



Partisan tension lingers after Wilson rebuke

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- Despite pleadings from many lawmakers to move past the Rep. Joe Wilson dispute, some members of Congress are not ready to let it go.

The House returns to work Wednesday with nerves still raw over the bitterly divided vote Tuesday to rebuke Wilson, R-S.C., for shouting "You lie" at President Barack Obama during last week's nationally televised speech to Congress.

Just after the vote, Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, argued on the House floor that the president actually had insulted Congress during his speech, instead of the other way around.

"He comes in here talking about a lie. ... He says we're making wild claims," Gohmert said of Obama's allegations that Republicans were mischaracterizing Democrats' health care bills. "That's no way to act when you're invited into somebody else's house."

Being careful not to violate rules by saying the president was lying in his speech, Gohmert added, "Whoever put that line in his TelePrompTer should know that that's not true."

On the Democratic side, Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., accused Wilson of instigating racist sentiment against the president and sending the signal that "you don't have to bury it now. You can bring it out."

"I guess we'll probably have folks putting on white hoods and white uniforms again and riding through the countryside intimidating people," Johnson, who is black, told reporters. "That's the logical conclusion if this kind of attitude is not rebuked. Congressman Wilson represents it. He's the face of it."

The rare resolution of disapproval against Wilson was pushed through by Democrats insisting that the South Carolina lawmaker had violated basic rules of decorum and civility in his outburst. Republicans dismissed the vote as a political "witch hunt" and a waste of precious time and taxpayers' money.

Wilson had called the White House to apologize shortly after Obama's speech, and he said at the time that the president "graciously accepted my apology and the issue is over." Republicans agreed, but several Democrats pressed the issue when Wilson refused to apologize to Congress.

The final vote tally was 240-179, generally but not entirely along party lines. It was 233 Democrats and seven Republicans voting to chastise Wilson, 167 Republicans and 12 Democrats opposing the measure and five Democrats merely voting "present."

Wilson's outburst came as Obama said that illegal immigrants would not be eligible for federal subsidies to purchase health insurance under his overhaul plan. Democrats have insisted that their proposals prohibit undocumented immigrants from getting assistance. Republicans say the legislation needs stronger verification requirements.

Tuesday's resolution - a less severe rebuke than formal sanctions such as censure or reprimand - said Wilson's conduct was a "breach of decorum and degraded the proceedings of the joint session, to the discredit of the House."

The Office of the House Historian said the resolution marked the first time in the 220-year history of the House that a member had been admonished for speaking out while the president was giving an address. Deputy House Historian Fred Beuttler said such uproars often lead to a period of less hostile rhetoric because members realize that a line was crossed and the public is watching.

Several lawmakers pleaded for civility as Congress continues work on health care legislation.

"Both parties must focus on changing for the better and setting an example," said Rep. Tim Murphy, R-Pa. "Let's all stop the name-calling and shouting. We've got work to do."