

## Payroll tax cut proposal brews discord in Senate

By Ellen Nicholas  
STAFF WRITER

Senate Republicans adamantly oppose a major tax cut, while Senate Democrats fight to pass it. No, you did not read that wrong.

Obama's proposal to extend and expand the payroll tax cut has the parties appearing in a surprising role reversal.

"It puts this whole weird spin where you have Democrats supporting tax breaks and Republicans opposing it," said Associate Professor of Political Science Kyle Dell. "But when you see it in the context of (the election in) 2012, I think you can start to understand something that on the face of it doesn't look like it makes a lot of sense when you're thinking about stereotypes."

Originally, the payroll tax cut slashed the payroll tax from 6.2 percent to 4.2 percent, according to the San Francisco Chronicle.

For a middle class family making \$50,000 a year, this means putting an extra \$1,000 in their pockets annually, according to the White House website's payroll tax cut calculator.

However, with the cut set to expire on Dec. 31, the clock is ticking.

Obama proposed to expand the payroll tax cut by further lowering the tax to 3.1 percent.

That same \$50,000 dollar a year family would annually keep an additional \$550, on top of their current savings of \$1,000.

"I can totally understand not having that money is going to be a hit at a time when people don't need hits," said Dell. "On the other hand, the money has to come from somewhere."

This issue is producing a lot of tension between Democrats and Republicans.

"I think Democrats have the better argument," said Ken Gilmore, associate professor and chair of political science. "They're saying: pay for it by permanently ending the Bush tax cuts and raising a surtax on income above a million dollars."

The Democrats' proposal to levy a 3.25 percent surtax on annual incomes of \$1 million or more was rejected by the Senate on Dec. 1, according to Bloomberg.



President Obama's proposed payroll tax cut extension, which would give the middle class sector a tax cut and compensate by raising taxes on millionaires, has resulted in a divided Senate.

Economics Bob Williams. "They should be raised on not just millionaires but on most high-income households."

This issue is made even trickier by the looming 2012 presidential election.

"A lot of this proposal is more political than it is economic," said Williams.

Many Republicans, however, say the reason they will not support further tax cuts is because they have not worked in

place next year having to do it again. And guess where we are? Not to say I told you so ... We can't continue to do this."

"It hasn't stimulated the economy at all," Republican Representative Louie Gohmert said to Bloomberg Businessweek. "But over the long term, it does add to our deficit."

Dell agrees that our economic problems are not getting better and points out a political angle of the issue at hand.

"(The economy) is still on life support," said Dell. "The life support is keeping us from dying, but it isn't making us any healthier. And you can understand how that works really well for the Republican presidential candidate. Because then this helps us to support the whole narrative that Obama is a failed president."

Not only is there disagreement between Democrats and Republicans, but also within the Republican Party itself.

"(The Republicans) want to figure out a politically palatable stance collectively to take that doesn't look like they're defending the tax breaks for millionaires at the expense of ordinary people," said Gilmore. "Any tax cut has to be offset, at least for the deficit hawks. The problem is you don't do it by raising taxes because you've got the anti-tax people."

With so many factions fighting about so many elements of this issue, it seems unlikely that Senate will reach a decision anytime soon.

"Instead of compromising, we're kicking the can down the road," said Dell. "But what's happening is that can is getting bigger every time we kick it. And there's going to come a point where we can't kick that can anymore. The can's going to kick us."

"So let me get this straight, you don't want to raise taxes on the rich, but you don't want to lower taxes on the middle class," said Gilmore. "Wow."

"I think that taxes on all affluent households are too low," said Professor of

the past.

"Last year, we were in the same place when we proposed the first payroll tax holiday," said Republican Congressman Jeff Flake to Fox News. "A lot of us said we shouldn't do it because we'd be in the same

## Solar power from space explored as energy alternative

By Rory Molleda  
STAFF WRITER

Most students were not alive during the 1970's oil crisis, when people waited for hours to fill up their tank, but dependence on fossil fuels is still a huge problem in the U.S.

A study group of the Paris-based International Academy of Astronautics said that the technology for orbiting solar power plants could be available within the next ten to twenty years, according to Reuters.

The study was led by John Mankins, a 25-year NASA veteran, who believes that the sun's power could be beamed down to Earth from a satellite to potentially provide an alternative to oil.

"It is clear that solar power delivered from space could play a tremendously important role in meeting the global need for energy during the 21st century," said Mankins to Reuters.

One of the main advantages to solar power stations in space is that they would collect energy 24 hours a day, which is impossible on the planet's surface. Another obvious positive is that solar power does not harm the environment.

"There is a global need for an increased energy generation that does not have an environmental impact," explained Matthew Perren, head of innovation at Europe's largest space company Astrium, to The Telegraph. "The real advantage of space solar power is that it can provide power on demand as we can essentially point the laser beam where ever we like on the earth below the orbit."

Although it could cost hundreds of millions of dollars

to put into practice, the study believes that the project could pay for itself after only 30 years.

Earlier this year, NASA offered California-based Artemis Innovation Management Solutions a \$100,000 contract to pursue the project. And in 2009, they awarded a company called LaserMotive \$900,000 to research how to make laser beams send the energy from space back

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**John Mankins, 25-year NASA veteran**

down to Earth, according to MSNBC.

It might be a small amount to start their research, "but at least it's a start," said Mankins to Reuters.

"Much of the technology we need has already been tried and tested in existing satellites and spacecraft," said Perren to The Telegraph. "But there are technical difficulties that still need to be overcome such as

improving the efficiency of converting the energy and increasing the power of the laser we can build."

However, Astrium and Artemis are not the only firms to explore solar-based energy.

In September, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency announced a \$21 billion plan to send satellites with solar panels into orbit that could provide energy for up to 300,000 homes on Earth, according to The Telegraph.

The Japanese plan is another example of how NASA is falling behind the rest of the world in terms of space exploration. Since the shuttle program ended this summer, NASA has to pay Russia's space agency \$50 million per astronaut they send to the International Space Station, according to the Huffington Post.

NASA might be looking for a new direction, but they have not given up entirely. Air Force Col. M.V. Smith, who led a Defense Department study on space-based solar power for the military, believes that the project needs to attract private companies before NASA endorses it.

"It's a new mission area," said Smith to MSNBC, "and in this austere budget era ... I think what you're going to see is that the commercial community is going to step up to the plate and do minor studies that would bait the interest (of NASA)."

However, once it catches the full attention of NASA, it is still important to remember that the goal of space-based solar power is to offer another alternative resource.

"It is important to remember that we are not looking to take the place of power stations on Earth," said Perren to The Telegraph, "But to provide another piece of the puzzle in finding alternative energy sources."