

MARK WARNER'S SUPERDUPERCONGRESS

I find it amusing that two guys who are on the Senate Intelligence Committee—Mark Warner and Saxby Chambliss—hosted a “secret meeting” that got reported just two days later.

The private gathering this week, held Wednesday in a Capitol meeting room, included about 25 centrists from both parties. It was organized by Sens. Mark R. Warner (D-Va.) and Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.), two members of the “Gang of Six,” which tried unsuccessfully to engineer a grand deal patterned loosely after the plan laid out by the deficit commission headed by former Clinton White House chief of staff Erskine Bowles and former senator Alan Simpson.

Though perhaps they should blame Bob Corker and Holy Joe Lieberman, who both blabbed about the meeting on the record.

When I first read about this secret cabal of 25 Senators meeting to cut! cut! cut!—what I’ll call SuperDuperCongress to highlight how stupid our Senators are and to emphasize their apparent self-importance—I didn’t pay much attention.

But then I realized (having not read closely to the bottom the first time) that this was an effort of Mark Warner, who lobbied vocally, but unsuccessfully, to get named to SuperCongress. And I recalled a look to kill that Jack Reed sent Mark Warner’s way in the pre-speech pomp last night.

Which got me thinking about what Warner’s SuperDuperCongress is trying to do—aside from put the interests of the banksters even further ahead of real people.

While the article notes that, like Warner’s SuperDuperCongress, Obama wants SuperCongress to cut more than they’ve been tasked to do, several

of the comments from the article send a clear message that at least some SuperDuperCongress members think their efforts matter a lot more than Obama's pitch for jobs.

"I don't think I'm speaking out of school that it was a unanimous feeling among a large group of senators from both sides of the aisle," said Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), one of the meeting participants. "Most people are far more focused on this supercommittee than any speech the president's going to give.

[snip]

Several people familiar with the discussions said the lawmakers felt that, after the pomp and ceremony of Obama's joint-session speech fades, the center of political and policy gravity on Capitol Hill will be the work of the special committee, chaired by Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Rep. Jeb Hensarling (R-Tex.).

[snip]

One senior Democratic aide called Obama's jobs plan largely "dead on arrival" because its expected price tag would roughly cancel out the one year's worth of savings many lawmakers hope the supercommittee will find.

So while there's every reason to believe Obama would be sympathetic to this effort (and it's likely that Obama ally Dick Durbin, another member of the Gang of Six, is among the 25), at least some of the participants in Mark Warner's SuperDuperCongress are basically saying, "Fuck Obama and the jobs bill he needs to pass to get reelected, we're more interested in cutting."

This also seems like an attack on Harry Reid's authority. He, after all, picked Patty Murray, Max Baucus, and John Kerry for SuperCongress. Not only did he shun the Democratic Gang of Six members (along with Warner and Durbin, Kent Conrad), but he happened to pick Max Baucus, who voted against the Catfood Commission because it

did things like cut social security (which the Gang of Six aimed to cut using chained COLA, among other means). And while I think John Kerry is the weak link among SuperCongress Democrats, on paper at least the three Senators seem likely to be able to meet the demands of House Democrats, who want programs for the poor protected in a way the Gang of Six and Catfood Commission weren't much interested in.

Frankly, I'm not sure what to make of SuperDuperCongress. It seems like a bunch of Democrats have decided to pre-empt Obama's push for jobs, but also try an end-run around those Democrats in the House who still believe in the New Deal and the Democratic Party's legacy.