

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS, JR.

Washington, D.C.

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MODERATOR: Our next speaker truly
3 is one of the leading public officials of our
4 day and age. Congressman John Conyers, the
5 Democrat from Michigan, was elected recently
6 to his 19th term, I believe. A real squeaker
7 85 percent vote.

8 (Laughter)

9 MODERATOR: But most importantly,
10 John Conyers serves as the senior Democrat on
11 one of the most significant committees of the
12 U.S. House of Representatives, the House
13 Judiciary Committee. Through that committee
14 goes some of the most important legislative
15 items and laws that affect the I.T. industry
16 as well as critical issues for our nation,
17 such as the impeachment issues, of course,
18 which was considered by the committee.

19 Congressman Conyers also was a
20 founding member of a very important
21 institution in the Congress and within the
22 country, namely the Congressional Black

1 Caucus, and is the dean of the Black Caucus.
2 We've been meeting with Congressman Conyers
3 and his staff and other members of the
4 Congressional Black Caucus and the
5 Congressional Hispanic Caucus over the last
6 year to talk about ways we can increase, as
7 just was talked about, more minorities into
8 the I.T. workforce because today, the I.T.
9 workforce is not representative of our
10 population at large.

11 The fact that Mr. Conyers has taken
12 time from his incredibly busy schedule to be
13 with us shows that he understands the I.T.
14 industry and other industries that depend on
15 I.T. workers. And I'm honored to present to
16 you Congressman John Conyers. Congressman.

17 (Applause)

18 MR. CONYERS: Actually it's not 85
19 percent, it's down to 91 percent.

20 (Laughter)

21 MR. CONYERS: I apologize. I'll
22 work harder. Ladies and gentleman, I am very

1 honored to be here. I'm not giving eight
2 speeches in six days. I'm giving a few
3 remarks today and I've got Attorney Scott
4 Deutschman of Judiciary who's going to be
5 here. But this is the most important set of
6 remarks I will be making all month because if
7 I can kick-start this whole diversity thing
8 which you've been doing a great job of
9 talking about, writing about, moaning about,
10 you know, everybody's wringing their hands,
11 but my job is to try to get this thing really
12 moving.

13 The fact is the numbers are going
14 down as we -- so we don't have -- Ernst, we
15 don't have a year to do papers and come back.
16 We've got to start going right now. And so
17 time is of essence. As chairman-in-exile of
18 the Judiciary Committee.

19 (Laughter)

20 MR. CONYERS: I would like to
21 remind you that I have 583 days left before I
22 stop being the ranking member and become the

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1 chairman.

2 (Applause)

3 MR. CONYERS: I would appreciate it
4 if you'd all remember that every one of those
5 583 days that remain.

6 And I'm so delighted Susan Davis is
7 here and this is her district. California
8 was so encouraging for us. It's just really
9 great. And I am impressed with what I have
10 read, with the people that I've talked to,
11 with Danielle Germain who retrieved my suit
12 carrier off Northwest this morning. I mean
13 if you thought Ernst was cool, you should
14 have seen what I was going to look like up
15 until about an hour ago.

16 (Laughter)

17 MR. CONYERS: Now let us welcome
18 the only other Detroiter here, Mary Smith of
19 McKenzie High School, who you will swear
20 she's on my staff or a P.R. agent or
21 something. Stand up, Mary. Everybody take a
22 look at her.

1 (Applause)

2 MR. CONYERS: Hi. Right on,
3 Detroit. Yea, yea, yea. Too bad about MSU.

4 (Laughter)

5 MR. CONYERS: Yea? Okay, all
6 right.

7 (Laughter)

8 MR. CONYERS: I'll see you in the
9 hall.

10 (Laughter)

11 MR. CONYERS: See, we -- it's the
12 fight after the game that counts in Detroit.

13 (Laughter and Applause)

14 MR. CONYERS: Now I -- it's funny
15 how things happen. I was in Kmart in Detroit
16 yesterday before I flew in. And I ran into
17 this lady, Kathy McClellan, who runs this
18 entrepreneur center in downtown Detroit and
19 which my chief of staff in Detroit, Attorney
20 Ray Plowden, is the chairman of the board.

21 He teaches business law there and,
22 every now and then, I come in and do a

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1 commencement program they go through -- they
2 have a big -- but I saw her and it occurred
3 to me she's the kind of contact that we need
4 to really get more people into the pipeline.
5 And then I saw she was with a friend of hers
6 who had graduated and had her own business,
7 Microworks Computers, Angela Eason.

8 And it occurred to me this is --
9 you know, this is a fortuitous convergence or
10 whatever. It's incredible -- it was
11 incredible because it made me start thinking
12 about others.

13 So we changed this draft that
14 Deutschman had worked on two or three times
15 and now I tape everything I do because we
16 always like to compare what I was supposed to
17 say with what I actually said.

18 (Laughter)

19 MR. CONYERS: It's very instructive
20 for me, not the staff. They moan, God, he
21 cut that out.

22 But then I started thinking of

1 other things. Focus Hope in Detroit was
2 started by the late Father Cunningham, now
3 run by Eleanor Drusitis, that takes kids in
4 off the street and if they can stick for 4
5 years in it, they get an automotive
6 engineering degree. But more than that,
7 they're the ones that the Big Three want more
8 than the graduates from my school, Wayne
9 State University.

10 They want them because they're
11 trained by retired vice presidents and
12 operating engineers and people that have
13 taken them through it in real time. And we
14 need a Focus Hope to begin now to work in the
15 high-tech field. I am so delighted to see so
16 many community college people and people out
17 of the teaching professions because that's
18 where it's really got to start.

19 And then I thought of one other
20 group, which is an extracurricular program
21 for kids in the Detroit system on weekends
22 only at the University of Detroit, where they

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1 spend time on math, engineering math, Detroit
2 area program for math and everybody.
3 Thousands of kids are in it. It's an
4 incredibly good, strong program that gets
5 people started.

6 And so what I and Susan Davis and
7 Sylvester Raiz the chairman of the Hispanic
8 Caucus; and Eddie Bernice Johnson, the
9 chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus;
10 and then we pull in our friends Nancy Pelosi
11 and Ms. Eshew and Barbara Lee up in Oakland
12 and it goes on and on; we've got quite a
13 little group now; Zoe Lofgren always doing a
14 fabulous job on Judiciary, we've got to pull
15 all of us together and really start doing
16 just several things.

17 One, we have to network every
18 corporate partnership program in every state
19 in the union, I like telling this to
20 high-tech people, and put it on a computer so
21 that we can all look at and know precisely
22 what the heck we're doing. There are dozens

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1 and dozens of projects, maybe hundreds, that
2 many of us don't know anything about that are
3 doing great. And so we've got to pull all
4 that together. If you do that, I'll even
5 give you a better introduction, Harris
6 Miller, than we give you when you normally
7 come before the Judiciary Committee to
8 testify. I'll make everybody stand up before
9 you give your testimony.

10 (Laughter)

11 MR. CONYERS: See, these are the
12 benefits of when I'm chairman.

13 (Laughter)

14 MR. CONYERS: I mean, you got to
15 understand this thing. There's something in
16 it for everybody. But if we could do that.

17 Number two, we have got to move
18 with a sense of urgency. Next year isn't
19 going to cut it. If we keep doing what we've
20 been doing, the figures will be down again
21 the fifth year. So obviously, there's
22 something we got to do.

1 Number three, we need to make sure
2 that we finally sit down with all the people
3 that aren't here and let's start having some
4 honest dialogue. I present myself as the
5 honest broker, respected by many, despised by
6 some.

7 (Laughter)

8 MR. CONYERS: But this is all in a
9 respect mode here. We've got to bring Harris
10 Miller and all the front row together with
11 Jesse Jackson, with Maurice -- the Urban
12 League fellow, Hugh Price. We've got to
13 bring Hugh Price together. We've got to get
14 Butch Wing out of the Rainbow operation at
15 Silicon. We all have to sit down in whatever
16 framework, but we cannot keep sending
17 messages and shipping grenades and all that.
18 I mean, we got to put it all down in the room
19 and begin to deal with how we go about doing
20 this.

21 Number four, we've got to go to the
22 Department of Labor and get the \$150 million

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1 that is waiting for diversity programs and
2 partnering as we speak. Dale Zeigler,
3 Employment and Training Grant programs,
4 Department of Labor, \$150 million have been
5 laying there. We've got to meet with Elaine
6 Chow, the Department of Labor, and really try
7 to get them up to speed and work with them.

8 I want you to know, I -- my
9 partisanship, I leave at the door when we're
10 trying to accomplish good deeds. I know we
11 have an illegitimate government in
12 Washington.

13 (Laughter)

14 MR. CONYERS: And I -- it doesn't
15 bother me. I got to work with what I got. I
16 know that there's 1,313 days left between the
17 first Tuesday in November in 2004, but that
18 doesn't bother me either.

19 (Laughter)

20 MR. CONYERS: We've got to all come
21 together and get what we can out of wherever
22 we can: In the private sector, in the public

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1 sector, with the community schools, with
2 everybody. We've got to pull this together
3 because this reminds me of the challenges
4 that we had when we were talking about the
5 Marshall Plan and the G.I. Bill and when we
6 had to react to the Soviet launch of Sputnik.
7 That's what we've got to do now.

8 We've got to treat this as a
9 national emergency because that's what it is.
10 It -- we can't miss this opportunity. And
11 the beauty of it is that it's win-win because
12 the nation really benefits from this. And
13 the business, our commerce, we're stronger
14 and we deal with this whole question of
15 diversity with the technology that is the
16 wave of the future in the 21st century.

17 And so I'm delighted to be here
18 with you all and I want to pledge my
19 continuing cooperation. There is nothing
20 higher on my agenda than turning these
21 numbers around. Most of you know here
22 precisely what has to be done. We've got to

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1 start down at the elementary schools to get
2 kids interested in engineering. Who was it
3 that said, you know, that engineers are
4 considered to be nerds? And it's a kind of a
5 sorry situation that you consider engineering
6 not exciting or you miss this challenge for
7 computers and technology, which the kids are
8 already in anyway.

9 I mean, I was talking to one
10 fellow, his kid got a station -- a work -- a
11 PlayStation or something and it was in
12 Japanese. His dad got it early. They threw
13 the instructions away and obviously they
14 couldn't read it. They put it together
15 anyway. My kids constantly amaze me with
16 what they do, except when the 5-year-old puts
17 orange juice and buns inside the machine so
18 that everybody's trying to figure out what --
19 why is this machine down. Then they take it
20 there and they tell us what they had to pull
21 out of it and it's also ruined.

22 But we're at a beautiful point in

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1 time to really deal with this issue that's
2 been gathering dust for so long. So thanks
3 for having me here. Give Susan Davis my love
4 and let's all really come out of here roaring
5 on dealing with diversity at this fourth
6 annual conference. I'm glad Hiroshi invited
7 me.

8 (Applause)

9 MODERATOR: What an inspirational
10 message. Thank you very much, Mr.
11 Chairman-in-Exile.

12 (Laughter)

13 MODERATOR: I didn't know you were
14 such a mathematician. You count things very
15 precisely I noticed. That number of days
16 that you become chairman, I've seen that.
17 But I saw it, for me, some real specific
18 challenges that you want us to meet. And I
19 pledge to work with you and your colleagues
20 to do that, to go to those meetings you
21 suggested, to set up this database, and to do
22 those things. These things are all doable.

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1 We look forward to meeting with Secretary
2 Chow and I look forward to that meeting,
3 also. So thank you for that and thank you
4 for taking the time to be with us.

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