

LOBBYING

“Congress shall make no law ... abridging ... the right of the people ... to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

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File Photo

Dirk Van Dongen isn't convinced that Democratic proposals will create jobs.

On Jobs, Democrats Find New Allies

By **Matthew Murray**
ROLL CALL STAFF

After months of sparring over health care reform, small-business groups are angling to play a lead role in shaping a White House-backed jobs package that is expected to become a priority in the new year.

The Senate Finance Committee is enlisting the small-business group **Alliance for Affordable Services** to survey its members for possible legislative remedies to combat double-digit unemployment numbers that are plaguing the economy. In the brief polling questionnaire made available to Roll Call, the group's members are asked to rank a payroll tax holiday, hiring credits

and other potential revenue sweeteners for small-business owners.

Senate Democratic staffers suggested Tuesday that the conservative-leaning organization's involvement is part of a larger effort to solicit ideas from one-time adversaries.

“Everybody sees unemployment numbers and knows that it matters,” one Senate Democratic aide said.

Dan Faraci, a lobbyist with the alliance, said that regardless of the fact that his group is not on board with current Democratic health care proposals, it is more than happy to work with Democrats on a jobs bill. He said his group is “pleased” to offer its mem-

bers' suggestions to the Finance panel.

“With the many difficulties facing small business — who provide employment for the majority of this country, and are attributed with 86% of new hiring — seeing the development of sensible and effective solutions is of utmost importance,” Faraci wrote in an e-mail. “Working together with the Finance Committee through surveys and direct interaction with our membership, in a non-partisan fashion has been encouraging as well for the benefit of policies which we hope will direct our country in the pursuit of economic recovery.”

Senate Democratic outreach appears
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Former K Street Foes Turning Into Backers on Jobs Bill

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to mimic the White House's strategy. In a speech at the Brookings Institution on Tuesday, President Barack Obama recounted the wild ride that the nation's economy has experienced in the past year, but he said, “We're in a very different place today than we were a year ago.” Indicators show the economy is stepping back from the brink, he added.

The president also referenced an employment forum recently held at the White House, stressing that his “economic team has been considering a full range of additional ideas to help accelerate the pace of private-sector hiring.”

“We've already heard a number of good ideas, and I know we'll learn of many more,” Obama said, according to a copy of the speech distributed by the White House.

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Dirk Van Dongen

President, National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors

As part of his proposal, Obama recommended various tax write-offs and hiring incentives for small businesses.

In addition to Faraci's group, other better-known business groups say they're

willing to play nice with Democrats on economic legislation. A spokesman for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce wrote in an e-mail Tuesday that the group “continues to support the administration's focus on creating jobs and has offered recommendations for creating 20 million jobs over the next decade.”

In a letter last week, chamber President Tom Donohue — the source of frequent Democratic criticisms in recent months — wrote that his organization “stands ready to help” the White House on jobs legislation.

The National Association of Manufacturers also told Obama in a recent letter that it “stand[s] stand ready to assist you in advancing a growth and jobs strategy that builds on a strong manufacturing base to serve our entire nation.”

“We anticipate working with the administration and Members of Congress to promote job strategies,” NAM spokeswoman Laura Narvaiz said.

But not every conservative-leaning business group is preparing for a kumbaya moment with the White House. National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors President Dirk Van Dongen said his group will sit out the debate on a jobs bill.

“We're not involved in what the White House is doing,” Van Dongen said. “At the end of the day, just about everything they're talking about kind of constitutes ‘make work,’ as opposed to ‘real work.’”

He concluded: “Businesses hire when they need people to perform the tasks associated with a job, not when they're given a tax break or some other artificial incentive.”