

Howard Gutman, U.S. Ambassador to Belgium, Is Reassuring on the Impact of the Election

Catherine Mommaerts in financial daily L'Echo

U.S. Ambassador to Belgium Howard Gutman was not surprised by the outcome of the midterm election and he considers that it will not fundamentally change things in Washington. 'This is what people were expecting,' he said yesterday on the occasion of a breakfast with Belgian journalists. It is a fact that the economic situation was not in favor of the Obama Administration or of the Democrats' majority in the House and the Senate. 'One family out of three is affected by unemployment,' the Ambassador pointed out. According to him, the objective of the Obama Administration will remain the same. 'Continuing to try to resolve the problems it inherited (from the Bush Administration) and coming up with a smarter and greener economy that would be less dependent on oil,' he said.

But one should no longer expect major reforms, Howard Gutman added. 'All what could be done on the legislative field was done during the first two years,' the Ambassador explained. And what was not possible during the first half of his Presidential term will not be possible during the second. One thinks about climate and the famous 'cap and trade' which the President unsuccessfully tried to impose. 'Todd Stern went to Copenhagen knowing that there would be no major legislative change in the U.S.,' the U.S. Ambassador admits.

As for the successes that President Obama obtained during his first two years, the Ambassador does not believe that the republicans will undo them, or that they will become obstructionists. 'Both Democrats and Republicans who were elected yesterday were elected to solve economic problems and they will have no choice but to do something,' the Ambassador explained.

The Obama Administration and Congress will also work on security issues which remain an important topic as we recently saw with these packages with explosives on U.S.-bound planes. And there is no change to expect on foreign policy, the Ambassador added, saying that 'the United States will continue to work with their partners in the fight against terrorism.'