



LEADING THE NEWS

Republicans all a-Twitter over the visit

By Michael O'Brien

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Audiences usually treat presidents to a round of polite applause, but when President Obama addressed House Republicans on Tuesday, they started Twittering.

Just a week after being inaugurated and becoming the most powerful man in the world, Obama strode into the Republican redoubt on Capitol Hill, whereupon its denizens started texting accounts of the proceedings into cyberspace.



There could be no clearer demonstration of the way politics has moved into an age in which technology trumps formality.

While Obama implored Republicans behind closed doors to consider supporting his economic stimulus bill, GOP thumbs worked overtime, tapping updates onto the microblogging website for thousands to read.

“Impressive,” Rep. Bob Inglis (R-S.C.) remarked, before noting that everyone in the room — Obama and Republicans included — expressed “deep concern about unemployment.”

“There’s real desire in this room to figure a way back to prosperity,” Inglis wrote on his Twitter page.

Others were quick to point out the sharp differences on the stimulus package.

Obama had “not much luck [because] we know tax cuts [equal] better and quicker,” Tweeted Rep. John Culberson (R-Texas), one of the most frequent Twitter and new-media users in the House.

Twitter allows users to share websites and opinions or interact with other users in 140 characters or fewer. The site has caught on with media-savvy lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, who routinely check in from locations as varied as constituent breakfasts in their districts and the floor of the House during a vote.

“If [the] President carries this on it does open door for a new tone!” Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-Mich.) exclaimed.

“Sharp differences are muted,” Rep. Michael Burgess (R-Texas) Twittered.

The Republicans commended Obama throughout the meeting, but were quick to note their continued disagreement with the president and the House Democratic leadership after conservative blogs pounced on the friendly rhetoric. (Pundit Michelle Malkin, a frequent Twitter user herself, directed a message toward Burgess during the meeting: “You Tweeted during Obama [meeting]: ‘Sharp differences are muted.’ That’s exactly what’s wrong [with] the Republican Party!”)

“President Obama is speaking to House Republicans right now on Democratic stimulus bill,” wrote Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) on Twitter. “Good sales man, bad product.”

“[The] fact remains that his stimulus expands government with little economic growth along with it,” Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.) said after the meeting.

“His speech doesn’t match the process that [House Speaker Nancy] Pelosi [D-Calif.] and [Senate Majority Leader Harry] Reid [D-Nev.] are implementing,” Hoekstra wrote.

“At least Obama has talked about the stimulus for an hour. Which is about an hour longer than Dem leadership has spent with us on this,” Burgess said.

Members of Congress have slowly increased their use of the website, with some Tweeting directly and some being moderated by their staffs. According to the website TweetCongress.org, which tracks lawmakers’ Twitter feeds, 29 Republican members are on Twitter, compared to 16 Democrats and one Independent: Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut.

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