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Obama clings to hope on climate bill with recess looming

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With time slipping away before the August recess and lawmakers eyeing the campaign trail, President Obama is pushing to revive a cap-and-trade climate bill and a small-business assistance program he says will create jobs.

For good measure, a more partisan-sounding Obama chided Republicans for stalling on his judicial nominations.

"Everyone understands that we're less than 100 days from an election," Obama said in the Rose Garden. "It's during this time that the noise and the chatter about who's up in the polls and which party is ahead threatens to drown out just about everything else."

House lawmakers were preparing Tuesday to vote on a war funding bill that Obama also wants in hand before both chambers depart for the August recess -- with all of the House members and one-third of the Senate heading out to campaign.

"The folks we serve," Obama said, "sent us here to represent their interests, not our own."

Obama met privately with a bipartisan group of lawmakers before emerging to enumerate his ambitious, possibly hopeless end-of-summer agenda. The House is set to close business next week, followed by the Senate the week after.

Obama also remarked on the WikiLeaks release of secret documents on the war in Afghanistan, in statements the White House hopes will finally shift the narrative away from the documents and back to topics Obama wants to talk about.

Obama said he is "concerned" about the leak, but said problems in waging war underscore the need for lawmakers to pass his \$33 billion war funding request. He also took a swipe at his predecessor.

"For seven years, we failed to implement a strategy adequate to the challenge in this region," he said, urging lawmakers to send him enough money to keep the wars going.

The president wants Congress to pass a modest assistance package for small business, including

eliminating some capital gains taxes and expanding government loan programs.

But Chris Edwards, a tax policy expert at the Cato Institute, said Obama's nod to small business is largely meaningless if he moves ahead with letting the Bush administration tax cuts expire at the end of the year -- a battle lawmakers are expected to face when they return after Labor Day.

"If he really wants to help small business, he should extend the tax cuts," Edwards said.

House Republican leader John Boehner of Ohio, previewing the tax cut battle to come, repeatedly called letting the tax cuts expire "a job-killing tax hike."

On a climate change, the administration pushed back on suggestions that a bill capping emissions is hopeless this year, saying the two chambers could insert a cap on emissions during conference consideration of energy legislation.

"I don't think the bill is essentially dead this year," said White House press secretary Robert Gibbs.

The House previously approved a bill to cap the industrial emissions blamed for air pollution, but the Senate balked and is considering a pared-back bill that would encourage energy efficiency.

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