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## House Dems call Republicans promise-breakers

By Joseph Picard

It is only the second day of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress and charges of hypocrisy and broken promises are flying around the House of Representatives. As may have been expected, these charges are coming from the Democrats, who are now in the minority.

"Today's rules package reveals only one thing, and that is hypocrisy," said Rep. Frank Pallone, D-NJ, on the House floor on Wednesday during debate on the House rules the new majority party, the Republicans, put forward.

"Despite all the rhetoric about the deficit, the Republicans first act in the majority will be to allow a legislative process that goes back to exploding the national debt," Pallone said.

The House, like the Senate, draws up its own rules, the majority party composes them and, because it is the majority party, wins the vote to adopt them, as the Republicans did on Wednesday.

One of the new rules, which Pallone and other Democrats roundly criticized, would change the current rule of "pay as you go," or PAYGO, to "cut as you go," or CUTGO. Under PAYGO, any proposal that mandated spending public money would have to indicate how the proposal would be paid for - that is, through cutting other government spending, raising taxes, or some combination of the two.

Under CUTGO, the tax raising option disappears and any spending proposed must be offset by cutting spending elsewhere.

But, as Pallone pointed out, the Republicans exempted tax cuts from CUTGO.

"Mandatory spending still needs to be paid for but tax cuts do not," Pallone said. "Which means Republicans can cut taxes for the rich and increase the deficit while doing so."

The Bush administration tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 were not paid for by cutting spending or through any other means. The revenue lost to the government markedly increased the deficit and the national debt. The Congressional Budget Office has called the Bush tax cuts one of the main drivers of the rising national debt and the nation's looming fiscal crisis.

These are the tax cuts that were extended through a bargain between the Obama administration and Republican leadership last year. They are still in effect and are still not paid for. The GOP plans to make the tax cuts permanent.

Republicans, who swept into power in the House in November's elections, often campaigned on cutting government spending and reducing the deficit.

"Do you want to honor the commitment to reduce the deficit or abandon it?" said Rep. Rob Andrews, D-NJ. "The rules plan permits an abandonment of the promise to reduce the deficit because it ignores the fiscal consequences of the repeal of the healthcare bill, which the Congressional Budget Office says will reduce the deficit by more than a trillion dollars over the next 20 years, and

because it ignores the fiscal consequences of permanently extending the tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 for the wealthiest Americans."

Michael Tanner, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, defended the Republican rule-making, explaining that Republicans exempted tax cuts from the CUTGO rule because they do not agree with the way the CBO considers tax cuts.

"The CBO scores tax cuts on a static model," Tanner said. "If you cut taxes \$100 million, the CBO does not recognize any effect on the economy, but simply marks down the \$100 million as adding to the deficit."

But Republicans believe that tax cuts stimulate the economy by expanding business endeavors and creating jobs. Therefore, tax cuts have a real economic value not captured by the CBO's reckoning, Tanner said.

"You can understand why the CBO scores like that, because they are unable to quantify the effect of tax cuts on the economy," Tanner said.

But, he explained, Republicans do not want to be locked into an accounting method they do not think accurately portrays the economic reality.

Democratic lawmakers have also pointed out that Republicans are already retreating from promises they made in their Pledge to America.

Two of those promises were to cut the federal budget by \$100 billion the first year in power, and to allow Democratic lawmakers to offer amendments to any bill that will reduce the deficit.

But the House rules passed Wednesday do not allow Democrats to offer amendments, and thereby engage in debate, on the healthcare reform repeal Republicans plan to move next week. Also, Republican leaders are backing away from the "\$100 billion budget cut" promise as impracticable.

House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer, D-MD, mocked the new Republican majority on his website with a paraphrase of a Who song: "Meet the new Republicans: same as the old Republicans."

And Hoyer quoted a statement made in November 2010 by Rep. Paul Ryan, R-WI, the new chairman of the House Budget Committee: "We're going to have an open and transparent process and allow any member of Congress to amend bills in committees and things like that," Ryan said.

Ryan, House Speaker John Boehner, R-OH, Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-VA, and Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-CA, were all contacted Thursday morning for comment on the charges Democrats were making against them. None responded before this story was posted after 4 p.m.

Thomas Mann, senior fellow at the Brookings Institute, said the Republicans are trying to maintain a positive image for the people who put them in power.

"The Republican leadership is worried that Democrats could offer amendments on popular parts of the Affordable Care Act that would either pass or put Republicans who vote against them in a difficult political position," Mann said.

"It could also blur their message on repealing the law, which is a symbolic gesture to Tea Party members and activists," he said.

As for the huge budget cut promise, Mann said that "was always pie in the sky. With a chunk of the fiscal year already elapsed, they are trying to find a way to pass something out of the House now and then extend the cuts in the next fiscal year."