

PETER DREIER: Okay, I think we are ready to begin. Good evening. My name is Peter Dreier from Occidental College. A couple of ground rules here. First of all it would be nice if people could move towards the center towards these two sections here and move up towards the front. So I invite people who are sitting in the back and sitting on the sides to please move in, if you don't mind. I could order you to do that but I would have no influence.

The second thing of order of business is I just want to say a little bit about the format. This is basically going to be a session where Barbara Ehrenreich is posing questions and have a good conversation with Chairman Conyers and so we will invite you after their first round of conversation is over to ask questions. In order to do that we will have Lee from the ASA pass out index cards and if you have questions while they're speaking, please write down your questions, and then Lee will bring them up to me and I will pick the most provocative questions. So please try to ask provocative questions. That's how we'll do that because it would be messy to have everybody coming up to microphones. Okay? And you will be passing your decks to the center aisle here. So we will start passing those out now. But if you would to ask questions that's the way to do it. Okay?

So I just want to frame the topic for the night and introduce our esteemed guests. Tonight's topic is The Future of American Politics and we have invited Congressman John Conyers and Barbara Ehrenreich to talk about these issues through the question and answer. And as I said we will give the audience a chance to ask questions of these two distinguished and courageous fighters for justice.

To set the stage, sociologists have been notoriously bad at predicting the emergence of social movements and the transformation of politics. But the signs are all around us. Fran Piven has proclaimed that the theme of this year's ASA meeting is "Is another world possible?" And I don't think it's an accident that the cover story in this week's issue of the British Journal, *The Economist*, is *Is America turning left?* They must have read Fran's mind. And in many ways today the United States resembles the conditions of a century ago that was called the gilded age. It was an age of rampant unregulated capitalism; it is a period of merger mania. Increasing concentrations of wealth among the privileged few, growing political influences of corporate power brokers called the Robber Barons. Who exploited workers, gauged consumers and corrupted politicians with their money.

But it also became out of that period of turmoil and politics activists created the progressive movement in the early 1900's. Forging a coalition of immigrants, unionist, middle class reformers, settlement house workers, journalist, clergy, upper class philanthropists and, yes, the first generation of sociologists, who were part of that progressive movement. They fought for better working conditions, better housing, better public services like sanitation, and public health laws. And today we see a lot of the same conditions of the gilded age. Widening of inequality, corporate influence and corporate scandals like Enron, persistent and growing poverty, deepening job insecurity and fears about retirement and pensions, 45 million Americans without health insurance and

unprecedented wave of foreclosures, an increase in violent crime, the Supreme Court put women's reproductive rights at risk more than time since Roe versus Wade and of course a belligerent foreign policy.

But are we now on the brink of another progressive era? I think that the meetings this week so far have shown us that bubbling below the surface is a new wave of social activism and political stirrings among ordinary Americans. It may be invisible to the mainstream media but it's obvious to anybody who is paying attention. It has many of the same elements of the progressive era 100 years ago. A rebirth, an excitement in the labor movement particularly among low wage workers, women and immigrants, a growing movement of community organizing among groups like ACORN an immigrant rights movement, 150 cities or more have passed living wage laws. The fact that Barbara's book Nickel and Dimed was a best seller tells us that something is—she touched a nerve in the American populace. Who would have thought that the two most popular films in America right now are a documentary about global warming and a documentary about the health insurance problem. Al Gore's, An Inconvenient Truth, and Michael Moore's SiCKOs. There is a growing environmental justice movement. All the democratic party candidates so far have been talking about widening inequality in poverty. All of them have committed themselves to some kind of universal health insurance plan. One of the candidates has focused his entire campaign on poverty inequality in a way we haven't seen since Bobby Kennedy's campaign in 1968. And of course last November the voters of this country were wise enough to elect a democratic majority in both houses that allowed our guest tonight, Congressman Conyers, to become the Chairmen of the Judiciary Committee.

So the cooperate right and the religious right are now on the defensive. The buzz words of the last few years. Just think about them, Katrina, Abramoff, Tom DeLay, Guantanamo, Libya, Abu Ghraib, Terri Schiavo, Rumsfeld. Those are all buzz words of shame. So the question is and that we will talk about tonight is are progressive forces up to the task of taking advantage of this situation and creating a major and permanent realignment of American politics? Will these popular stirrings translate into a popular progressive era that will out last the next election? And if so I hope we will see a new TV show in a few years on Wednesday nights about the inner workings of the White House. And I think that if all the forces come together the name of that show will be Left Wing.

So that's the question for tonight. The question that the Economist asked, is America turning left? And to talk about that we've—are honored to have Congressman John Conyers. In November of last year Congressman Conyers was reelected to his 26th term in the U.S House of Representatives. Winning 87% of the vote in Michigan's 14th Congressional District, he is the second most senior member of the House of Representatives. And in his 43 years in congress Congressman Conyers has built a solid track record of legislative achievement and has been a strong ally of the Labor Movement, the Women's Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the Environmental Movement, and other movements and struggles for economic and social justice. He currently serves as the Chair of the Judiciary Committee. His committee recently subpoenaed President Bush's top aides in its investigation of the administration firing of

eight federal prosecutors. He has introduced legislation to advance civil liberties, ensure equal protection equal access to the voting booth and the fight against violence against women and since September 11th he has been a strong voice for protecting civil liberties of our citizens.

Among his major accomplishments, and only a few of them, are the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, the Motor Voter Bill of 1993, the Martin Luther King Holiday Act, the Alcohol Warning Label Act, the Jazz Preservation Act and the Help America Vote Act of 2002. And he is currently the founder and Chairman of the Congressional Universal Health Care Taskforce and has introduced a Medicare for all single payer bill that already has the endorsement of over four thousand doctors around the country. So we have, we are honored to have, a courageous fighter for justice who has been able to find a way to work inside the system but also be able to help those fighting outside the system.

And we are familiar with Barbara Ehrenreich who was one of America's leading social critics. She is the author of thirteen books, including the best selling book Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America. For that book she worked undercover as a restaurant employee, cleaning staff and Wal-mart clerk to find out how America's working poor are being treated in the post welfare reform era. The book is now widely used in many of our college classes and was the bases for a widely praised play by the same title. And following that book she wrote another book called Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream. And with those books and that model of her research I think it's fair to say that Barbara is a modern day combination of George Orwell, Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, Rachel Carson, Michael Harrington, C. Wright Mills, Francis Perkins, Jane Adams, and Thorstein Veblin. All this in one person. She is a frequent contributor to the New York Times, Harper's, The Progressive, contributing writer to Times Magazine. She's written for Mother Jones, The Atlantic Monthly, Ms., The New Republic, Harper's, Z Magazine, In These Times and other publications. She is frequently seen on TV shows like *Charlie Rose* and *Oprah Winfrey*. She has written lots of books on lots of topics including women's health, social stratification and the American workforce. Her most recent book is on the origins—is on Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy and in addition to being a social critic she's an activist on such issues as health care, peace, women's rights, and economic justice. Last year she founded an organization called United Professionals, a non-profit organization to help those mistreated by the cooperate business world. And she is also the National Co-chair of the Democratic Socials of America, which was founded by Michael Harrington, and she has taught at many colleges and universities. So with that introduction I will leave it to Barbara and to our esteemed guest Chairman Conyers to answer the question what is the future of American Politics?

REP. JOHN CONYERS, JR.: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to be here for several reasons. One: Francis Fox Piven is one of the great leaders and thinkers and activists and writers in America today and I wanted to thank her personally for the great job she has done. And the last time I saw her she was getting ready to become the president and now when we finally see each other again she's outgoing she

won't be president for much longer to my sorrow. But I congratulate the person that is now succeeding her and I know she has done a great job. Don't you think so, this one year?

One reason that makes me certain of that is the title that brings us here this evening. It's incredible. "Is Another World Possible" is the lead and then we ask ourselves what is the future of American politics this evening. Are we getting more progressive and can we? Well of course when you compare and start off with the 43rd administration anything you do is going to be better than what you got now. And if anybody has any insights on why Karl Rove chose today to announce today that he was not going to stay in office any longer please see me. Because he is supposed to be coming before the Senate Judiciary Committee after evading Senator Leahy the chairman for so long and I don't know why he picked today or now before we could get back into conference. But I've got news for you Karl Rove. You can be subpoenaed even after you've left your position. And if you don't believe me you can ask Harriet Miers because she's been subpoenaed and has been now voted in contempt of congress by the House Judiciary Committee and we may be sending the marshals out to get her before too long. So this is not one way to get away from the oversight responsibilities of a vigilant congress.

I am pleased to be with Barbara Ehrenreich we've been friends across the years and her power in not only revealing the present economic plight of the people that are on the bottom of the economic rungs of our system but she's beginning to find that there are some big gaps that are being created in the middle class as well. So I commend her on the organization that she has put together. To work, to organize middle-class workers and to create an organization in that regard I wish you the very best and I hope that I can be of some help in that regard.

Peter Dreier of course is well known as—he's one of the sociologists that have always had a political inclination. Of course there isn't anything new about political scientist being politically active and informed. The greatest person that I have ever met that had more affect on my outlook than anybody of all was of course Martin Luther King Junior. He graduated with a degree in sociology from Morehouse University before he became a minister. And so I know that that spirit that has informed members of congress, activists, writers, great thinkers across the years have come out of the ranks of this more than 100 year old organization that brings us all together tonight.

In the congress we have a progressive caucus. It's headed by two women, Barbra Lee of California and Lynn Woolsey of California. We have somewhere between fifty and sixty members depending on the emotional mood of the members of congress, depending on what's happened to them and we are very active. Within that progressive caucus is another group called the Out Of Iraq Caucus headed by Maxine Waters of Los Angeles, California and she has been working with all of us in the congress which has, by the way, several interesting caucuses. The Congressional Black Caucus which is it's about 38th year. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Asian Pacific Caucus headed by

Mike Honda. And all of us work together to make sure that progressive issues come forward.

Now we've talked about the universal health care bill. The universal single payer health care bill is the most important piece of legislation. If there was one thing we were going to work on together it would be universal health care. Not just a name or a title but a universal single payer health care. So that we would get rid of all the insurance companies, the HMO's, all these people that for profit have invaded this situation and leads me to make it clear to you that health care is not a privilege, it's a right. And everybody should be in and nobody out.

We recently had in my judiciary committee for a reception and he should his movie later on that night in the Northwest Washington D.C movie house, Michael Moore. Who was raised this question of health care to a completely new level. The number of members sponsoring this legislation is now eighty-one. The highest number we've had, this is the third congress that I have introduced the bill and we're moving toward holding hearings before the end of this 110th congress. So I think that's a very important and worthwhile cause. 18,000 people die every year because they didn't have access to a hospital, they didn't have any insurance, they had no way of a getting into any place. And frequently now you can't even get into an emergency room. We've had people that have unfortunately died outside of hospitals because they wouldn't be let into any part of it.

So this issue the future of American politics is very vey important to me. I wanted to just mention a couple of very important considerations that have caused me to state that this administration is the most anti-constitutional, the most secret, most arrogant government entity that we have ever had in the White House in the history of this country. From the Iraq war to warrantless wire tapping programs, to the politicalization of the U.S attorneys and the civil rights and the Department of Justice, to the signing statements of President Bush over hundreds of them, which he never tells you that he signed until you read them, if anybody reads the federal register. Why he thought they may have a constitutional problem or what part of it he was taking an exception to. We have a politicized government now. To the extent that has never existed before. We have had more withdrawals from treaties, noncompliance with treaties we have ratified. We have an out right animus towards the United Nations when you see who he has appointed as the ambassador to the United Nations. A clear hostility to the Labor Movement, the collective bargaining system and working people in this country. We've broken up the K Street Connection in which former Majority Delay and Mr. Abramof had a pipeline through lobbyist writing the laws in this country. We've weakened the safety of this country by failing to enact the recommendations of the 911 Commission which we have just done during this congress. We've cost the prestige of the United States, it's hard to measure how much respect that we have lost. We are determined to keep Americans under surveillance thanks to the Patriot Act and the new FISA law that was recently passed. We were able to get a six month sunset so we are busy writing another one that we will bring forward next month.

So here we are two elections, presidential elections fraught with so many irregularities. Fraught with so much activity that was illegal, fraught with so much misleading information and people in states who ran the presidents campaign and were at the same time secretaries of state supposedly doing their job to get out the vote as much as they could. On the domestic front we still have soaring gas prices and a record number of foreclosures due to subprime lending. Unemployment is on the increase. The failing education system, public education, No Child Left Behind has left millions left behind. An inadequate infrastructure and we're looking now at all our bridges, highways and roads to make sure that they are now being neglected. And guess what we found out? They are being neglected. And we've got a very big problem.

Now in Detroit, where the automobile industry has been what created the city, we now find a new president of Chrysler, Robert Nardelli, received two hundred and ten million dollars to leave a company that reportedly wasn't doing so well, Home Depot, to take over Chrysler Cooperation. Question: Was he being paid for the good work that he had done at the company that he had left or were they paying him to get him out of the company and that was the price they had to pay? A man with no automobile experience and here the automobile industry is in very fragile shape. And so here we're dealing with and we have to look back on this to find out where we are to make sure we know where we are going. Here is an administration that only two years ago was talking about privatizing social security. Well we turned that around quick didn't we? That didn't take long for anybody conservative, independent or liberal to realize that was the wrong way to go.

So our challenge here tonight is one that I look forward to. And since I named all the things that have gone wrong I think we should, in all fairness, bring up the question of whether we should remove the president from office before his term expires? And that immediately brings some issues that we may want to consider together. Should we include the Attorney General? Should we include the Vice President of the United States? Now the problem is that one of the things we have to determine is whether we want to put the enormous amount of time involved, I've in more impeachment inquiries and impeachments than any other member in congress, but I want to remind you that the Judiciary Committee cannot impeach anyone, that an impeachment has to come from a majority of 218 members of the congress, and incidentally 2/3 of the senate to convict. So we've got to weigh between what it is we want to get done and what we would gain by invoking Article 1, Section 8, Clause 5 of the constitution that allows us to do this kind of thing.

Let me point out to you we have already passed a minimum wage after many years of struggling with that. We've also passed legislation to strengthen the integrity of the voting process in America because we found out that the voting section of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice wasn't doing what they were supposed to do. They were prosecuting immigration cases, if you please. We found out they only brought two voting right cases based on discrimination or denial of the right to vote.

So that's the lay of the land. We see a bright light at the end of the tunnel which gives us a chance to reclaim our government which has been a long time coming. Until this last election we have gone twelve years without a democratic majority in the House or in the Senate. And so I joined to tell you that yes we have to analyze the American political process and there is no better place to do it than here. But there's a benefit that comes from dealing not just with the good that it will do America. We are being watched by all of the countries, the people in the world. They're trying to figure out if we're going to move away from this military, imperial style. We are the super power of the planet and you do it our way or else. We consider some states client states and those—either with us or against us mentality is not going to work and I say to you that the peace and whether we can continue to grow a peaceful consensus among the 6.6 billion people on the planet is going to depend on who leads this country. And who leads this country is going to depend on how we in the professions, in this organization, in the civil rights movements, in the community organizations, the non-governmental agencies across the country and ordinary citizens who will and who must be persuaded to join with us in this effort. Not just to make America safer and better and stronger but to keep this world from disintegrating into a nuclear catastrophe, in view of the fact that nuclear weapons are all over the planet earth. And so I look forward to this discussion with you and Barbara Ehrenreich Thank you very much.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: This is quite a thrill for me, particularly the part of you calling me an old friend. I really liked that, gotten that on tape, I want it notarized. But just one personal reminiscence. When my book Nickel and Dimed came out I was invited to speak to some progressive caucus members and Congressman Conyers was there and I had the feeling at the time this was too strange. Here I am with these actual people who make decisions in our country and then he listened. And he started a committee to investigate the circumstances of the working poor. Right?

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Not only that but we're investigating the OSHA Agency, the Occupational Safety and Health Agency, because we found that it has too been weakened, politicized, deregulated so there are more unsafe work places than every before. Thank you for your pointing us in that direction. A few years back.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: Anyway it was a very important moment for me. When I learned about this committee and I thought "My God I actually know somebody in a House of Representatives." And he said—I said "I think maybe that had a little bit to do with the passing of the raising of the minimum wage last month which is so important."

Anyway let me pick up on the health care issue. You have been way out there on this. I think it was in 02 or 03 you started you launched HR676 proposing a single payer universal health system for the United States. So I guess my question now is, as we listen to the democratic candidates, two of them have put forward their health proposals, and to my disappointment both Obama's and Edwards do fall far short of that. They're still talking about something attached to your employment and we haven't heard from Clinton yet on this issue. Though I kind of worried after 1993 because I think—she put forward a

program then that I thought personally was very disappointing. So do you want to comment on what—whether we should be hopeful about the democratic candidates? What are they going to do to advance universal health insurance?

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Well some of them are going to dance around the subject as much as they can. Its like packaging, everybody is using the term universal health, a universal plan. Universal is in everything. But basically they are not dealing with the real problem. The only member, the only candidate is Dennis Kucinich who has endorsed HR676 right from the beginning. The rest of them still have an insurance company in there somewhere or an HMO or an employer. But what to me is more important is that we have the doctors coming for it. We have to build up a real—a real base of support.

Now the polls have all shown that people not only want HR676 but they would even be willing to pay more then they are paying now if they could get it. Our proposal is that they pay less since its—that's the whole basis is that we are taking the profit out of health care. This is in the national interest to keep three hundred million people healthy. You talk about fighting terror and protecting the shore with 47 million people that don't have a nickel or a dimes worth of health insurance? Its absurd. So this is where we've got to start and the doctors are coming in, the health professionals are coming in. I've two former congressmen who are on HR676 but so far have not introduced it in the House. One is Bernie Sanders, the Senator. And we if are going to start talking with him. The other is the congressman from Ohio that became a United States Senator, Brown. So Sharrod Brown. So what we are doing is building it up. This not mysterious this is how big social projects work. You keep building up the support; you keep building up the support and guess what? Pretty soon everybody is running down to help.

This is what happened when I introduced the Martin Luther King Holiday Bill. Three days after his assassination I called Coretta Scott King to get make sure we were on board. People would come in and say “John put me on your bill, I know you cant pass it but everybody is yelling about it here” and they were right but fifteen years later we got it passed because of the momentum. We don't need fifteen years for health care cause we got millions of and millions of people ready to do it now. What we've got to do is bring more of the medical community into this. So that we can get this bill to hearings before the end of the 110th congress. And then really get serious in the next congress. With a new congress and a new president.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: Alright well. Um I think we will have to build up more grass roots pressure on this. I think the sentiment is there. The odd thing about health care is that it has not come together in movement. A sentiment that's clear but yet you don't have people sitting in yet or whatever their going to need to do.

And my next question has to do with Iraq. There were high hopes in November 06 that a democratic congress would somehow extricate us more quickly. Now it's the democrats in congress who seem to have entered a morass around this issue. And we're not—although public opinion around here is overwhelmingly against the war. Nothing,

you know, we haven't seen a plan. What is your strategy and I know you can't speak for all congressional democrats or anyone. What do you see as the way ahead on that?

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Well first of all to me the number one thing we've got to do is extricate our self form Iraq. We got to get out of Iraq. It doesn't do anybody any good to say that we never should have gotten into Iraq now that we find the circumstances that were manufactured to start us off into a preemptive war. But we have passed a resolution; well first of all we have forced the congress to budget the Iraq war into the defense bill as opposed to a supplemental measure. Which they were doing so that you couldn't tell that this war was costing us 1.2 trillion—one and a half trillion dollars when you combined the direct and indirect cost. We got a resolution and Pelosi did this to get us out of there in March of 08. We can't get any—we weren't able to get anything on the other side.

We're faced with several options. One: To declare victory and leave like we did in Vietnam. Two: —and that's what we had to do there. Number two, and this I recommend strongly, is that we stop using the United States Military to be policemen in Iraq. That is a no win situation and with the differences going on between the three sects there that is not—that is not something you can come into a country and police. So the other option is to withdraw from Iraq but keep a military force in the perimeters. I think Murtha, Jack Murtha talks about that as a potential strategy. McGovern has a plan, former senator George McGovern.

But the big problem that they see now is this: that if there is a withdrawal and the whole thing collapses will we have to go back in or should we go back in? And I think that is creating the slower effort about moving out of Iraq. It's a difficult issue but I think that we have to begin a withdrawal because everybody whose military opinion I respect says that no matter how long we stay there will be the same circumstances. The fight—the fighting will go on which goes back hundreds of years of differences that we didn't take into account. So that to me we should show that those of us who proclaim to be against the war we must show the determination to withdraw American troops from the fighting on the ground in Iraq starting immediately. This is me.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: Right. No it's ok. Well that's good to hear you say it that clearly. I think you know this—it's a problem. The public the approval ratings for congress are now incredibly enough lower then they are for the president. And I think, I mean I don't have any special insight or information here, although Peter might though, that largely does reflect disappointment about the war. What do you think? No? Yeah. That it largely reflects feelings about the war. So I worry that congress is becoming less popular faster then the president unless it makes a move on the war to get us out.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Well I I don't attach the—I don't attach the low congressional ratings to solely to Iraq. If that were the case then all the democratic members of congress that are freshmen that were elected in red states they would be able to vote with me and with the get out of Iraq caucus in congress. But they aren't able to do that. They tell us they aren't able to do that. So I think it's due to the

corruption and the politicalization of the republican congress and the administration that lead to a wave of scandals, imprisonment of members of congress resigning, phony district, well district plans that are being challenged in Texas that DeLay did on five congressional seats. The K Street. All of that I think really contributes to—with inaction on Iraq, but its—if I could persuade the members there who know that they came from conservative states and districts that this would strengthen them and not jeopardize them. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to do it. It would also take, Barbara, the senate as well. So many have told me this “Look I would be for it and I would be willing to take the chance if we knew it was going somewhere. If it was going to fail then I'm more hesitant to join with you.” So we have a majority of democrats that want to get out of Iraq but we have enough that would prevent us with the republicans literally voting to a man and woman to stay that we do not have a majority. In either body.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: Well that that brings me to another question I have about democrats in congress and the senate today. The passage of the new FISA Bill or the renewal of it last week depended a lot on the so called blue dog democrats. I hope you can explain who these people are and everything. But I think that a lot of us were shocked, absolutely breathless, that that passed and it did pass with the support of quite a few democrats. Care to comment on that?

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Well the majority of democrats voted against it.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: Right but there was a substantial minority.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Yeah well there are forty blue dogs. Southern conservatives mostly but there some blue dogs from California and other places amazingly I found out. But it represents the conservative wing of the Democratic Congress-House and they were almost to a man and woman opposed to it so there was no way it could pass. Because we have only majority of 30 in the House, 30 more democrats the republicans so we got I think a couple republican votes. So that's how it happened. We got a very small majority in each body. In the senate we have a majority of one in the House we have a majority of 30 out of 435. So that's really thin, that's really thin in both Houses and I think that accounts for why some of the progressive issues cannot move forward in the 110th congress successfully.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: Alright well, I am going to make this my last question because I see the questions from the audience have come up, have arrived in Peter's hand. So my last question is then, alright, what can we, not you, do to help progressive elected officials like you, a progressive leader like yourself, you can't do it alone. Now most of the people here are teachers they are also writers. You know they're in people who are in positions of some kind of influence. What can we all be doing? I mean you can't do this alone. There is a strong feeling you certainly can't do it with such small majorities.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: You know Attorney LaShawn Warren told me this question was going to come up. And I just wanted you to know that I have thought about this a great deal because everywhere I go that's the question. I was with the Kip County Democrats in Grand Rapids, if you can believe it, only three days ago. And their enthusiasm was incredible. I was with the United Steel Workers in Detroit the week before their enthusiasm is incredible. And now I'm with a 14,000 member organization that has been around for a century and now which houses not just sociologists but political scientists, and other people that are connected to the understanding of the American system and how it works.

And so it seems to me that the writing and the activity and the explaining the system to everybody because quite frankly the media does a pretty bad job of this folks. They do not, well the media is cooperate so it doesn't take a long time to follow bread crumbs to find out whose running what around here. I mean Rupert Murdoch is a poster boy but there are plenty of other conservative media companies in this country as well. And so we have a huge teaching job. To me social scientists and sociologists have a great opportunity. Some have even gone as far as to put themselves in a position to run for office, which I encourage greatly but that's not necessary when there are so many other things you can do in terms of writing and teaching and making sure that the people in your community in your universities in your professional setting can get with it.

We were talking about this wide number of organizations that are issue oriented. We have we have to create and I need to talk with as many people as I can, Peter, about how we create a full employment society. That's what we need more than anything else right now. Second to a health insurance plan. Universal. We need a full employment society we—with the late with the former senator George McGovern and Gus Hawkins when he was the Chairmen of Education Committee. We passed the full employment and balanced growth act. I'll never forget it. In which the government kicked in after unemployment reaches certain percentage over the norm in any particular region. To train and to create jobs and to employ people. And I think we need to go back to that because these percentages of unemployment now mask the true number of Americans that really are looking for work in this country.

So those are some of the things in—help us end the war, help us get a universal health care plan, help us create a full employment society and help us take back our government.

PETER DREIER: That's not only an agenda for America that's a good syllabus for sociology 101. I am looking at about 30 cards that were passed up to me and I'll pick a few of them to ask you about. One of them has to do with back to the minimum wage and back where Barbara started with the meeting she went to with the progressive caucus. There are people who will argue that after a decade with congress has passed the minimum wage and forced the president to reluctantly to sign the bill. And in two years it will raise the minimum wage to 7.25 an hour which is below the poverty rate, which would be about 9.50 an hour. Is there any appetite you think in congress, should a democrat be elected to the White House to raise the minimum wage to at least the poverty

rate, which it was back in 1968 but hasn't been since. So that would make it about 9.50 an hour.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Absolutely Peter. That I mean it what we've done doesn't even catch up to where we used to be as you've pointed out. So we've got to do more about the minimum wage. As her books show, there are people working two and three jobs as a matter of necessity because they're all paying so little for the labor. We have to create in this society, first of all a full employment society but then where people are unemployed or thrown out of work that they will be able to get an unemployment compensation that's decent.

While we're on that, what about these horrible free trade laws that allow companies to keep sending our work products, our companies, out of this country to cheap labor markets? It seems to me that there is no reason that we need to reward cooperate America by facilitating them getting out of the country. As everybody knows now when you get information over a phone line it may as well be might as well be coming from India or anywhere else on the planet. And we have had a lot of outsourcing. Way too much. I went down to that Maquiladora in Mexico and it was very very disappointing.

PETER DREIER: Well one of the debates that will no doubt happen more intensely after the presidential election, is the debate over whether we regulate labor across borders but we tend to not regulate capital across borders. One of the questions had to with immigration reform. What is a progressive agenda on immigration reform that we might look to the progressive caucus for leadership about?

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Well first of all it has to be a reform of the whole system. And of course you know just when I was about to say that President Bush got it right on one subject he immediately came out this week or last week and said that now he is for all the enforcement parts of an immigration bill and nothing for protecting the families and keeping them together, nothing for dealing with a fair system of compensation, nothing about really punishing the companies who with a blind eye hire people that they really know are illegal and are not Green Card holders and are not here in any kind of way.

So immigration to me illustrates the ability for the media to make many people in our society hostile to the whole idea of dealing fairly with an immigration reform. How can you build fences or walls hundreds of miles along our border and expect to keep people out. It's not working now; as a matter of fact they've only built a couple hundred miles of fences that have already been appropriated. The people in those areas on the U.S side hate the wall. It's interfering with everything they do. As a matter of fact we've some of the way they configured it makes no sense at all. But it's an illustration on how people can be made to blame them. The outsiders, the immigrants are taking peoples jobs The immigrants are causing our crime. The immigrants are causing our school systems to be less well as they should be. To me this is a tragic circumstance in which those of us

who realize that we need immigrants and not that most of our history is a—this country is a land of immigrants. So to put this in some perspective it's very difficult and very hard.

The congressman from California Zoe Lofgren has been working on immigration with more steadfastness than anybody in the congress and along with the congress Gutierrez of Illinois we're trying to put together a small plan that is not enforcement prone that will deal sensibly with the subject. We've got—we can't continue to isolate and make immigrants the problem when it's our system which takes in some places for them fifteen years of waiting before they can even become—get legal in this country after they've been here. So if you're talking about rounding up twelve million people and sending them back everybody knows that's not feasible. It wouldn't work. We haven't anything near the number of detention centers or places to keep them.

PETER DREIER: I want to ask two more questions from the cards and hand it back to Barbara for the last couple of the questions. One of our colleges in the audience wanted to know, we know that you've been probably the leading opponent of the Patriot Act and in your role on the Judiciary Committee. And were wondering what's going to happen to the Patriot Act. Particularly if a democrat is elected to the White House and to the violations of the civil liberties and civil rights that it reflects.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: The easy question is to repeal it. But I have not talked to anybody about it. You know the Patriot Act is a beautiful example of what can happen in politics. We actually passed the Patriot Act they went to the rules committee and took it out and rewrote another one and brought that to the floor, the administration people did that. And we were all outraged. No body had seen it, it was several hundred pages long. And then we got this bill which has only been made steadily worse by giving, like FISA, the government more powers to investigate people on suspicion. Not that they are connected to terrorism. And that's what FISA did. It almost—it in effect legalized warrantless surveillance, which was unbelievable since the courts have spoken on that. And so we're hopeful that we can come up with an alternative to a—what a name to put on a bill that takes away Americans rights. What do you name it? Well you name it the Patriot Act.

PETER DREIER: The last question from the audience. I am going combine a number of questions about health insurance. A lot of people asked questions about health insurance. It seems to be that in the last year or so there has been a growing sense of many American businesses now recognize that the cost of health care is making America less competitive in the global market and a growing number of business leaders are seeing the wisdom of coming around to some kind of universal health insurance that isn't tied to employment. And, if again, if a democrat is elected to the presidency and you reintroduce your bill in that congress. What's the likelihood that we can get obviously the insurance industry and the pharmaceutical industry will not be in favor, but the other employers, the other sectors of business, can you see a scenario where they are supportive of that? And that might mean that the Hilary—that the ads that the insurance companies put on the air—

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Perry and Louise?

PETER DREIER: Perry and Louise, and the whole opposition movement that made the moderate democrats, like Jim Cooper, scared of anything to the left of manage competition. They might come around to your version of the bill. So the real question is : what do you see are the, not the policy issues but the political issues, what's going to create the political momentum both from the business community at the top and the grass roots movement at the bottom, to get a universal single payer health insurance plan passed?

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Barbara Ehrenreich talked about this where is the movement behind health care. And although we have a number of organizations, including the physicians for a national health plan working with us on it, and they were waiting for me when I came forward with the bill. They had been supporting this before I was. And the African American Medical Association the NMA has been supporting this before I got to congress. So when you begin to examine this you find that there is a residual opposition from the major corporations in this country. And much of it is based on their hostility towards the fact that we would dare come up with a plan that democratically includes everybody. It doesn't mean that it's going to cost them more, and I illustrate the automobile industry which built—which now in Canada builds more cars then we build in Detroit and guess what plan their automobile workers are under? As well all of you know. They are under a universal health care plan that's Canadian. And their cars they have no trouble, they get along fine. The companies don't complain. But the same company over here is still trying to get used to the idea that this is what the right way to go and the right thing to do. Even when it's in their best interest. This isn't like this is going to cost you a pound of flesh guy. This is going to help you. You're complaining about health care benefits and what you want to do is reduce the workers benefits but you don't want to move to a plan that will be helpful—more helpful to you and to the workers in this country. And so there is a reticence it's also in the American Medical Association. AMA has a hard core that will resist this even though doctors are looking at the fact that the reimbursement rate for Medicaid is lower then the lower then the cost of treating the patient. So that you have to be able to afford to take on Medicaid cases. Some of that is creeping even into Medicare. So what we're saying is that there is a lot of closely held myths that that we have to climb over. To me that's where sociologist come in, that's where thinkers come in that can parse these things out and I'm hoping that that those 81 members of congress that are, or 80, that are with us will be able to relate to the thousands of people in the ASA as we move forward in this very important struggle.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: Okay, well.

Two more questions.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: We pretty much used up most of our time so one question on the impeachment question. I can certainly understand your concern about this

taking up so much time and energy and is it sort of a symbolic gesture. But you also in your original comments talked about America's standing in the world and the image which we have now of being a hyper-belligerent country with no respect for human rights, given to torture and so on. Doesn't it seem to you that one of the things we might do or try to do as strongly as we could to get—to correct that image, to change that image into America is something more admirable or least associate ourselves from what we have been dragged into in the last 6 years would be to launch a, you know, be really dogged about an impeachment effort.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Right, I think it would send out a great message and I'm going to be meeting on the imperial presidency subject and how we best deal with it and of course this is one of the solutions. What we got to do though is weigh, first of all make sure we know what we are getting into. I would not like to be the person who has boasted of having been involved in so many impeachments then when we get to the fact that the government gets tied down, we make no progress at all, all the issues come—the government will come to a standstill. Which maybe not is a bad idea. But we do have some things that we are trying to continue to get through to win the election to sustain ourselves.

There are two things I should mention. One is that there have been psychological interpretations of the president's conduct that suggests that sometimes he may be disassociated from reality. So, are you surprised to hear—I know this is—this is the medical terminology that was—I am passing on. But that being the fact, people have come to me from two directions. One: "Congressman please initiate impeachment hearings because this president, like he did in Iraq, may go into Iran". And then I have another group of people that come to me and say "Congressman please be cautious about what you do that may destabilize the president's emotional considerations of everything because you might do something that could provoke him to go into Iran".

Now the other thing is Bush as victim. Here are all these people in the Congress that have always intensely disliked this man and what he has done and guess what they are doing in the last months of his term of office. They are going to impeach him. And guess what? He's made mistakes and we don't agree with everything, we found out about the war and blah blah blah. But this is a democratic payback for all the things that they imagine that were done to him during the twelve years that Newt Gingrich had the republic—enabled the republicans take over the Congress since 1994. Now, there are those that will say "well that does not have anything to do with it." Look at Article 1, Section 8, Clause 5, there it is, go to it. As a member of Congress and I want you to work with me on this and tell me about it. I have to look out—my first interest is to preserve the best interest and welfare of the American people. Now if that is—if that is my approach and what are the best interests of the country at large. If in that context it is not impeachment then I want everybody that applauded impeachment—for impeachment to understand that that is the scales in my head in which I am balancing. Is that fair enough to ask you to join with me in that? Okay. Alright. I hear less than unanimous agreement on that subject.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: We have actually run out of our time for this session. I just want to tell you that this has been a very, I think, special occasion for everybody here to have this kind of very informal frank conversation with you. I think this is, am I the only one here that feels like what a privilege this has been, what a treat. I really want to thank you for your wonderful honesty. And remember we are right behind you or in the front or around and keep it up.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Peter could you ask everybody, this is sort of some inside things I have divulged, please keep this in the room.

PETER DREIER: This is all off the record ladies and gentlemen.

CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS: Yes, all off the record. Thank you.

PETER DREIER: We know from tonight that there is an appetite among sociologists who join in the struggle for a more humane society. This morning I said our goal in life should be by the time my 10-year-old twin daughters are old enough to vote that we will be as humane as Canada and maybe we can even raise our sites higher than that. But to do that we have to get engaged in the political process. Not just be critics, being critics is good, being cynics is not good, being skeptics is good. There is a lot of sociologists who are teaching the next generation about reform and social justice so we have a bigger influence in just our own votes so let's use that influence as teachers and as students and as public intellectuals to change the public debate so that we are not hamstrung by the terms of debate given to us by the media and by the mainstream political forces.

But we can extend and change those a bit just the way 10 years ago the word living wage was a radical idea. But thanks to Barbara and thanks to Congressman Conyers and thanks to the ACORN and the Labor Movement and the groups around the country that have been struggling to get 150 cities with living wages, 29 states that have raised their minimum wage above the federal level including the cost of living index that we have now made this idea of a living wage a mainstream idea. I think that is a great use of social science and a great use of our capacity as teachers and as public intellectuals to change the public discourse and with the leadership of Congressman Conyers and the work of Barbara Ehrenreich who will continue to be our guru for social justice. We can continue using our talents and our skills as social scientist to promote social justice. Thank you and good night.