

Transcript of Yesterday's Press Availability After House Democratic Caucus Meeting

WASHINGTON – **Representatives John B. Larson (CT-01), Rosa DeLauro (CT-03) and Joe Courtney (CT-02)**

held a press availability yesterday before the Democratic Caucus meeting on the ongoing storm recovery efforts in Connecticut and the need for Congress to address Jobs. Below is the transcript:

Rep. Larson: Well good morning and thank you very much for joining us for a pre Caucus conference. We want to take a moment before we begin – a parochial interest, but something extraordinarily important.

Connecticut has gone through what I think most people would call a Katrina – Rita experience, where we have been hammered in succession by Irene, excessive rainstorms, and now of course, this northeaster, Alfred, which of course comes at an unusual time – in the fall when leaves were overburdening our trees and caused a catastrophic occurrence across the state of Connecticut. At its high point more than 900,000 people were out of power in the state of Connecticut.

I commend the Governor and his office in the way that they have responded. We thank the President and FEMA. The delegation has been working with the Administration to make sure that we got emergency status, but for the more than 500,000 people that are still out of power and have been so since Saturday, this is very difficult. We appreciate their persistence and their perseverance through this time. But certainly it's a frustrating time when you have 29 transmission lines that go down, where we had none during Irene.

The task has been a yeoman's one. We have doubled our efforts here as a delegation. I was directed to speak to the President yesterday on behalf of the delegation. A full complement of FEMA and the part of the restoration that we so desperately need in terms of additional line men is going to be coming forward in large part thanks to the effort and persistency of this delegation. I know that Jim Himes and Joe Lieberman and Dick Blumenthal and Chris Murphy all have participated in this as well.

Before we go directly to our message on jobs I wanted you to hear from Rosa DeLauro and Joe Courtney, who will also have something to say about jobs, but about the state of Connecticut.

Rep. DeLauro: Thanks very much John, and I'm pleased to be here with my colleagues, both for the message which we will talk about with regard to putting people back to work in our state of Connecticut, but across the country, but particularly about the state of play in Connecticut, which as Congressman Larson has pointed out, is really devastating – and up to 20 inches of snow in Connecticut – the power outage – as Congressman Larson has pointed out – and the reason for that.

I visited yesterday, and I know my colleagues have visited in their respective districts, the shelters. I was in Seymour, Connecticut where there was 100 percent power outage and people in shelters coming in for a shower or coming in to stay overnight in Middletown, where they've really accommodated close to, in the last several days, seven – eight hundred people. I was there on Sunday night and went back there yesterday, and folks were still there that I saw on Sunday. And also to Middlefield, I was in Naugatuck, and in those shelters - what you see – babies – six months, eight months old to people who are 88 or 90 years old. They are wanting to go back to their homes, but they can't – it's too cold, and the temperature has dropped in Connecticut.

So again, we're grateful for the effort the Governor has mounted, and we were all at the Governor's – Congressman Courtney, Congressman Larson, and myself, were at the Governor's Emergency Operations Center yesterday to talk to the Deputy Secretary from Energy to provide some assistance with this extraordinary power outage we have faced.

We also – I want to take a moment just to say to the people of Connecticut and the people who have been hurt that their resilience is extraordinary. The outpouring of volunteers to come and help, places who have donated food to make sure people are eating, and sending blankets, etc. to take care of them. But the issue is getting that power back on so that they can go home. We are working with the White House in order to get the additional amendment designating protective services for our state and for our municipalities. But it's an extraordinary situation and I know that this has happened to other parts of the country, but for us it's happened, and it's been a double whammy and we want to make sure that Connecticut and the people of Connecticut receive the resources that they need to be able to get their lives back together again.

Joe Courtney?

Rep. Courtney: Just briefly, because I think both of them described well the situation.

This morning the utility, the largest utility in the state, projected that we would have power back on Sunday at midnight, so that's another three or four days. My home town, Vernon, is completely a hundred percent out. My wife and I and our daughter have been camping at home, because that's really kind of what your lifestyle is - I shaved with melted snow yesterday morning.

And again, unlike Irene, which again, happened about three months ago, you know, the temperatures are in the 20's in the evening, the days are short, and this is just a much tougher challenge for people to get through. Irene, obviously, had long summer nights and weather in the 80's for people, so that, again, their immediate health was not threatened.

John lost one of his constituents last night with carbon monoxide poisoning. A lot of folks, unfortunately, really aren't able to really utilize their generators in a safe fashion – using them inside – and you know, this is going to be a very difficult three or four days ahead for the state and I know that all of us that came down last night are going to do everything we can to make sure the White House steps up every bit of assistance that we can get. Number one, more line crews, and number two, to get public assistance to these communities whose volunteer fire departments, police departments, their cert crews are just being stretched beyond the max.

So thank you, John, for taking a moment to put the spotlight on us.

Rep. Larson: I want to thank my colleagues, and I thank the press for this indulgence, but I think you can see 11 states were impacted, more than 2 million people, 900,000 of which were in Connecticut. So this is something near and dear to our hearts. Uppermost on their minds of course, in the state of Connecticut, even in the midst of this catastrophe is jobs.

And so, here we continue to wait for the Republicans to take up the President's agenda, to put the country back to work. As the President has said, this nation can't wait, well, when he said it

more than a month ago it was 14 months, to be put back to work. A month has transpired, more time has elapsed, and the country is still not back to work. And yet we have plans from both sides of the aisle that exist out there, that could be put into play, that could put this country back to work, which is precisely what we need.

We cannot understand the recalcitrance on the part of the Republicans leadership, not to take up the President's bill.

Obviously with 51 votes in the Senate, it has a majority over in the Senate. But only the arcane cloture rules in the Senate would prevent what every third-grader knows: that 51 votes means a majority of the people favor an initiative that would put them back to work.

It's hard to conceive for the American people during this difficult time when they're out of work and many of them, like us in the state of Connecticut, dealing with other natural calamities, have to deal with this personal calamity.

As one woman put it in my district, "I feel like I'm in the dark abyss of uncertainty. Does anyone in Washington understand my concerns and what it's like to be out of work and not knowing the future and not knowing whether help is on the way?" Especially frustrating when you have all these plans that are laid out there.

And whether it's infrastructure banks and whether it's putting people back to work directly, whether it's our fire, police and teachers, these are things that everybody understands and recognizes that this would grow the economy immediately and it's precisely what needs to be done, and continues to be a frustration of the Democratic Caucus, not to see this happen.

We will persist in hope that the Select Committee takes up jobs because we know that job creation equals deficit reduction.

The President later today will be hosting at a bridge here in town the need for infrastructure.

Again, let's put the country back to work. 14 million people unemployed, 25 million underemployed need the dignity that comes from a job.

My colleagues?

Rep. Courtney: Well, again, what we just talked about a moment ago is another textbook example of the fact that we have incredibly fragile power and energy infrastructure. We had two transformers collapse and fall into the Connecticut River. That should not be happening, and the opportunities and capacity for this country to strengthen its ability to move people and goods from one place to another by investing in transportation, by improving our power infrastructure in terms of burying lines, hardening, again, the substations and transformers. It is really limitless.

And the only thing that's holding us back is the political will to move forward as a country.

And as John said, what I think people looking at Washington, what I hear, is that this place scares them. Because we can't do some of the basic, fundamental tasks of government in terms of setting the horizon with budgets, with getting passed, again, what I think should be a fairly easy task of getting deficit reduction over a 10 year period on the right trajectory.

And instead we're just sort of trapped in this approach that the Republican majority has in the House, where their goal, and I think everybody gets it, is to take this President down.

This is about power. It's not about what's in the best interest of the country. Because if it was about what's in the best interest of this country, we would be moving forward on this jobs agenda.

Rep. DeLauro: Thank you.

I echo the comments of my colleagues, but I would add that some 17 years ago, I introduced

the national infrastructure bank, and in that regard, because an infrastructure bank, a development bank akin to what they have done in Europe with the European investment bank, is a driver of jobs in the long term.

That's what we have been talking about here. That's what the President has proposed in his jobs bill. And I'm hopeful that the Senate this week – unlike what it's done in the prior weeks, is to vote down the jobs bill package all together, and then followed up by voting down the Fix America's Schools as quickly as we can to put people back to work – that they will pass the legislation for an infrastructure bank. It is the key to our success.

That's not my commentary, but you check with any of the economists around the country and around the world, quite frankly, both in terms of long-term and short-term job growth.

If we can pull together public and private partnerships, to leverage dollars, to rebuild America, we can put this nation back on track. Our Republican colleagues in the last election said that they were going to create jobs and turn the economy around. None of which they have accomplished to date. And if you do create jobs you will lower the deficit.

That is a goal. However, the deficit goal should not be one that is only looked at through cutting the programs that would help to put people to work. It also means that there needs to be revenue on the table and it seems that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle are reluctant to put revenue on the table, as they are reluctant to even provide in the House of Representatives a hearing.

Regular order? They talk about regular order? When we have not been able to have a hearing on a piece of legislation, whether you are for it or against it?

The biggest single crisis in the nation, the challenge is to get people back to work and they will not hold a hearing on jobs. It tells you who the obstructionists are and who are willing to let this economy collapse because of politics.

Rep. Larson: Thank you. We're on our way to a Caucus. I will come out after the Caucus and

take further questions, but I apologize because we are running late this morning.

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