

So-called Jobs Bill Omits Key Job Provisions; Process Leaves Zero Room for Improvement

Written by Sen. Charles Grassley
Tuesday, 23 February 2010 10:06

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Senator Chuck Grassley Statement Submitted to the Record

Partisan and Incomplete Processing of Bipartisan Economic Incentives Package

Monday, Feb. 22, 2010

The Senate is about to engage in a cloture vote on the Senate Democratic Leadership's third stimulus bill. What I find surprising is that what we are about to vote on indisputably and absolutely belongs to the majority leader. That is to say we are not going to vote on a bipartisan package that I put together with Finance Committee Chairman Baucus. I was under the impression that the Senate Democratic Leadership was genuine in its desire to work on a bipartisan basis, but clearly I was mistaken. Although the Senate Democratic Leader was highly involved in the development of a bipartisan bill, he arbitrarily decided to replace it with a bill he hopes to jam through the Senate.

As much as I was surprised by the Senate Democratic Leader's disregard for bipartisanship, I am even more surprised by the explanations given by him and his cohorts.

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Perhaps the most significant change between the bipartisan package Chairman Baucus and I helped put together and the package we will be voting to move to is that a package of expired tax provisions has been removed. Normally referred to as extenders, these generally very popular and certainly bipartisan provisions have been extended several times over the past few years.

What is surprising is that hyper-partisan members of the majority have suddenly decided that the tax extenders are partisan pork for Republicans.

A representative sample comes from one report, which describes the bipartisan bill as “an extension of soon-to-expire tax breaks that are highly beneficial to major corporations, known as tax extenders, as well as other corporate giveaways that had been designed to win GOP support.” Just today the Washington Post includes this attribution to the Senate Democratic Leadership. From the Post:

“ “We’re pretty close,” {the majority leader} said Friday during a television appearance in Nevada, adding that he thought quote, “fat cats”, unquote, would have benefitted too much from the larger Baucus-Grassley bill.”

The portrait being painted by certain members of the majority, echoed without critical

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examination in some press reports, is wildly inaccurate.

For one thing, the tax extenders include provisions such as the deduction for qualified tuition and related expenses and also the deduction for certain expenses of elementary and secondary school teachers. If you are going to school or if you are a grade school teacher, the Senate Democratic Leadership thinks you are a fat cat so you are on your own. If your house was destroyed in a recent natural disaster and you still need any of the temporary disaster relief provisions contained in the extenders package, too bad, because helping you would amount to a corporate giveaway in the eyes of some.

The tax extenders have been routinely passed repeatedly because they are bipartisan and very popular. Democrats have consistently voted in favor of extending these tax provisions.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi released a very strong statement upon House passage of tax extenders in December of 2009, saying this was, quote, "good for businesses, good for homeowners, and good for our communities," end quote. December of 2009 was not very long ago. In 2006, the then-Democratic Leader released a blistering statement, quote, "after Bush Republicans in the Senate blocked passage of critical tax extenders," end quote, because, quote, "American families and businesses are paying the price because this Do Nothing Republican Congress refuses to extend important tax breaks," end quote. I ask unanimous consent that both of these statements be printed in the record in their entirety.

Recent bipartisan votes in the Senate on extending expiring tax provisions have come in the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008; the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006, which passed the Senate by unanimous consent; and the Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2004, which originally passed the Senate by voice vote although the conference report received 92 votes in favor and a whopping 3 against. According to the non-partisan Congressional Research Service, extension of several of these provisions go back even further, including the Tax Relief Extension Act of 1999, which again passed the Senate by unanimous consent but lost 1 vote on the conference report.

Blinded and dazed by the power of their now not-so-super majority, certain Democrats have in

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the last few weeks turned against the extenders. One Democrat said, quote, "Our side isn't sure that the Republicans are real interested in developing good policy and to move forward together. Instead, they are more inclined to play rope-a-dope again. My own view is, let's test them," end quote. Another member of this large 59-vote majority exclaimed, quote, "It looks more like a tax bill than a jobs bill to me. What the Democratic Caucus is going to put on the floor is something that's more focused on job creation than on tax breaks," end quote.

The only explanation for this behavior is that certain senators have decided that it serves a deeply partisan goal to slander what have been for several years bipartisan and popular tax provisions benefitting many different people.

Today's Washington Post article I quoted from earlier includes a statement from a Senate Democratic leadership aide saying that, quote, "No decisions have been made, but anyone expecting us immediately to go back to a bill that includes tax extenders will be sorely disappointed," end quote.

Having put their heads into the sand, this chamber's Democratic leaders seem intent on keeping them there. I appeal to all of you to vote against the Democratic Leadership's effort today to jam the Senate. A vote for the Senate Democratic Leadership's cloture motion is a vote to foreclose an opportunity to improve the bill. It also is a vote to forbid any corrections to mistakes in the bill. And there is a significant mistake in the Senate Democratic Leadership's bill. The bill as currently written would allow employers of illegal workers to benefit from the payroll tax holiday. We should correct that mistake with an amendment. The Senate Democratic Leadership's posture prohibits this correction.

Either the Democratic leaders are playing partisan politics with tax extenders, or they don't understand the worth of the provisions to the economy, including job retention and creation. The biodiesel industry alone says 23,000 jobs are at risk due to the biodiesel tax credit being allowed to expire. Those workers are not fat cats.

And in case anyone thinks biodiesel is something only lowans worry about, these green jobs are in forty-four of the fifty states. There are 24 facilities in Texas. There are 15 facilities in Iowa. There are 6 facilities in Illinois and 6 in Missouri. There are 4 facilities in Washington. Ohio has 11 facilities. There are 5 facilities in Indiana. There are 3 facilities each in Mississippi and South Carolina. There are 7 facilities in Pennsylvania and 4 in Arkansas. New Jersey has 2 facilities.

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There is one facility in North Dakota. Only 6 of the 50 states do not have some biodiesel production. They are Alaska, Delaware, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Wyoming. The other forty-four states have some biodiesel presence. I ask unanimous consent to put in the record an article from the Erie, Pennsylvania, newspaper, describing the struggles of a local biodiesel plant.

So we need to turn away from talk of fat cats. We need to get back to work on the bipartisan package that was in the works until the Senate Democratic Leadership's dramatic change in direction. Many people who are not fat cats or a part of large corporations are counting on these provisions being extended, and they are counting on their elected representatives to work together, as we were doing, to get the job done.

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