

S.F. provides Pelosi shelter from D.C. storm

Matthew B. Stannard, Chronicle Staff Writer
Tuesday, August 11, 2009



(08-10) 19:08 PDT -- House Speaker Nancy Pelosi barnstormed through her home turf of San Francisco on Monday, touting the city as a crucible of innovation and a home for model social programs as she rallied support for health care reform - while in Washington, D.C., the discussion focused on an opinion piece she co-wrote labeling the tactics of some protesting the plan as "un-American."

At a conference on innovation at San Francisco's Mission Bay and at a Potrero Hill program helping connect families in poverty to overlooked benefits, Pelosi was greeted by friendly crowds and political allies.

The tone was markedly different from chaotic town halls across the nation that have provided fodder for YouTube and cable news shows. Some members of Congress, on summer recess before returning to debate the proposed health care overhaul, have considered holding constituent question-and-answer sessions by phone instead of in person to avoid the ruckus.

Pelosi suggested last week that some apparent grassroots protests were inauthentic, organized by special interests or political opponents to the proposed health care plan. She and House majority leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., made waves Monday in a USA Today commentary in which they criticized the tactics that have been used by demonstrators at some town halls, such as hanging members of Congress in effigy or chanting loudly to drown out discussion.

"These disruptions are occurring because opponents are afraid not just of differing views - but of the facts themselves," the pair wrote. "Drowning out opposing views is simply un-American."

The loaded phrase brought criticism from House Minority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio.

"Each public forum should give every participant the opportunity to express their views," Boehner said in a statement. "But to label Americans who are expressing vocal opposition to the Democrats' plan 'un-American' is outrageous and reprehensible."

White house response

White House deputy press secretary Bill Burton, asked about the opinion piece by reporters on Air Force One, said, "There's actually a pretty long tradition of people shouting at politicians in America," adding that President Obama welcomes rigorous debate.

"If you just want to come to a town hall so that you can disrupt and so that you can scream over another person, he doesn't think that that's productive," Burton added.

Still, Pelosi said Monday in San Francisco that she and the White House are on the same page, and she made a distinction between legitimate debate between members of Congress and their constituents and organized efforts to shout down discussion.

"This is about the democratic way," she said. "We have a responsibility to hear what our constituents want to say. If somebody wants to shut that down, we don't think that that's fair."

In his press release responding to Pelosi's opinion piece, Boehner argued that Democrats have failed to answer basic questions about their plan, such as whether it will "put government between doctors and patients, force anyone to lose their current health coverage, kill jobs, promote taxpayer-funded abortion or cut Medicare."

Program touted as model

Pelosi used her San Francisco appearances to highlight her health care talking points, taking time to make the case that the proposed overhaul will let people keep the coverage they have if they like it, include a cap on payments but not on coverage, and prevent discrimination for pre-existing conditions.

At her Potrero Hill stop, Pelosi touted as a national model a program operated by SingleStop USA that uses specialized software to identify government benefits - from food stamps to tax credits to housing assistance - that people living in poverty are eligible for but may not know about.

About \$60 billion in existing benefits go untouched nationwide each year, according to SingleStop officials, including \$3 billion in California.

Pelosi was introduced by a young single mother of three who was able to buy a car thanks to a \$6,000 tax credit the program identified. It also helped her get a job and prepare to take classes at City College of San Francisco.

"There is no work more important than what is being done here. We're talking about our children and the future of our country," Pelosi said. "What I saw today is a national model, of national significance, about how we can better invest our resources."

E-mail Matthew B. Stannard at mstannard@sfgate.com.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/08/11/MNA3196PRR.DTL>

This article appeared on page **A - 1** of the San Francisco Chronicle

© 2009 Hearst Communications Inc. | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Feedback](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Contact](#)