

# Chaos, arm-twisting gave Pelosi win

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After lawmakers had devoured the last of the Kalua Pig at last Thursday night's [White House Luau](#), Nancy Pelosi summoned her team back to the Capitol — to ensure the climate change bill wasn't the next thing roasted on the spit.

[Pelosi](#) and her top lieutenants would spend the next four hours whipping, cajoling, begging and browbeating undecided Democrats — and triple-checking their whip lists to decide who was a solid “yes” and who was prevaricating on the [cap-and-trade](#) legislation.

Yet no matter how many calls they made — or how many times they checked and rechecked their list — Majority Whip [Jim Clyburn](#) (D-S.C.) and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) kept coming up between 12 and 20 votes short of the 216 votes needed to win.

“We didn't have the votes — and we had to have this vote,” said a leadership aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity. “This was the big one for us. [Pelosi] staked her prestige on this one. ... This was her flagship issue, and this was a flagship vote for us.”

[The American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009](#) passed by only 219-212, after an epic day replete with Republican ambushes, petty betrayals, hastily rearranged flights and disappearing acts.

Yet for all the apparent chaos, the action was commanded by a House speaker maneuvering with the urgency of someone who knew her reputation was on the line.

Despite Republican promises to punish battleground state Democrats for supporting a “cap and tax” plan, Pelosi and her fractious caucus passed their most serious test to date.

And whatever the fallout, aides say that both Pelosi and President Barack Obama now know that their majority can hold together — barely — when placed under withering pressure — which may bode well for the equally arduous trials on health care reform.

At the end of it all, Pelosi, who floated in and out of the House cloakroom all day, impossible to miss in an arctic-white linen pantsuit, gambled big and pulled off one of the most important legislative victories of her career, a win she views as a personal vindication, according to those close to the San Francisco Democrat.

“There's no question about it,” Clyburn said after the vote. “She went back to her whipping

days of old. She is an incredibly good whip. I'm trying to learn from her every day."

Despite the most coordinated push yet between Democrats on the Hill and the Obama White House, the outcome was not certain until the very end, according to two dozen aides and members of Congress interviewed by POLITICO.

"It was really never a solid [216]," one person said afterward.

Party leaders agreed to bring the bill to the floor during a meeting Monday night, even though some of the members present had reservations about forcing vulnerable Democrats to cast votes on a package that may not go anywhere in the Senate.

In the days leading up the vote, the number of Democratic "yes" votes was locked at 200, according to people familiar with the tally. Every time they'd pick up one vote, another would slip. Democratic leaders needed a cushion to help protect the most vulnerable among them, and they didn't have it.

As the frustration grew, an aide joked in one meeting that White House staff should give fence-sitters the same colored leis so that the president and his Cabinet secretaries would know who to buttonhole. The desperation was such that others in the room paused for a split second to consider the joke before abandoning it as a logistical impossibility.

During the luau, Clyburn set up shop in the Oval Office with Obama to meet with wavering Democrats, like freshmen Reps. Frank Kratovil Jr. of Maryland and Eric Massa of New York. Members of Clyburn's whip team patrolled the White House lawn, cornering colleagues and making the case for the bill.

As the week wore on, Pelosi was directing former Vice President [Al Gore](#) whom to call, but everyone decided late Wednesday night that the list of undecided members was small enough that he should stay in Nashville, Tenn., to make calls.

On the day of the vote, the bleary-eyed tag team of Pelosi and Clyburn camped out in the cloakroom, just off the House floor, for nearly three hours.

One of Pelosi's first targets was Rep. Rush Holt (D-N.J.), a key fence-sitter who wanted more money generated from the carbon trading to be directed to the research and development of green technology.

Pelosi talked to him again and again, but he wouldn't budge. Her message to him was the same as it was to others: It wasn't worth voting against the bill because of what wasn't in it.

According to witnesses, Pelosi perched herself on the arm of Holt's chair and went nose to nose with him for a half-hour warning him that his no vote could scuttle the entire climate change effort — and that liberals would have another chance to make their case once the

bill came back from the Senate.

Around 2 o'clock, he became a "yes."

Next up was Austin, Texas, liberal Rep. Lloyd Doggett, who had seemed to be leaning toward the bill during a Thursday night visit with Obama in the Oval Office — but then infuriated the White House midday Friday by declaring the measure too weak on polluters to win his vote.

An exasperated White House staffer told POLITICO it was "stunning that he would ignore the wishes not just of his president but of his constituents and the country."

Then Pelosi began working Doggett as the two stood in the back of the chamber near the railing, making the same perfect-is-enemy-of-the-good argument she had used against Holt. Doggett ended up voting "yes." During the vote, Washington Rep. Jay Inslee, one of the taller members of the House, guarded the doors on the floor leading out to the Speaker's Lobby, warning members not to leave the floor in case anyone needed to switch his or her vote. But that didn't stop some Democrats, like Colorado Rep. John Salazar, from voting no early and sneaking out to avoid getting pressured by party leaders.

Leadership aides say Texas Rep. Ciro Rodriguez promised Pelosi he'd vote yes, but voted no and sprinted from the chamber. California Rep. Xavier Becerra tried unsuccessfully to flag him on his cell phone — and Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) bounded into the ornate Speaker's Lobby off the floor shouting, "Rodriguez! Rodriguez!" as puzzled reporters looked on.

Pelosi forced members to postpone their trips abroad to stay in town for the vote, aides familiar with the situation said. At one point, she even promised to escort one member out to the airport in her motorcade to catch an early flight — as House Republican Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio) stalled the proceedings with an hourlong reading from the 300-page manager's amendment.

California Rep. Ellen Tauscher, a master of floor procedure who left the House on Friday to take a top job at the State Department, may have made the biggest personal sacrifice by postponing a dinner the night before her wedding to preside over the debate — her last as a member of Congress.

When another Californian, Rep. Joe Baca, declared himself undeclared, Pelosi and her whip team surrounded him — and burst out into applause when he cast one of the decisive "yes" votes, according to an eyewitness.

Members who wanted to be spared of the Pelosi treatment — slinked in and out of the chamber hoping the speaker wouldn't notice them.

Rep. Bob Filner (D-Calif.) — another progressive who didn't think the bill was strong enough — was an especially elusive target, according to leadership aides. Pelosi's attempts to contact Filner early Friday weren't successful, staffers say, but she began lobbying him furiously when he showed up for a series of procedural votes leading up to the fateful climate change measure.

After Baca and others had cast their "yeas," the speaker walked up to Filner and calmly said, "It's now your time to be on the record, Mr. Filner," according to a witness.

He voted yes.

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