

# PhillyDeals: Democrats try to appease angry factory owners

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You might call it the Democrats' Capitalist Appreciation and Congressional Humility Tour - almost.

**U.S. Rep. Steny Hoyer (D., Md.)**, the second-ranking leader of what's now the minority party in the House of Representatives, joined local **Reps. Chaka Fattah** and **Allyson Schwartz**, both Philadelphia Democrats, to meet with 20 factory owners Wednesday at Center City's **Kleinbard, Bell & Brecker L.L.P.** law firm.

The Washington delegation came to hear business complaints, promote probusiness aspects of their own agenda, and try to mend fences. Silver-haired Hoyer said he wanted his old power back in future elections and didn't want to stay in the minority for the rest of his career.

Democrats around the country, led by **President Obama**, are making similar overtures, suggesting tax- and trade-law reforms they hope will excite manufacturers, and urging business owners to push Republicans to work with them toward common goals.

Hoyer said he wanted Democrats to appeal to the "10 percent" of Americans who lead companies, found businesses, and create jobs that the rest of the nation depends on.

The Philly crowd was a tough sell.

'Killing us'

"The federal government is killing us," **Bruce Entwisle**, president of **Harry Miller Co.**, a North Philadelphia industrial-chemicals-maker, told the reps.

"There's so much insecurity and uncertainty. The president is antibusiness. We've got one of the highest [business] tax rates in the world."

Fattah stood on the defensive, pointing out that a lot of U.S. companies don't pay taxes. But Hoyer said he felt the owners' pain: "We want to bring tax rates down" while ending loopholes - a position he said Fattah, Schwartz, and Obama shared.

"I don't think the president is really as antibusiness as you do," Hoyer said. But he conceded that past "rhetoric has not been helping."

"You need to talk about health care," said **Ronald "Boots" Nissenbaum**, boss at **Cover Sports**, a Southwest Philadelphia company that makes coverings for baseball fields.

"What other industry can raise its prices 15 percent a year? Health care and higher ed. That's it. There should be a public option, but I believe in competition" among health plans.

Schwartz defended Obama's health-care expansion bill. "The voters didn't agree with you," Nissenbaum said, raising his voice. "It's hard to lead the way," Schwartz said, smiling - a little.

Some complaints were highly specific and served to remind business owners why it can be useful to make friends with your local member of Congress, even if he or she is a Democrat.

"My company spends less than 8 percent of our revenue on foreign parts, but the **Federal Trade Commission** will not let me label our parts as 'Made in America,' " complained **Alix James**, chief executive of **Nielsen-Kellerman**, a Boothwyn maker of sports gear.

"We're going to help get this resolved," pledged Fattah.

**Fenjin "Gene" He** asked whether anyone could explain to him why it has taken years, with no resolution, to get Philadelphia city government to approve expansion of his factory, **Nature Soy Inc.**, on North 10th Street.

"I can help with that," Fattah said. It's in his district.

Businesspeople who depend on federal contracts had different concerns. "I'm worried about our overreaction to the deficit," said **Jim Conybear** of **Metlab**, an Elkins Park metal-treating company that counts the **Pentagon** as a client.

Don't just complain, Hoyer told the group in parting. Tell us what to fix.

## Not Glenn Beck

Later, I asked Entwisle whether the Democrats had succeeded in making themselves seem more business-friendly.

"It didn't change my mind," he told me.

Entwisle said he was drafting a letter to Fattah, complaining that the congressman "tried to marginalize what I said," as though Entwisle had gotten his ideas from talk radio and cable-TV screamers. "I don't watch **Glenn Beck**. I read the **Wall Street Journal**," he told me, contrasting two of news mogul **Rupert Murdoch's** popular properties.

"Allyson Schwartz was the same way," Entwisle added. "On health care, she told the gentleman who raised the question that she knows a little bit better than he did," even though he was the one who has to pay premiums for his workers, not her.

But if the locals on this exhibition team went down swinging, the Democrats' star visitor still managed to score a point.

"Steny Hoyer strikes me as an old-time Democrat. I think he listened," Entwisle said. "We're always going to be polar opposites. But he came a long way and made the time to listen."

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