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Marco Rubio's jobs bill bipartisan, incremental

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WASHINGTON — With Congress' ability to pass substantial jobs legislation trapped in the jaws of partisanship, Sen. Marco Rubio is going for baby steps.

The Florida Republican on Tuesday introduced a jobs package he and a Democratic co-author say would boost small businesses and send a signal to the public that Washington is moving on some fronts.

"We're not claiming this bill is earth-shattering," Rubio said. "What we did is very simple. We sat down and said, 'Okay, let's find all the things that Republicans, Democrats, the president and everybody agrees on, and let's pass those things.' "

He crafted the proposal — the American Growth, Recovery, Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Act — with Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del.

The AGREE Act would extend for three years a measure allowing businesses to depreciate the full cost of qualified equipment and property purchases; extend by three years a tax break on some small business stock; extend a research and development tax credit to 2013; provide veterans with up to \$100,000 in tax credits for starting a franchise; and allow more highly skilled workers in the country, among other measures.

Rubio and Coons stressed that the ideas were drawn from both parties and "job creators." To emphasize that point, they were joined at a news conference by Steve Case, a former AOL executive who is a member of the President's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness. Jobs bills are flying around the Capitol these days, so Rubio and Coons' prospects are unknown. The legislation has not yet been evaluated by the Congressional Budget Office for its cost.

Rubio and Coons hit the cable TV news circuit Tuesday evening (and plan a trio of appearances this morning) to pitch their plan.

"The provisions are generally positive," said Dan Mitchell, an economist for the libertarian Cato Institute, who reviewed the plan at the Times' request. "Lower tax rates on investing are key for job creation. Temporary tax cuts usually are not effective because businesses and entrepreneurs generally don't make permanent decisions to expand output and hire more workers based on short term tax provisions. But the Rubio-Coons proposal addresses this problem by using three-year windows. Not perfect, but much more likely to boost growth."

Rubio seemed to be everywhere in Washington Tuesday. He was the guest at POLITICO's "Playbook Breakfast" interview series, held the jobs news conference, then sat down for a wide-ranging talk with Florida reporters. A few of his responses:

- On whether military action would be justified against Iran. "The idea of Iran having a nuclear weapon is so catastrophic that there is virtually no price too high to pay to prevent it from happening." He would not say whether he thinks military action should be taken now, however, adding, "You always hope sanctions will work."

- On whether the tea party will still exist in four years. Yes, he said. "Because the things the tea party believes in, which is a constitutionally limited role for government, it's not going to go away. It will continue to be a vibrant force in American politics."
- On the chances of the GOP presidential nominee winning Florida. "Good. I think at least 50/50, given the circumstances. But that vote's going to have to be earned."
- On whether he'll seek the vice presidency. No, he said. "Because I'm focused on my job in the Senate. What's wrong with the Senate? "