

Unlawful response

by The San Diego Union-Tribune.

Public outrage at AIG's eye-popping bonuses at taxpayer expense is no surprise. We don't like it, either. We did, however, expect the response from Congress and the White House to be at least lawful.

Instead, House members who should not have been surprised rushed to pass a new law of suspect constitutionality, all to undo a dozen lines in the month-old, 11,000-page stimulus bill that help us more in the bill than out. Maybe the Senate will realize in its deliberations that someone did us all a favor by sparing the government of the United States worldwide doubt about the reliability of its own contracts.

The nation's ability to pay its contractual debts may be in doubt. It's willingness to pay should be unquestioned.

Yet Congress and the White House quickly and loudly sweat the small stuff to wring every drop of political advantage out of temporary ire.

Take, for instance, the careful parsing that went into slapping a 90 percent tax on bonuses. It affects the bonuses of workers whose companies got at least \$5 billion in bailout funds and whose household income exceeds \$250,000, the new floor for exorbitant taxation generally.

Take President Obama's promise to "pursue every legal avenue" to get those millions back. A graduate of Harvard Law, he must know that every legal avenue likely won't reap a nickel.

Take all this time and talk over \$469 million while infusions of trillions in public money have yet to produce much daylight in our financial black hole. In fact, the administration's antidote for toxic assets and the economy's other ills looks less effective by the day.

Right now the nation needs leaders in Washington. This past week, we got followers of the anathema du jour.

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