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Congressman JOHN LEWIS

As the nation catches its breath after the intense campaign and election, we face an unprecedented economic crisis. We watch, wait and pray for the best. Atlanta's own legendary lawmaker, Congressman John Lewis, is right there in the midst of it all, living and working through this historical time in America. He is no stranger to serving on the front lines in our nation's history as over the nearly past five decades he has championed the cause of civil rights and social justice. In our interview, Congressman Lewis reflects and offers great insight into the challenges before us as the country begins laying the groundwork to economic recovery. This is a man of great faith, reason and logic, who brings his common sense to the table as he participates in the most riveting decisions being made in the country today. His passion and concerns are for the unity of the citizens of our country. Every decision he makes is based on how it will translate to our lives as a people. Sharing his thoughts of hope and optimism, he offers his perspective as to what he sees before us.

Q&A

IN THE AFTERMATH OF AN EXHAUSTING AND CONTENTIOUS CAMPAIGN, DO YOU AGREE THAT BIPARTISANSHIP AND NON-RACIAL DIVIDES HAVE NEVER BEEN MORE CRUCIAL TO THIS NATION MOVING FORWARD IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION?

Yes I do – and it's already happening as President Obama is reaching across the aisle, making key nominations and appointments of many Republicans. He simply wants the best team possible.

THE HISTORY OF YOUR CAREER HAS BEEN HIGHLIGHTED BY YOUR ONGOING FIGHT FOR HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS. AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME, IT IS THE ECONOMY THAT IS IN EMERGENT NEED OF LEADERSHIP AND REPAIR. WHAT CAN YOU BRING TO THE TABLE AS YOUR QUALIFICATIONS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THESE SOLUTIONS?

Common sense. I come from a family

of share croppers in rural Alabama. No matter how little money my dad made, he always believed in putting some away. When their 110-acre farm became available, my parents had saved wisely and my dad was able to purchase the farm for just \$300. There was no credit or financing involved. It was a cash transaction. Today, my family still owns this land.

Perhaps the solution is in returning to the basics and revisiting the logic that we learned as children. We have to pace ourselves. There is no overnight fix. But there is every reason to be optimistic and hopeful as we move forward. There are concepts on the table now that will present the solutions. Our goals are clear in our pursuit of economic well being for all Americans. The solutions will come in the creation of jobs, that no

child goes hungry and that everyone can have a home, education and affordable healthcare.

HAVE OUR NATION'S CREDIT PRACTICES OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF DECADES BEEN BEHIND THIS CRISIS?

It would appear that our policy has been "Anyone can afford anything!" The fact is that we've been living beyond our means. We've had a "fast food-instant gratification" mentality and now we're facing the results.

THE ECONOMY IS CERTAINLY THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING THE COUNTRY TODAY. ARE YOU OPTIMISTIC THAT WE CAN WE PULL THROUGH THIS RECESSION?

Absolutely. It took time for us to get here and will take time to recover. Our country's infrastructure including

An advocate of mass transportation, Lewis is an active proponent for Atlanta's beltline. He believes that repairing and improving our country's infrastructure will solve many of our problems, from creating jobs to eliminating congestion.



DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS HAS REPRESENTED GEORGIA'S 5TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT IN THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SINCE 1987. THE DISTRICT ENCOMPASSES ALMOST ALL OF ATLANTA.

transportation, roads and bridges, are in great need of repair and restoration. We owe it to future generations to maintain and improve these assets and in the process we can create a great many jobs. Over the next couple of years, we will hopefully lay the groundwork to return our country to a sound economic entity.

DID YOU EVER THINK, EVEN IN RECENT YEARS, THAT YOU WOULD LIVE TO SEE AN AFRICAN AMERICAN BECOME PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES?

I never believed that this would happen in my lifetime.

YOU ARE CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST COURAGEOUS PEOPLE THAT THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT EVER PRODUCED. TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE YOUR GREAT DRIVE AND MOTIVATION?

It was the idea that we could live in a country where integration could be achieved. I believed so passionately in the possibility of change and wanted to reach as many people as I could to share this belief.

WITH MORE THAN 40 ARRESTS, PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND SERIOUS INJURIES, HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO REMAIN A DEVOTED ADVOCATE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF NONVIOLENCE?

On February 3 of this year, a 73-year-old man came to talk to me. He was with his son. He told me that nearly a half century ago, he was one of the young men who had beaten me nearly to death in a bus depot in North Carolina. The purpose of this trip was to apologize in person to me, and he did so in front of his son. I was stunned. I had never known his name or who he was. But he

wanted to clear his conscience. With a full heart, I forgave him.

YOU ARE THE RECIPIENT OF NUMEROUS AWARDS FROM NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. WHICH RECOGNITION HAS MEANT THE MOST TO YOU?

While the honors and awards have been very gratifying, the most rewarding aspects of my career have been the individual people who I have met and talked with and learned from. Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting with Reverend Billy Graham at his home in North Carolina. For 30 minutes we spoke together. For me this was a great honor. Dr. Graham was so articulate and warm and for me this was an inspirational high point in my life.