



Republicans reject 'job-killing agenda' while Senate passes 'pay-go' & confirms Bernanke

By Jon H. Harsch

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Washington, Jan. 28 – The day after President Obama’s State of the Union speech, Republicans found lots to criticize yet said they look forward to a “conversation” with the President Friday when he visits the Republican policy-setting meeting being held in Baltimore. Congressional Democrats meanwhile voiced their strong support for the President’s agenda, with both House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) forecasting that they will pass healthcare reform and job creation legislation soon.

In promising that Congress will complete a comprehensive healthcare bill, Pelosi acknowledged the challenge: “we will go through the gate. If the gate is closed, we will go over the fence. If the fence is too high, we will pole vault in. If that doesn’t work, we will parachute in. But we are going to get health care reform passed for the American people for their own personal health and economic security and for the important role that it will play in reducing the deficit.”

Shortly before Pelosi made that promise in a packed press conference, House Republican Leader John Boehner (R-OH) held his own press conference in which he said that “we’re eager for the President to come to our retreat tomorrow. We’re going to have an honest conversation about America’s priorities and trying to find ways to find some common ground.” But he made it clear that Republicans reject what he called the President’s “job-killing agenda.” He said that despite the President’s Wednesday night appeal for bipartisanship, “there was nothing last night in the President’s speech to indicate that there was any willingness to sit down and work together.” He dismissed the Democrats’ healthcare legislation as something that Democrats “are trying to shove down the throats of the American people.”

As for the prospect of bipartisan legislation, Boehner said that as a matter of principle, “I’m not going to vote for a bill that raises taxes, I’m not going to vote for a bill that grows the size of government, and I’m not going to vote for a bill that puts government in control of decisions the American people should be allowed to make on their own.”

Boehner also used the one-year anniversary of last year's House passage of the stimulus bill to comment that "The 'stimulus' simply isn't working, but rather than admit it, the President and congressional Democrats are doubling down and calling for even more government 'stimulus' spending – wasting even more taxpayer dollars." Boehner insisted that passing the "trillion-dollar stimulus" package began "a troubling pattern of partisan actions that ignored the will of the American people." He said this pattern is being repeated in the Democrats' efforts to pass the cap-and-trade climate bill and healthcare reform.

Senate Majority Leader Reid seemed equally resistant to the idea of embracing a new spirit of bipartisan cooperation. In his press conference, following the Boehner and Pelosi press conferences, Reid said "As Senate Democrats work to strengthen our economy, we hope Republicans will finally decide to stop rooting for failure and start working with us to create jobs."

With Republicans urging Democrats to stop blaming everything on the Bush administration, Reid certainly doesn't seem ready to forgive and forget. In Thursday's Senate floor debate on reinstating "pay-go" rules to require savings or revenue to offset any spending increases, Reid said "Let's not kid ourselves: we are in this financial situation – and these pay-as-you-go rules are necessary – because we spent the last decade spending money we didn't have. We spent trillions on two wars, tax breaks for multimillionaires and corporations, and other policies. Those days are over."

Obama had called on the Senate to pass pay-go in his Wednesday evening speech. The House passed the measure last July in a 265-166 vote. On Thursday, the Senate voted 60-40 for pay-go in a party-line vote, with Republicans objecting that pay-go will be a way to increase taxes while Democrats insist that it was pay-go which created budget surpluses under President Bill Clinton.

In other Senate floor action Thursday, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben Bernanke was confirmed for a second term in a 70-30 vote that is expected to calm markets around the world. That vote did not observe party lines. The 70 "Yes" votes included 47 Democrats along with 22 Republicans and 1 Independent (Lieberman) while the 30 "No" votes included 11 Democrats, 18 Republicans and 1 Independent (Sanders).

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