

Boehner: Republicans 'earning our way back'

By: [David Rogers](#)

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House Republican leader John A. Boehner says the “price is too high” for even modest Democratic immigration reform proposals. But on the issue of spending earmarks, he says he would accept a simple statement from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi suspending the practice this year.

In an interview with Politico on Wednesday, Boehner said Republicans are “earning our way back” with American voters and signaled that cuts in corporate income taxes could become more of an issue with today’s economy. Closer to home, he admitted that the financial irregularities at the National Republican Congressional Committee include “multiple bogus audits” and could prove more costly than press estimates that have put the potential loss at hundreds of thousands of dollars.



Boehner sounded upbeat about the recent political movement on one of his signature issues, spending earmarks.

Photo: [John Shinkle](#)

“Given the extent of the effort to be devious in terms of bogus audits, financial statements and everything else, you would think it would be more,” he said.

The FBI has been investigating inconsistencies within the NRCC’s financial records amid allegations that the committee’s former treasurer had forged an audit from the 2006 election cycle. The NRCC executive committee is expected to meet Thursday afternoon to discuss the scandal.

Boehner spoke as the House raced toward its spring recess. His Republicans are just coming off an embarrassing loss in the Illinois home district of former House Speaker Dennis Hastert, but Boehner sounded upbeat about the recent political movement on one of his signature issues — spending earmarks — and the emergence of Arizona Sen. John McCain as the expected GOP presidential nominee.

Pelosi has still not made a final decision on where she will come down on the earmark question, but she is feeling pressure from Republicans. Boehner said he wouldn’t insist on legislation or a formal rules change, as is being considered in the Senate this week.

“An earmark moratorium is an earmark moratorium regardless of how you get there,” he said.

Regarding McCain, Boehner appears to have softened his tone on immigration reform, which McCain has championed in the past. But given fears of any amnesty, Boehner is still nervous about even short-term visas for undocumented workers — already in the U.S. illegally — as proposed by some Democrats in a trade-off for more seasonal H-2B visas sought by business.

“If we can find some way to resolve this, that would be great,” Boehner said of the H-2B issue,

which is a mounting concern for the restaurant and tourist industries. “At this point, I think the price is too high. They’re talking about temporary visas for people who are here illegally. All of a sudden, the A-word jumps up in people’s minds.”

Boehner said he welcomed McCain’s call to cut the corporate income tax rate to 25 percent from 35 percent and that he would favor eliminating the tax entirely.

“If we want people to invest in America, we have to have a tax system that’s competitive with the rest of the world, and increasingly our tax system is not competitive,” Boehner said. “It just makes it easier for people to move their businesses overseas.”

Louisiana Rep. Jim McCrery, the ranking Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee, has also supported an end to the corporate tax but as part of a larger tax overhaul package that would make up for the lost revenues. Economists have argued that the Treasury could recoup significant revenues through higher individual income taxes as more is paid out in dividends, for example.

But Democrats, who have their own proposals to cut the corporate rate, say McCain and the GOP are going too far and not recognizing the potential deficit impact unless new revenues are found. Ways and Means staff members estimated that the annual revenue from corporate taxes is near \$370 billion.

Boehner, who appeared unaware of the totals, was dismissive.

“If you look at what it brings in, there’s nothing there,” he said when asked about the impact of doing away with the entire tax. “It doesn’t bring much in.”

On trade and national security issues, Boehner said that he believes a majority of the House would support the Colombia Free Trade Agreement but cautioned that it remains a delicate issue this election year. He said he has pushed for a House vote — “the sooner the better” — but also appeared to warn the administration against “pushing the envelope too far” without giving Democrats time to come up with a plan for consideration.

Boehner was most blunt in pressing for action on a Senate-passed terrorist surveillance bill backed by the White House. Democrats are “making a big mistake” in not allowing an up-or-down vote on the Senate measure this week, he said, as he sought to tie the issue directly to the safety of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Everybody knows that this needs to be done,” he said. “The longer we wait, the more we tie the hands of our intelligence officials and the less information we’ll have to keep America safe and the less information we’ll have for our troops on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq. An inordinate amount of this data and needs are for our soldiers in those two countries and elsewhere.”

Patrick O’Connor contributed to this story.