Three Days Until Fiscal Cliff -- Will A House Progressive Uprising Scuttle A Deal?

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By Michael Matthew Bloomer, Friday, Dec. 28, 2012.

[caption id="attachment_3390" align="alignleft" width="281"]

United States Gridlock Busting Superhero Fiscal Clifford[/caption]

Deadlines imminent! Tea Party cooperation missing! Economy jeopardized! Progressives restive! Obama miffed! McConnell funny looking! Boehner dyspeptic! Cantor snickering! Knives are out! What to do, America, *what to do?*Though rumors today of a possible settlement of the ongoing non-negotiations over the so-called "fiscal cliff" have surfaced,[1. Narrower Tax Deal Floated as Lawmakers to Sit With Obama, JONATHAN WEISMAN and JENNIFER STEINHAUER, *New York Times*, Dec. 28, 2012. Obama, Lawmakers Set for Fiscal-Cliff Meeting, SIOBHAN HUGHES, JANET HOOK and CAROL E. LEE, *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 28, 2012.] time to actually commit the proposal to legislative writing and secure its approval in the House and Senate is short. Although the Congress can do pretty much as it wishes to rush legislation to the President's desk, can a deal, after all this haggling, be reached? How can lawmakers hobble together a "grand bargain"?

Here's the problem that may now emerge, and this time its from the *left* flank. Let's suppose that Speaker John Boehner and his oft-times nemesis, Tea Partier House Majority Leader, Eric Cantor, reach an agreement that would enable a "fiscal cliff avoidance plan" to be brought to the House floor for a vote. In addition, let's suppose that Mitch McConnell is also in an agreeable mood and has his Tea Partiers like Rand Paul in line as well so as to avoid a filibuster. Finally, Harry Reid agrees to bring whatever bill emerges to the Senate floor for a vote. Copacetic, eh?

Well, no. Here's the problem with an agreement that gets House and Senate Republicans on board: Any such proposal would require concessions on the Democratic side that would be considered toxic, if not unthinkable, for example:

- a tax rate increase set at anything above the $400,000 floor that the President has

proposed,

- an agreement on the doc-fix that cuts deeply into health prevention programs, or,
- worst of all, any compromise that raisies the Medicare eligibility age, let's say to 66 rather than the GOP proposal of 67.

This kind of deal would induce progressives to bolt the agreement. They are an important and numerous body, enshrined since 1991 in the Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC).[2. Congressional Progressive Caucus (accessed 12-28-2012)] Led by Co-Chairmen Keith Ellison (D-MN) and Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), the more than 80 member caucus (includes one Senator, Bernie Sanders (I-VT)) already has strong reservations about President Obama's "fiscal cliff" proposal (you know, the one that John Boehner and Mitch McConnell say they've never heard of). The administration's compromise over tax rates irks them, and they oppose the possible move to chained CPI calculations for Social Security (and other) inflation adjustments.[3. Progressive Caucus Stands Against Chained CPI, Press Release, *Congressional Progressive Caucus*, Dec. 19, 2012]

So, it follows, that life is restive in the CPC and further compromises and concessions to GOP radicals by the administration to ensure House passage through the Tea Party roadblocks will incite a progressive riot. Recall, they are already up in arms over Obama's abandonment of his $250,000 tax rate pledge and Speaker Boehner's Plan B. How this will play out will fall to the House Democratic leadership, in particular, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's own acceptance of the ultimate deal that may emerge tonight. Then, assuming her own "buy in," she must convince progressives like Ellison, Grijalva, Sheila Jackson-Lee, Xavier Becerra, John Conyers, Elijah Cummings, Rosa DeLauro, Carolyn Maloney, and Maxine Waters aboard a creaky ship. Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer will have his work cut out.

Finally, House passage of a "fiscal cliff" bill will be dicey, at best. It may be possible to cobble together a coalition of Tea Partiers, Democrats, and progressives around a deal that none of them like. Yet, the intransigence of the Tea Partiers regardless of the issue is well known. Why would they change now? And if they do yield, it will be a "deal" that progressives cannot support. If the CPC votes in a block against a too-Tea Parrty heavy compromise deal, that's 80 votes against. Add in a dozen or so dissatisfied Tea Partiers, and the phrase "politics make strange bedfellows" gains renewed meaning.

Fiscal Clifford'sprediction (see his pic above)? No grand bargain possible. Instead, another can, another kick, another road . . .

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