

HOW'S THAT PLAN GOING, MR. PRESIDENT?

I was going to write about this story—about a confrontation between Henry Waxman and Barack Obama over the latter's ineffective negotiating strategy—yesterday.

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."

But I'm sort of glad I waited until after today's announcement that unemployment has gone up and declining public sector employment is dragging down the economy. Because it makes it all the more appropriate to highlight Obama's

claim that he has a plan.

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

Not only does the crummy economic news weaken what had been a position of relative strength for the President, but it shows that if he's got a plan, it's either not working or not designed to work. Obama's plan—to focus on the deficit—only makes it more likely we'll see ongoing cuts to public employment.

Is that really the plan, Mr. President?