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By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

In 2010, Tim Huelskamp was elected with a different kind of freshmen class in the U.S. House of Representatives. After a major backlash against the Affordable Care Act known as Obamacare and the Democratic Party controlling the House, Senate and the presidency, conservatives were swept into control of the House of Representatives with the promise to cut excessive spending, get the nation's economy back to work, and repeal Obamacare.

"I've been trying to take a real vote to repeal Obamacare for two years and nine months," Huelskamp said after returning to his office after casting votes in the House during the current government shutdown Thursday.



Some refer to the new conservatives as being related to the Tea Party movement, and while President Barack Obama may have campaigned on change, it is this group that is working to end the business-as-usual politics that has seen Washington spend record levels while incurring massive amounts of debt.

“We are just starting to change business as usual with this,” Huelskamp said. “The president said, ‘Just fund everything like last year.’ That means another \$700 billion to \$1 trillion to the deficit. Business as usual doesn’t work.”

When the Senate, led by Democrat Harry Reid, refused to consider any spending cuts for Obamacare, the government shut down Tuesday and has remained in partial shutdown since.

The House has sent four separate bills to the Senate to provide funding for cancer treatment for children, veterans support services, national monuments and additional military funding including the National Guard, and Reid has refused to allow votes on the issues.

Reid responded to a CNN reporter’s question about “piecemeal funding” when she asked about clinical trials for children that were not able to take place because the Senate would not allow a vote.

“You all talked about children with cancer unable to go to clinical trials,” CNN’s Dana Bash said. “The House is presumably going to pass a bill that funds at least the NIH. Given what you’ve said, will you at least pass that? And if not, aren’t you playing the same political games that Republicans are?”

“What right did they have to pick and choose what part of government is going to be funded?” Reid responded.

Bash followed up with another question, asking, “But if you can help one child who has cancer, why wouldn’t you do it?”

“Why would we want to do that?” Reid responded. “I have 1,100 people at Nellis Air Force base that are sitting home. They have a few problems of their own. This is — to have someone of your intelligence suggest such a thing maybe means you’re irresponsible and reckless.”

“I’m just asking a question,” Bash replied.

To Huelskamp, these are the political games that are not accomplishing anything for the American people.

“At the end of the day, all they do is talk about process, games, politics and strategy,” Huelskamp said. “We enjoy that discussion, but we have to get something done. We can’t simply keep lifting the debt ceiling.”

But the media in Washington wanted to know if Huelskamp was going to do just that — lift the debt ceiling without making any cuts to spending.

“I asked them, ‘How will we pay it back?’” Huelskamp said. “People are getting tired of it. Throw the Obamacare rollout in with the spending and it’s a disaster. We are pushing back, and we are making progress in the debate.”

An example Huelskamp cited as a double standard is having former Kansas governor and current Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius pushing for Obamacare but not enrolling in it herself. According to Huelskamp, she, along with most of the government officials in Washington including the Congress are exempt.

Even if they tried, many couldn’t navigate through the enrollment process at healthcare.gov. According to Huelskamp, no Kansan enrolled on the first day, and he only knew of one person in Kansas City who successfully signed up.

But having some Americans required to sign up or face fines while others were exempt did not

sit well with the second-term congressman from Kansas.

“It’s a fairness issue,” Huelskamp said. “If it’s not good enough for Congress and big business and unions, everyone else should be exempt, too.”

Huelskamp said that the American people overwhelmingly agree that Obamacare is harmful. More than 98 percent of Republicans and 68 percent of independents oppose the law.

While Republicans have backed off of complete repeal, Democrats have made no concessions on Obamacare including imposing a tax on medical equipment and refusing to delay the individual mandate.

Democrats have accused Republicans of holding the government “hostage” and even referring to the GOP as terrorists.

“A staffer at the White House actually said that anybody who disagrees with the president is a suicide bomber,” Huelskamp said. “They are getting desperate. We are begging them to sit down and negotiate.”

So far, there have been no negotiations, and it appears the government will remain shut down until they do.

“It is a real battle on what is the responsibility of Washington,” Huelskamp said. “Obamacare, the budget — it all becomes part of it. Either the government takes more control, or we strike a torch for liberty and roll it back just a little bit. Americans are with us. We are winning that debate and making some progress.”

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