

ROLL CALL

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Heard on the Hill: Token Smokin'

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By *Emily Heil and Elizabeth Brotherton*
Roll Call Staff

An HOH tipster reported seeing Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-Fla.) smoking in the Rayburn House Office Building cafeteria, shortly after the House vote on the stimulus bill Friday afternoon.



And while HOH could understand that the showdown vote was probably pretty stressful, we were surprised to hear about Stearns' smoky indulgence — lighting up is banned in the cafeteria, after all, and Stearns himself has been vocal about the harms of cigarettes.

A Stearns spokesman cleared the air for us with an unusual story. Stearns was demonstrating “smoking” an electronic cigarette, a device used to help wean smokers off those addictive coffin nails. The nifty faux smokes produce vapor that mimics smoke, but doesn't deliver carcinogens into the body.

“I believe that this is healthier for smokers and offers a practical way to help smokers quit,” Stearns said in a statement provided to HOH. “This could be the wave of the future in smoking cessation.”

Stearns wants to share the gadget, too: He's given one to his son and one to House Minority Leader John Boehner (the Ohio Republican is a hard-core smoker). Stearns even offered this bipartisan peace pipe: “I am going to send a package to President Barack Obama to help him quit or meet with him and enjoy a harmless, carcinogen-free smoke.”

The Tie That Binds. Sen. Charles Schumer might like to lead the news cycle, but we certainly can't say he's ahead of the fashion curve.

The New York Democrat on Thursday was sporting a rather dated tie: It was pink (hello, “Miami Vice”!), and featured outlines of the state of Massachusetts, the initials “J.K.” and donkeys. That's right folks, that would be a “John Kerry for President” tie. How very 2004.

Schumer apparently thinks that the tie, which dates back to when Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) launched his unsuccessful White House bid, is timeless. “It's a nice pink tie,” he said, when asked about the cravat.

And it isn't Schumer's only geographically inspired neckwear. “I have other New York ties,” he said.

Power Lunch. Talk about an informational interview — Rep. Kendrick Meek (D-Fla.) was spotted lunching in the Members' dining room on Thursday with Sen. Mel Martinez, whose Florida seat Meek is hoping to claim as his own in 2010.

Perhaps Meek was getting the scoop on what the job is like from the guy who would know best — Republican Martinez is planning to retire after this term, leaving an open race in the Sunshine State. We can only guess that the bipartisan duo weren't talking about the weather.

Meek's spokesman confirmed our spy's report, and said his boss ate chili while the Senator chowed down on — what else? — Senate bean soup.

Stimulus Stress Stimulates Staffers. The economic stimulus package is already having some effect: The long days and nights working on the bill apparently have prodded staffers to take more stress-busting sessions in the Rayburn House Office Building gym.

So many so that Chief Administrative Officer Dan Beard extended the gym's hours to accommodate the droves of fitness-friendly employees.

Starting today, the workout facility will remain open until 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday when the House is in session.

"Evidently the legislative process is causing more of the staff to work later hours and many are squeezing in an exercise session close to the 9:00 p.m. closing time," the CAO's office said in a statement. "The extra hour of available exercise time should relieve some of the pressure on House staff, allow them to do their work and still get in a good workout."

Kudos to staffers who are choosing to blow off the work stress by getting in shape, but we wonder if bars on Capitol Hill also are seeing an uptick in visitors ...

Inglis' Bipartisan Gesture. Being a Member of Congress has its perks — they skip security lines, get seated at restaurants quickly and have a staff devoted to their every need.

But during Thursday's tribute to Abraham Lincoln in the Capitol Rotunda, Rep. Bob Inglis used his position not for himself, but to help out some blue-collar Capitol employees trying to get a glimpse of President Barack Obama.

And the South Carolina Republican even Twittered about it.

"Standing in hallway of Capitol with food service ladies from R cloakroom," Inglis wrote. "As long as I'm here, police will let them get a glimpse of Pres."

Inglis' effort worked — just four minutes later, Inglis updated his original post, letting fellow Twitter-ers know that the workers saw the commander in chief. "The President waved to the ladies from the R Cloakroom. Weren't close enough for them to shake his hand," Inglis Twittered.

Inglis' kindness toward the Obama-ogling workers is especially notable considering he's a conservative Republican. Who said there isn't any Obama-era bipartisanship?

Val Does Valentine's Gala. The gala celebrating the refurbished Ford's Theatre may have been the social highlight in D.C. last week, but the runner-up that night wasn't too shabby.

Sens. Bob Bennett (R-Utah), Kit Bond (R-Mo.) and Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Reps. Russ Carnahan (D-Mo.), Danny Davis (D-Ill.), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas), Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.) and Pete Sessions (R-Texas) were among the 300 or so guests nibbling heart-shaped grilled cheese sandwiches and heart-shaped corn bread at the seventh annual For the Love of Sight Valentine's party Wednesday benefiting the Foundation Fighting Blindness.

The dinner, held in the palatial Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium, raised almost \$3.5 million for the 38-year-old charity. HOH spied Gordon Gund, the über-capitalist who used to sign LeBron James' paychecks — he co-founded Foundation Fighting Blindness in 1971 after going blind himself a year earlier — and hotel magnate Bill Marriott moving anonymously through the crowd, without the hint of an entourage.

But the biggest head-turner at the dinner was Val Kilmer, the actor who spent a few days last week making the scene in D.C.

Kilmer generously chatted with HOH for several minutes. We can't tell you exactly what we talked about, because

“off the record” was a condition of the conversation, but topics included Kilmer’s home state of New Mexico and Kilmer’s movies (“Top Secret” still kills us).

We couldn’t help but notice that Val — after several minutes together, we feel comfortable calling him Val — was seated next to Steve McMahon, the Democratic media consultant who was on the dinner committee. Hmm. Wonder if Kilmer is trying to ink McMahon as a consultant for his possible run for Land of Enchantment governor in 2010.

A Little Stimulus Package. In an effort to prove just how committed they are to stimulating the economy, House Budget Committee staff director and chief counsel Tom Kahn and his wife, World Bank economist Susana Kahn, on Thursday welcomed a baby boy. Kahn tells HOH the yet-to-be-named newborn is healthy and happy, and — perhaps just as important, seems to be both a Red Sox fan and a Democrat. “He’s our homegrown stimulus package,” Kahn said.

We’re forecasting a boom — at least in sectors like diapers and toys.

Overheard on the Hill. “If they think that I’m a better choice — what does that say?”

— Adult entertainer Stormy Daniels, who is mulling a Senate bid against sex-scandal-plagued Sen. David Vitter (R-La.), in a CNN interview Friday. The star of “Operation: Desert Stormy” said it isn’t inexperience that might keep her from running — taking office would mean a major pay cut.

Jackie Kucinich, Josh Kurtz and Emily Pierce contributed to this report.

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