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# Conyers calls for new American agenda

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People's Weekly World Newspaper, 12/21/06 12:19

DETROIT — At a packed town hall meeting here last week, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) called for a “new American agenda” and declared the new congressional session, set to begin Jan. 4, a “brand new start after 12 years” of disastrous Republican rule.

“You are now being addressed by Chairman John Conyers of the House Judiciary Committee,” Conyers told an overflowing audience at the University of Detroit Mercy Dec. 15. He promised to use his authority and influence to help reverse the lack of congressional oversight of the president on issues such as the Iraq war and abuse of civil liberties. Congress has the duty to “cut back Bush’s power grab,” he said.

He called for hearings on the “concealments, misstatements and exaggerations” that pushed America to war with Iraq, a “misbegotten war that should never have been started” and that has distracted from global efforts to stop terrorism.

The Nov. 7 election, Conyers noted, was a referendum on the Bush administration and the Republican Party’s ideas, policies, and methods of leadership. He called for a national dialogue on a new American agenda and said he plans to hold more public forums in Michigan and across the country.

Conyers, a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, listed a number of major issues that he intends to address from his new position in Congress. He cited D.C. statehood as one of the first items on the list.

Rejecting the Republicans’ handling of the immigration issue, Conyers said, “You really have got to be short of ideas if you can only come up with a wall to keep people out of the United States.” Immigration policy that does not address employers’ abuses of both workers and the system will not work, he said.

Conyers chastised the Bush administration for its hostility to international law and treaties. Citing White House efforts to undermine the Geneva Conventions, its refusal to comply with treaties signed by the U.S. regarding nuclear disarmament, and its mishandling of “genocide issues,” he argued, “Without international law the planet can not go on, and we cannot make an attempt to address and control war and divisions that exist in the world today.”

On the Iraq war, Conyers said, “One of the most important things on our agenda is getting out of Iraq as quickly and as intelligently as possible.”

“We can’t stay the course,” he said. “Our presence there continues and exacerbates the war.”

Conyers rejected Sen. John McCain’s (R-Ariz.) call for increasing troop numbers in Iraq. He pointed out that there is no military solution to the violence in Iraq and urged regional diplomacy and replacement of U.S. forces with UN peacekeepers. Conyers also rejected proposals in the Iraq Study Group report to privatize Iraq’s oil industry.

He called for talks with regional powers in the Middle East, and with North Korea and China, rather than confrontation, and said the U.S. should “take the lead on disarmament.” He also backed actions to address global warming.

Commenting on the 2008 presidential race, Conyers congratulated Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) on his announced intention to run for the Democratic nomination, saying Kucinich would be the “most progressive candidate” in the field. Conyers also expressed support for the potential candidacy of Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), noting, “Here’s a chance for a person of color to seriously run for president. And that has got to be given serious consideration.”

Turning to America’s health care crisis, Conyers noted that the U.S. has the most expensive health care system in the world while 47 million people go without coverage and 30 or 40 million more lack adequate coverage for necessary care. “It’s time we had a universal single-payer health care plan,” Conyers said.

Conyers plans to reintroduce his “health care for all” National Healthcare Insurance Act (HR 676), and called on the American people to pressure Congress to pass it. “It’s up to all of us to create a movement to bring universal health care to America,” he said. Funding for a national health care program and for treating and finding a cure for HIV/AIDS has to come out of the military budget, he added.

With states like Michigan ravaged by massive layoffs in auto and other industries, Conyers said policymakers are responsible for returning the U.S. to a full employment economy. He endorsed the ideas behind the Humphrey-Hawkins Jobs and Balanced Growth Act of the 1970s, which requires the federal government to develop employment programs for people who can’t find work in the private sector.

Conyers announced he will introduce a bankruptcy law reform bill with Sen. Evan Bayh (D-Ind.) that would give greater protection to consumers. The bill would also require major multinational corporations who use bankruptcy claims to break union contracts to show their international as well as domestic financial records to the bankruptcy judge.

Responding to questions about impeachment of Bush, Conyers said it was not on the agenda, and would require much more popular support, a bipartisan effort in Congress, and a stronger Democratic majority.

What is on the to-do list, he said, is “a people’s agenda” that provides “jobs, justice and peace.”

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