

## **Step Away From The Table** **by Dan Jacoby**

Once again, Democratic "leadership" in Congress has failed to lead. If anything resembling a bailout of the domestic auto companies comes out of that bifurcated body, it will not resemble anything a truly progressive Democrat could support -- except on a direct plea from the fools who supposedly run things.

Once again, Democratic "leadership" in Congress has proven that negotiation is an art, and they don't know which end of the paintbrush to hold.

Let's review the bidding: President-elect Obama calls on Congress to do something. The CEOs of the "big three" domestic auto companies are summoned to Washington, where they are pilloried and sent home with orders to return. They return as ordered, are subjected to more horsewhipping in "hearings" that accomplish nothing (as hearings are wont to do).

Behind the scenes, Democratic "leaders" are busy talking with Bush administration officials. As a result of those talks, the Democrats cave in to just about every demand the White House makes. (No wonder Congress has a lower favorability rating than the President!) Then, after reaching some sort of agreement, and getting it through the House, they run into the Senate Republican juggernaut.

Huh?

That's right, the minority party in the Senate, which is supposed to be in lock step with their "leader" in the White House, is actually the "next wave." Suddenly the "bi-partisan" deal isn't so bi-partisan after all, and the minority party has the upper hand -- again.

In these talks, as with almost everything they have attempted over the past two years, Pelosi and Reid made two inexcusable errors. First, they talked only with the White House and not Senate Republicans (whose support they need to get anything done). This was just plain stupid. Worse, it's a mistake they've made before and from which they haven't learned.

Their second mistake was being unwilling to walk away. Republicans always seem perfectly willing to get nothing done, rather than accept something less than virtually everything they want. Democrats, on the other hand, seem willing to cave in on practically everything in exchange for a meaningless "victory" in passing some piece of garbage that passes for legislation (see "\$700 billion bailout").

Don't think that, come next year, Mitch McConnell and his 40 or 41 colleagues on that side of the aisle don't know they can still have the rest of us over a barrel any time they want. And don't think he won't use the same tactics -- send his House leaders to get everything they can, then hold up the process until he gets even more.

The time has come for Pelosi & Reid to grow a spine. The time has come for them to be willing to walk away from important legislation, rather than let so much crap get by.

Unfortunately, for Pelosi & Reid, timing is not their strong point either.