

Possible budget maneuver draws howls

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- Members of the Obama administration are contemplating a strategy to pass some of the U.S. president's initiatives without Republican input, GOP leaders said.

Republicans say the move to push through proposals that would expand healthcare coverage and tax greenhouse gas emissions could irreparably harm relations with U.S. President Barack Obama and are counter to his pledge to restore bipartisanship, The Washington Post reported Wednesday.

"That would be the Chicago approach to governing: Strong-arm it through," said Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., who considered joining the Obama administration as Commerce secretary. "You're talking about the exact opposite of (bipartisanship)."

The "budget reconciliation" process would allow Obama's health and energy proposals to be folded into a bill that needs only 51 Senate votes to pass, making it filibuster-proof, the Post said. Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton used it for their deficit-reduction packages and President George Bush used it to push through tax cuts.

Administration officials told the newspaper no final decision about the option has been made but White House budget director Peter Orszag said Tuesday it was "premature to be taking it off the table."

U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., a moderate, said to the Post that reconciliation would create "kind of a divisive atmosphere." Lincoln has been working with GOP colleagues on a foundation for healthcare reform and said skirting the process "would just be sticking them in the eye."

Using budget reconciliation for major policy also drew opposition from Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., chairman of the Senate Budget Committee.

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