

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Verma, Richard R <VermaRR@state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, May 5, 2010 12:13 PM
To: H; Lew, Jacob J
Subject: FW: obey!

Obey won't seek reelection

By: David Rogers
May 5, 2010 11:33 AM EDT

In a major blow to Democrats, House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey has told close associates that he will not seek reelection and an announcement of his plans is expected as early as Wednesday.

The Wisconsin Democrat faces tough poll numbers at home, but until Tuesday night his staff had insisted he was running aggressively and had hired campaign staff. But a person close to him confirmed the decision to POLITICO Wednesday and said Obey was preparing to make a statement.

A press conference has been called at 1 p.m. and Obey staff indicated that he would announce his plans then.

Elected in 1969, the liberal is a major institutional figure who played a leading role in the anti-war and reform movement of the House in the 1970's. As the Appropriations chairman, he has been a close ally to Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) who came up through the same panel before moving into the leadership. And his departure follows on the death of Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.) this winter, a second Pelosi ally veteran of the powerful committee.

Indeed, the death of Murtha—and a second Obey associate—former Rep. Charles Wilson of Texas— may have influenced the chairman's decision. At 71, he is only about five years younger than his late friends and given the hard road ahead this election year, "he's bone tired and reached a point in his life where he has to think about how much time he has left."

Obey's frustration with the White House has been no secret either, and his unhappiness helps explain the repeated delays in the House over moving ahead with new funding for the war in Afghanistan. He himself is torn about the President Barack Obama's commitment of increased U.S. troops at a time of continued economic troubles at home. And after first setting a Memorial Day deadline, Democrats admit privately that Congress may not complete action on the package until the July Fourth recess.

The combination of his retirement—and Murtha's death—means a major change in the hierarchy of the Appropriations panel itself. And if Democrats retain power, Rep. Norman Dicks (D-Wash.) will be pushed to the forefront after serving until recently as chairman of the Interior and natural resources subcommittee, overseeing one of the smaller of the dozen annual bills.