

# CHUCK SCHUMER FOR MAJORITY LEADER

*Update: I've been reliably informed that Schumer made the comments to the NYT on Thursday, before his Friday meeting with POTUS.*

Since I've been obsessing about all the excess brush in TX now that we have a President who insists on working in August, I've been tracking Obama's schedule very closely. And so I noticed on Friday that Chuck Schumer had a late afternoon meeting in the Oval Office that was closed to the Press.

Just Chuck Schumer.

I found that rather odd, since Schumer's Chairmanship-of Rules-isn't necessarily one that would be of interest to the President. Unlike the House, for example, the Senate Rules Committee isn't going to have significant say over how a bill-health care, for example-comes up for a vote. [Update: I'm increasingly convinced this is wrong: Rules might be critical if they tried to do health care in reconciliation.]

And while there are a number of things buzzing in NY-notably, the confirmation of NY's Sonia Sotomayor and US Attorney and former Schumer aide Preet Bharara-that might concern both the White House and NY's senior Senator. But on a lot of those issues, some other Committee Chair would be involved (such as Pat Leahy for judiciary issues), which make it less likely that's what the White House wanted to chat to Schumer and just Schumer about. Furthermore, some issues (such as Carolyn Maloney's decision not to challenge Kristen Gillibrand) would be more appropriate in a non-official venue.

So I've been assuming that Schumer got called to the White House because he has a unique ability to get things done in the Senate. That's partly by virtue of his past tenure as DSCC Chair; thirteen Senators owe their position to Schumer,

including a number of moderates (Sheehan, Warner, Hagen, Franken, Udall, Udall, Merkley, Begich, McCaskill, Webb, Tester, Brown, Casey, and Whitehouse). He's the kind of guy who, if he were majority leader, would be tremendously effective and would have a lot of chits to call in on key legislative battles. Oh, and he's also on the Finance Committee—the committee on which six totally unrepresentative Senators are holding healthcare hostage.

Which is why I'm curious to see these comments from Schumer. (h/t Americablog)

"If they can't do it by Sept. 15th, I think the overwhelming view on the Democratic side is going to be, then, they're never going to get it done," Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, observed in a separate interview. "And there's always a worry that, you know, delay, delay, delay, you lose any momentum whatsoever."

[snip]

On the "public option," Mr. Schumer said, "if you call it a co-op but it meets certain criteria – it's available on Day 1, it's available to everybody, it has the strength to go up against the big insurance companies and the big suppliers to bring down prices – fine.

"If it's going to be a measly little thing that's just a fig leaf, not fine," Mr. Schumer said.

[snip]

"The proof of the pudding in this is not going to be who votes for it, if you have Republicans or not," said Mr. Schumer, who is heavily favored to win a third term in 2010. "It's going to be when it passes and when it goes into effect: does it work?"

(Actually, now that I think of it, the Rules

Committee might be able to toy with the way "reconciliation" is understood, which would have to be used in a Democrats-only bill.)

You see, coming from any other Senator, I'd consider this just one more comment amid a sea of comments about what might happen in the Senate. But coming from Schumer, coming just days after his curious meeting with Obama on Friday, I suspect this is a line in the sand.

Harry Reid might not get us there, but Chuck Schumer might.