

WAXMAN GIVES OBAMA LESSONS IN NEGOTIATION, AGAIN

Update: As Dday corrects me, both these lessons in negotiation describe the same confrontation that took place on June 2.

DDay linked to this story describing Henry Waxman confronting President Obama because he had given the Republicans the impression he would cave on debt negotiations.

One Democrat who was there said Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) bluntly asked Obama whether he was willing to fight for Democratic priorities amid GOP calls for trillions of dollars in spending cuts.

In asking the question, Waxman said he'd asked several Republicans about their White House meeting the day before and had been concerned by their response.

"To a person, they said the president's going to cave," Waxman told Obama, according to his colleague's account.

"If you're not going to cave, eliminating that misunderstanding is very, very important to the negotiations," the lawmaker said, retelling Waxman's message. "And if you're going to cave, tell us right now."

Obama, however, "didn't answer the question," the Democrat added. "Obama got in a huff, and he said, 'I'm the president of the United States, my words carry weight' – which is not the answer," the lawmaker said. "That's not what anyone challenges. It's whether he is doing this negotiation in the right way."

It's not the first time Waxman has voiced Democrats' frustration with Obama's serial capitulations to the Republicans.

Earlier this month, they had a nearly identical confrontation in part on precisely the same issue (championing Democratic priorities in negotiations).

The challenge – on behalf of the many Democrats who have long complained that Obama is not making enough use of his White House megaphone – was principally delivered by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), according to the attendees. Waxman, lawmakers said, called for stronger action across the board, rather than on a particular issue.

But Obama responded that he has to be more careful and more considered than that, and that he is executing an existing plan.

The president has heard the complaint before. Democrats have accused Obama repeatedly of ceding too much ground to the GOP, especially on health care and the extension of the Bush-era tax cuts for the wealthy. But attendees said the critique appeared to rub him the wrong way on Thursday.

“He was a little testy with the Waxman question. Essentially, Mr. Waxman was urging him to fight more,” one legislator said. “The president reminded folks that he's the president sitting in that chair and he knows how to negotiate.”

Obama also told the assembled Democrats not to count on more fiery rhetoric from the Oval Office.

“He said, ‘There's a difference between me and a member of Congress,’” another lawmaker said, paraphrasing the president as saying: “When I say

something the markets react, all of society reacts, other countries react. I've got to be careful with what I say. I can't just say it for brinkmanship. I've got to say it in a way so that I get what I want said, but I don't upset markets and so on."

Aside from the way this earlier article—citing a bunch of progressives claiming they had been heard—showed Democrats getting duped into believing Obama listens to them as often as Obama gets shellacked in negotiations with Republicans, I'm most amused by the underlying logic of the report.

Waxman told Obama that every single Republican he consulted had told Waxman Obama was going to cave on Democratic issues.

Obama's testy response (I love imagining, btw, the 6'1" Obama getting pissy as the 5'5" Waxman challenges him on these issues) was that his "his words carry weight."

But of course, every Republican asked said that Obama was going to cave.

That either means Obama told them he was going to cave (which is the only scenario in which Obama shouldn't be ashamed at how little weight his word carries with Republicans). Or Obama's claim his words carry weight is utterly belied by Republican mockery of his resolve.

Maybe after being blown off yet again, the Democrats will stop being the only ones around who believe Obama's word carries any weight.