

Q Any chance of getting a separate bill on the summer jobs money since it is almost the 4th of July?

Mr. Hoyer. You know, very disappointing that the bill in the Senate, Senator Reid has been trying every sort of formula to see if he can get 60 votes to move that.

I want to reiterate, and the press ought to report, in my opinion more fully, all of these propositions enjoy a majority support in the United States Senate. I don't think the public understands that. I think, frankly, we all have a responsibility to make sure they do understand that, that this is not a question where the majority of the Congress is not supporting these propositions. They are. It is simply a fact that the rules in the Senate provide for an extraordinary majority, and right now the Republican Party has one more or two more, we now have less because of the death of Senator Byrd, to get to that threshold.

But these propositions all enjoy a majority support. Now, in answer to your specific question, is it possible that we move ahead on a jobs bill, a summer jobs bill? It is possible, but whether or not that could get through the Senate is unknown.

Q What is the status of the funding for Afghanistan, your vote counts and your schedule?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I expect the supplemental to move within the next couple of days, certainly by Friday. That is our intent. You know, we are going to move towards that end. I would hope that -- you know we have some controversy in that. I would say that the American public has concerns, substantial concerns about what we are doing in Afghanistan in terms of success. There is

substantial concern, as Nita Lowey expressed, about nonmilitary dollars going to Afghanistan and being diverted into the pockets of either corrupt public officials or corrupt private officials.

Congresswoman Lowey, the Chair of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee, has indicated that she is not going to put any money on that until this is resolved, until we are assured, as I said yesterday when I was speaking to CSIS, that monies that are appropriated are appropriately applied to the objectives that the Congress wants them applied to.

But we are going to consider the funding for the troops, and we will do that within the next 72 hours.

Q Is there any way to split the two votes on that, on many on the war spending -- supplemental and domestic?

Mr. Hoyer. Split them. That will probably be our procedure, yes. I would hope my Republican friends would support that which they support and oppose that which they oppose, as opposed to either taking a walk or something on the war funding. They say they are for the funding of the troops. My view is we are going to put that up, and we will put it up as it came from the Senate, in my opinion.

Q Mr. Hoyer, obviously Childers, Dahlkemper and Kratovil didn't write the unemployment extension. Does it actually help them in their districts to be able to go back and say that they sponsored these things when they are in tough races?

Mr. Hoyer. Gee, I hope so.

Q I mean, what can they go back and say, in other words?

Mr. Hoyer. They can say that they introduced legislation in the House and Senate, I hope the Senate will pass it as well, pass legislation which will give people who have already entered into contracts to purchase homes on the expectation that they would get some assistance in doing that, that they will have an additional 60 days within which to settle so that the issue is not whether they bought, the issue is have they gotten to settlement.

And there is a cost to this, as you know, which is paid for. And the reason there is a cost for it because the CBO determines that more people will, in fact, go to settlement and get the assistance they need. That helps the real estate industry, housing. It helps homeowners who are selling their homes and it helps people who are purchasing homes.

So I would think those three could claim success. Mr. Childers and Mr. Kratovil and Mrs. Dahlkemper could say, look, this is something we have done. They have worked very hard on this.

Very few of us sit down and actually write. We send it to people that write it or we talk to the committee about it. But they certainly have been very strong supporters of this proposition.

Q Mr. Leader, on the supplemental, your optimism about it coming to the floor this week.

Mr. Hoyer. No, it is more than optimism. That is my intent,

not something I hope will happen. Here I have a little more control of that. My optimism of the Senate may be different, but my optimism with what I can, in fact, move forward is very heightened.

Q Point taken. Does that mean that the teachers' money issue has been settled in terms of the amount and how that may differ from what was originally proposed?

Mr. Hoyer. I think the answer to that is yes. Congressman Obey is working on an effort to get $10 billion to States. Mark Zandi just spoke to us downstairs in the caucus and indicated that absent some additional help for the States, the States are going to retrench. That is going to be a drag on the economy and be a drag on confidence, and we don't think that will be helpful. It will be paid for. It will be paid for. It will be paid for by not doing some other spending or spending that was planned that does not need to be done because it would lapse or things of that nature. Mr. Obey has been working very hard on that.

Q Will there be stimulus, unexpended stimulus money?

Mr. Hoyer. I don't think so, no. More emphatically than I don't think so. No. All right. Thank you all very much. Always a delight to be with you.

[Whereupon, at 12:00 p.m., the press conference was concluded.]