



Packet on the "100 Hours" Legislation

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A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA

100 Hours: Honest Leadership, Open Government Rules Changes

During the first 100 legislative hours of the 110th Congress, House Democratic leaders have pledged to work with their colleagues to pass key measures affecting the everyday lives of all Americans. One of these is a series of proposals to clean up Washington and sever unethical ties between lawmakers and lobbyists. We will start by banning travel and gifts from lobbyists, requiring full transparency to end the abuse of special interest earmarks, and ending the abusive processes that have destroyed democracy in the House of Representatives. These measures are the first steps to ensure that this Congress upholds the highest ethical standards.

Americans are paying for the cost of corruption in Washington with skyrocketing prices at the pump, spiraling drug costs, and the waste, fraud and no-bid contracts in the Gulf Coast and Iraq, for Administration cronies like Halliburton.

- Ethics and legal scandals plagued the Republican Congress – from the resignation of Reps. Tom DeLay and Duke Cunningham to the admission of illegal or improper conduct by Reps. Bob Ney and Mark Foley.
- The cozy relationship between Congress and special interests has resulted in lobbying scandals, such as those involving Republican super lobbyist Jack Abramoff. In this scandal, former Rep. Bob Ney pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit fraud -- accepting all-expense-paid trips to play golf in Scotland and accepting meals, sports and concert tickets, while providing legislative favors for Abramoff's clients.
- Republicans permitted a Congress in which lobbyists write the bills, 15-minute votes are held open for three hours, and entirely new legislation is crammed into signed conference reports in the dead of night.

Reform of the Republican culture of corruption is a top priority of the American people and a top priority of House Democrats.

- Republicans lost 30 seats, with 74 percent of voters citing corruption as an extremely important or a very important issue in their choice at the polls.
- As our first responsibility in fulfilling the mandate of this critical election, Democrats are offering an aggressive reform package to reverse Republican excesses and restore the public trust.

Bipartisan lobbying and government reform has been debated and passed by the House and Senate in 2006.

- Reform proposals have been introduced by both Democrats and Republicans including a bill by Rep. Shays and Meehan (H.R.5677), by Sens. McCain and Lieberman (S. 2128), and Reps. Hefley and Udall (H.R. 4988).
- On May 3, 2006, the House passed the Republicans' anemic package of reforms (H.R. 4975), after extensive hearings on a range of these topics. The Senate reform proposal (S. 2349) passed on March 29, 2006, but the Congress failed to reconcile the two versions.
- During those debates, Democrats proposed a tough, "far more robust version of lobbying reform" that was voted on twice and nearly passed the House with 16 Republicans supporting the reforms. [Washington Post, 4/25/06; Vote #118, 5/3/06]

A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA

100 Hours: Fiscal Responsibility Rules Changes

During the first 100 hours of the 110th Congress, House Democratic leaders have pledged to work with their colleagues to pass key bills affecting the everyday lives of all Americans. One of these measures amends House rules to require pay-as-you-go budget discipline with no new deficit spending as the first step to reversing record budget deficits that are passing trillions in debt on to our children and grandchildren. Democrats will also amend House rules to require full transparency in order to begin to end the abuse of special interest earmarks.

Pay-as-you-go budgeting with no new deficit spending is a key first step to reversing record budget deficits that are passing trillions in debt on to our children and grandchildren.

- The Bush Administration has turned a projected 10-year \$5.6 billion surplus into a nearly \$3 trillion deficit.
- America's debt has already climbed 50 percent to more than \$28,000 per person, and President Bush has borrowed more from foreign nations than the previous 42 U.S. presidents combined. [House Budget Committee, 9/27/06]
- Rising interest rates caused by Bush deficits cost middle-class families as much as \$1,700 a year on credit card and mortgage payments, with interest payments on the debt becoming one of the fastest growing categories of spending in the federal budget. [Third Way, 8/28/06]
- Pay-as-you-go was the law of the land from 1990 until 2002, paving the way for a balanced budget in the late 1990s, four years of budget surpluses, and bringing down the national debt by \$453 billion.

Pay-as-you-go budget discipline is a bipartisan proposal.

- 42 percent of the American public says reducing the deficit should be a top priority. [Pew Research Center, 10/6-10/05]
- On November 5, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed a deficit reduction bill imposing pay-as you-go discipline in a bipartisan deal supported by 47 House Republicans and 19 Senate Republicans. [H.R. 5835; PL 101-508; House Vote 528, 10/28/1990; Senate Vote 326, 10/27/90]. Pay-as-you-go was extended twice, with 193 House Republicans supporting it in 1997. [House Vote 345, 7/30/1997]
- Republicans such as former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and Senator John McCain support pay-as-you-go budgeting. [Senate Banking Committee Testimony, 6/15/2004; Congressional Record debate on the Feingold Amendment to S. Con Res. 95, 3/10/2004]
- It is supported by the Concord Coalition, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, and the Committee for Economic Development. [Press release, 4/20/2004]

Earmark reform is needed to bring transparency and accountability for special projects.

- The status quo has permitted some Members of Congress, with no transparency and accountability, to provide favors to special friends through earmarked special projects – putting special interests ahead of the public interest. The American people deserve to know who is sponsoring earmarks to begin to stop the cases of flagrant abuse of earmarks.
- The number of earmarks has exploded under the Republicans, climbing from 3,023 in FY 1996 to 13,012 in FY 2006, and the lack of transparency and accountability has led to problems--of which Rep. Cunningham is an example. [CRS, CRS, 1/26/06; 3/6/06] Former Rep. Duke Cunningham pleaded guilty to accepting bribes from defense contractors in return for his help in securing defense contracts.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA

100 Hours: Implementing 9/11 Commission Recommendations

In the first 100 legislative hours of the 110th Congress, one of the bills that the House will consider is a bill to make our nation safer by providing for the implementation of the 9/11 Commission's recommendations remaining after the enactment of the Intelligence Reform bill in 2004. The bill also goes beyond the Commission's recommendations by requiring, within five years, 100% scanning of U.S.-bound shipping containers.

The bipartisan 9/11 Commissioners have given the Administration and Congress several failing grades on implementing the recommendations that the Commission submitted in 2004.

- In 2004, the 9/11 Commission submitted 41 recommendations to the Administration and Congress on improving homeland security, preventing terrorists from acquiring WMD, and developing strategies for preventing the spread of Islamic terrorism. Many have only been partially implemented and others not at all.
- In December 2005, in its final report card, the 9/11 Commissioners gave the Administration and Congress many poor grades on implementing the recommendations, including 5 F's, 12 D's, 9 C's, and 2 Incompletes. A few months ago, they stated that the grades had not improved in 2006. For example, these grades include:
 - A "F" grade on providing a risk-based allocation of homeland security funding
 - A "F" grade on ensuring communications interoperability for first responders
 - A "D" grade on the screening of checked baggage and air cargo on passenger aircraft
 - A "D" grade on government information sharing
 - A "D" grade on preventing the proliferation of WMD and terrorism

By implementing the Commission's recommendations, this bill will make us safer by enhancing homeland security, strengthening efforts to stop the proliferation of WMD, and promoting strategies to reduce the appeal of extremism, particularly in Muslim parts of the world.

- This bill includes a number of provisions to substantially improve homeland security, including:
 - Significantly increasing the share of state homeland security grants provided on the basis of risk
 - Creating a stand-alone grant program for interoperable communications for first responders
 - Phasing in a requirement of 100% inspection of air cargo over the next 3 years
 - Quickly accelerating the installation of in-line explosive detection systems for checked baggage
 - Mandating strategic plan for deployment of explosive detection equipment at passenger checkpoints
 - Phasing in a requirement of 100% scanning of U.S.-bound shipping containers over the next 5 years
- This bill also includes a number of provisions to prevent terrorists from acquiring WMD, including:
 - Improving U.S. non-proliferation program, and creating a U.S. Coordinator for the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism and a blue-ribbon commission to recommend further reforms
 - Strengthening efforts to eliminate nuclear black-market networks
- This bill also includes several provisions on strategies to reduce the appeal of extremism, including:
 - Establishing an International Arab and Muslim Youth Opportunity Fund, to provide assistance for enhancing modern educational programs for Arab and other Muslim youth around the world
 - Providing for the establishment of a Middle East Foundation, to promote economic opportunities, education reform, human rights, and democratic processes in the countries of the Middle East

Implementing the 9/11 Commission's recommendations has strong bipartisan support.

- Implementing the 9/11 Commission's recommendations is supported by 62 percent of Americans. [Gallup/USA Today poll, 10/06] It is also supported by several bipartisan and nonpartisan groups, including such groups representing 9/11 families as the Voices of September 11th and Families of September 11.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA

100 Hours: Implementing 9/11 Commission Recommendation on Intelligence Oversight Reform

In the first 100 legislative hours of the 110th Congress, on the same day that the House considers the comprehensive bill to implement the 9/11 Commission's recommendations, the House will also consider a change in House rules to implement the 9/11 Commission's recommendation on intelligence oversight reform. This House rules change will create a Select Intelligence Oversight Panel within the House Appropriations Committee.

This House rules change implements one of the options that the bipartisan 9/11 Commission laid out in recommending intelligence oversight reform – i.e., combining authorizing and appropriating authorities in one panel.

- One of the 9/11 Commission's 41 recommendations concerned reform of the congressional intelligence oversight process. On this recommendation, the commission presented different possible options – with one option being combining authorizing and appropriating authorities in one panel.
- This House rules change, by creating a Select Intelligence Oversight Panel within the House Appropriations Committee, responds to the commission's option of combining authorizing and appropriating authorities in one panel. This new panel will be made up of members of both the Appropriations Committee and the Intelligence Committee.

The Select Intelligence Oversight Panel will strengthen the oversight process by providing a mechanism for considering intelligence funding and other intelligence issues from the combined perspectives of the Appropriations and Intelligence Committees.

- The Select Intelligence Oversight Panel will be primarily responsible for:
 - Examining, through the hearings process, the President's budget submission for intelligence and recommending to the defense appropriations subcommittee and other appropriations subcommittees levels of funding for intelligence programs, projects, and activities; and
 - Drafting a classified annex to the annual defense appropriations bill in which most of such recommendations are reflected.
- The Select Intelligence Oversight Panel will also conduct oversight of the use of appropriated funds by intelligence agencies.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA

100 Hours: Raising the Minimum Wage

During the first 100 legislative hours of the 110th Congress, one of the bills that the House will consider is a bill that will help up to 13 million Americans and their families by increasing the minimum wage. The measure would increase the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour over two years.

Increasing the minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour would bring a pay raise for up to 13 million Americans.

- Raising the minimum wage would provide an additional \$4,400/year for a family of three, equaling 15 months of groceries, or over two years of health care – helping them to keep up with rising costs.
- Nearly 13 million people would likely benefit from the increase – 5.6 million directly and 7.4 million indirectly. This includes 7.7 million women, 3.4 million parents, and 4.7 million people of color.
- It is wrong to have millions of Americans working full-time and year-round and still living in poverty. At \$5.15 an hour, a full-time minimum wage worker brings home \$10,712 a year –nearly \$6,000 below the poverty level for a family of three.
- A minimum wage increase is particularly important at a time when America’s families have seen their real income drop by almost \$1,300 since 2000, while the costs of health insurance, gasoline, home heating, and attending college have increased by almost \$5,000 annually. [Government Reform, 9/21/06]
- The minimum wage has not increased in more than nine years – the longest period in the history of the law. During that time, Members of Congress have received a \$31,600 pay raise. The real value of the minimum wage has plummeted to its lowest level in 51 years. [Economic Policy Institute, 6/06]
- An average CEO earns more before lunchtime in one day than a minimum wage worker earns all year. [EPI, 6/27/06]

Increasing the minimum wage has broad bipartisan and popular support.

- Supported by 89 percent of the American public in a recent poll. [Newsweek poll,11/11/06] Another recent poll showed 72 percent of Republicans support the minimum wage increase. [Pew Research poll, 4/19/06]
- President stated he would “find common ground” with Congress on a minimum wage increase. [11/8/06]
- Voters in six states passed minimum-wage-increase ballot measures in November – including Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada and Ohio. [Washington Post, 11/19/06] As of January 1, 2007, twenty-eight states along with D.C. have a state minimum wage above the current federal level.
- Supported by a range of organizations, including labor (AFL-CIO, SEIU, AFSCME, UNITE, Steelworkers), religious (National Council of Churches, the Interfaith Alliance, U.S. Catholic Conference, Alliance of Baptists), and civil rights organizations (NAACP, MALDEF, American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee).
- The minimum wage increase has the support of the majority in both the House and the Senate – with 64 House Republicans voting for a \$7.25 per hour minimum wage under a vocational education bill in July 2006, and a majority of Senators, including eight Republican Senators, voting for the minimum wage increase in June 2006. [Vote #366, motion to instruct on S.250, 7/12/06; Vote #179, amendment to S.2766, 6/21/06]

A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA

100 Hours: Promoting Life-Saving Stem Cell Research

In the first 100 legislative hours of the 110th Congress, one of the bills that the House will consider is the bipartisan DeGette-Castle bill to promote life-saving stem cell research. Unfortunately, the President vetoed this bill in July. It is expected that both the House and Senate will pass the DeGette-Castle bill again early this year and the bill's supporters are hoping that the President, this time, will sign this vital legislation into law.

The bipartisan DeGette-Castle bill expands federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, giving hope to 100 million Americans affected by debilitating or life-threatening diseases and their families.

- The bipartisan DeGette-Castle bill increases the number of embryonic stem cell lines eligible to be used for federally-funded research. The bill authorizes HHS to support research involving embryonic stem cells meeting certain criteria, regardless of the date on which the stem cells were derived from an embryo. Current policy allows federal funds to be used for research on only those stem cell lines that existed when President Bush issued an executive order on August 9, 2001.
- The bill only authorizes the use of stem cell lines generated from embryos that would otherwise be discarded by fertility clinics. The bill has strict ethical guidelines, including stipulating that embryos can be used only if the donors give their written consent and receive no money or other inducement in exchange for the embryos.
- Embryonic stem cell research has the potential to unlock the doors to treatments and cures to numerous diseases, including diabetes, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's, ALS, multiple sclerosis, and cancer.

Expanding embryonic stem cell research has strong bipartisan support.

- Expanding embryonic stem cell research is supported by 72 percent of Americans. [Opinion Research Corporation]
- Embryonic stem cell research is supported by such key Republicans as Sen. John McCain, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, and former First Lady Nancy Reagan.
- Embryonic stem cell research is supported by more than 200 organizations, including the American Medical Association, AARP, Association of American Medical Colleges, Parkinson's Action Network, American Diabetes Association, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, and Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Few of the stem cell lines authorized by President Bush in 2001 are now useful for research.

- According to the National Institutes of Health, of the 78 stem cell lines that were declared eligible for federal funding in the President's executive order of August 2001, only about 22 lines are now still available for researchers. And many of these 22 "available" stem cell lines are contaminated with "mouse feeder" cells, making their therapeutic use for humans uncertain.

Embryonic stem cells are uniquely promising for certain treatments – unmatched by adult stem cells.

- As former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, who first opposed the DeGette-Castle bill and now supports it, has pointed out, *"I strongly believe...that embryonic stem cells uniquely hold specific promise for some therapies and potential cures that adult stem cells cannot provide."*
- As the American Association for the Advancement of Science has argued, we owe it to those with serious illnesses to vigorously pursue both adult stem cell and embryonic stem cell research – which both can provide important and different benefits to millions of patients.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA

100 Hours: Requiring HHS to Negotiate For Lower Drug Prices For Those Enrolled in Medicare Rx Drug Plans

In the first 100 legislative hours of the 110th Congress, one of the bills that the House will consider is a bill to cut the cost of health care and improve access to medicines by requiring HHS to negotiate with drug companies for lower drug prices for Medicare beneficiaries. The current Medicare Rx Drug law prohibits HHS from conducting such cost-reducing negotiations.

This bill is likely to result in real savings for 22 million Americans enrolled in Medicare drug plans.

- This bill would repeal the part of the current law that prohibits the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) from negotiating with drug companies for lower prices for those enrolled in Medicare drug plans. The bill would instead require the Secretary to conduct such cost-saving negotiations. In conducting these negotiations, the HHS Secretary may not restrict access to certain medicines in Medicare, for example by requiring a particular formulary (i.e., a list of covered drugs) to be used by Medicare drug plans.
- The bill would also require the HHS Secretary to submit to the relevant congressional committees a report on the negotiations conducted by the Secretary, not later than June 1, 2007, and every six months thereafter.

Under the bill, the HHS Secretary has discretion on how to best implement the negotiating authority and achieve the greatest price discounts.

- The states, Fortune 500 companies, and large pharmacy chains all use their bargaining clout to obtain lower drug prices for the patients they represent. HHS should have the same ability for Medicare beneficiaries.
- This bill provides the HHS Secretary complete discretion in how to implement his negotiating authority. The Secretary's options are many and HHS has a wealth of expertise, which it successfully used in 2001 to obtain lower prices for Cipro, the prescription drug used in response to the anthrax attacks.

Giving HHS drug price negotiating authority for Medicare has strong bipartisan support.

- Giving HHS negotiating authority is supported by 92 percent of Americans. [Newsweek poll, 11/06] It is also supported by many organizations, including the AARP, Consumers Union, and the AFL-CIO.

The current Medicare Rx drug law has failed to slow the rapid growth in drug prices; the prices charged by Medicare drug plans are rising at more than twice the rate of overall inflation.

- A Families USA study shows that, over a 6-month period, the median drug price increase among Medicare drug plans for the top 20 drugs prescribed for seniors was 3.7 percent – which translates into a 7.4 percent increase over a year, more than twice the rate of overall inflation. As the study concludes, “The Medicare drug plans are not containing drug price inflation.”

The Medicare Rx drug program has resulted in a windfall for big drug companies – with drug companies now reporting record profits and seniors paying higher drug prices.

- “For big drug companies, the new Medicare prescription drug benefit is proving to be a financial windfall larger than even the most optimistic Wall Street analysts had predicted.... Wall Street analysts say they have little doubt that the benefit program...has helped several big drug makers report record profits.” (NYT, 11/6/06)
- In October, Pfizer, the world's biggest drug company, reported that its third-quarter earnings had more than doubled from a year earlier. Similarly, Eli Lilly, Novartis and Wyeth also reported significantly higher profits.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA

100 Hours: Cutting Interest Rates on Student Loans

In the first 100 legislative hours of the 110th Congress, one of the bills that the House will consider is a bill that would take the first step in making college more affordable and accessible by cutting the interest rates in half on certain subsidized student loans over the next five years.

This bill, by cutting the interest rate for undergraduate students with subsidized student loans in half over the next five years, will help about 5.5 million students.

- This bill is designed to make college more affordable and accessible by cutting the interest rate on subsidized student loans for undergraduates in half over the next five years – cutting the interest rate from the current 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent. This proposal is targeted on assisting the low- and middle-income students and their families with the most financial need – those who receive subsidized student loans.
- This bill will be fully paid for – meeting all pay-as-you-go requirements.

Cutting the interest rates on student loans has strong bipartisan support.

- Cutting student loan interest rates is supported by 88 percent of the American public – with a majority of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats all in support. [Newsweek poll, 11/06]

Making college more affordable is particularly important at a time when the costs of attending college continue to skyrocket.

- The costs of attending college continue to skyrocket – putting college out-of-reach for more and more students. Tuition and fees at public universities have increased by 41 percent after inflation since the 2000-2001 school year and tuition and fees at private universities have jumped by 17 percent after inflation.
- In addition to tuition and fees rising, interest rates on student loans have risen. Over the last five years, the interest rates on student loans have jumped by almost 2 percentage points – further increasing the cost of college. More and more students are staggering under the load of student debt – with the typical student borrower now graduating from college with \$17,500 in debt.

We need to make college more affordable at a time when financial barriers are preventing millions of young Americans from attending college.

- According to studies from the Department of Education, financial barriers will prevent 4.4 million high school graduates from attending a four-year public college over the next decade, and prevent another two million high school graduates from attending any college at all.

Making college more affordable will help make our economy more competitive.

- More than ever, the health of our economy rests on having a highly-skilled and well-educated workforce. College access is the key to our remaining strong in the face of an increasingly competitive global economy.
- Without changes, by the year 2020, the United States is projected to face a shortage of up to 12 million college-educated workers, directly threatening America's economic strength.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA

100 Hours: Repeal Big Oil Subsidies/Invest in Renewable Fuels

During the first 100 legislative hours of the 110th Congress, one of the bills that the House will consider is a bill to follow through on our commitment to increase investment in renewable energy and begin the path to energy independence. We will start by repealing billions in subsidies given to big oil, at a time of record profits to fund clean, renewable energy and energy efficiency. Specifically, the measure would ensure that oil companies that were awarded the 1998 and 1999 leases for drilling pay their fair share in royalties. The measure would also close loopholes and end giveaways in the tax code for Big Oil. Finally, the bill would create a Strategic Renewable Energy Reserve to invest in clean, renewable energy resources; promoting new emerging technologies, increasing the development and deployment of renewable sources, developing greater energy efficiency and improving energy conservation.

Over the last several years, profits and subsidies for Big Oil have climbed, as has our dependence on foreign oil.

- In 2006, the big five oil companies made \$97 billion – nearly five times their profits in 2002. Gas prices at the pump also topped \$3 per gallon.
- At a time of record profits, Big Oil has received new and additional subsidies over the last six years.
- The U.S. now has a record dependence on foreign oil, which has climbed to 65 percent.
- The U.S. is sending about \$800 million per day to the Middle East and other oil producing countries.

Reducing our dependence on foreign oil is critical to bolstering our national security and creating good-paying new jobs.

- Accelerating the implementation of existing clean, energy-efficient technologies and investing in research and development for solar, wind, biomass, geothermal, fuel cells, and alternative fueled vehicles will put America's innovators, engineers and talented workforce to work.
- American farms abound with crops that can be used to fuel our cars and trucks – from corn to soybeans to switchgrass. In 2005, the ethanol industry supported the creation of more than 150,000 jobs in all sectors of the U.S. economy, boosting U.S. household income by \$5.7 billion. [Report for the Renewable Fuels Association]
- The President's budget funds renewable energy and energy efficiency at below the 2001 level, in real terms, and provides nearly 50 percent less for research on renewable energy than was promised in the energy law.

There is broad bipartisan support for ending the addiction to oil by investing in clean renewable fuels.

- 52% of the American public said the U.S. government should invest in alternative energy sources to reduce dependence on foreign oil. [LAT/Bloomberg poll, 8/3/06]
- President Bush promised to end our addiction to oil by investing in clean renewable fuels, including cellulosic ethanol, and cutting edge technology in his 2006 State of the Union Address.
- President Bush said: "Record oil prices and large cash flows also mean that Congress has got to understand that these energy companies don't need unnecessary tax breaks. Taxpayers don't need to be paying for certain of these expenses on behalf of the energy companies." [CNN, 4/25/06]