

July 26, 1991

Dear Colleague:

We are organizing a meeting of Members interested in developing a progressive agenda for the Congress.

As Members of Congress, we are deeply concerned at the degree to which the citizens of our country are becoming angered and alienated from the American political process. Poll after poll indicates that the ordinary people of this country no longer believe that the US Congress represents their interests or is fighting for their rights. In the 1990 Congressional elections, only 35 % of eligible voters bothered to cast a ballot. We have by far the lowest voter turnout of any industrialized democracy in the world.

It seems to us that a key reason that the American people are giving up on the political process is that the Congress appears to be unable to confront the major problems facing our nation - problems which are especially painful for the working people and the middle class of this nation -- the people who constitute the vast majority of our population. We're seeking to meet these with real alternatives:

-- THE BUDGET: We cannot be hamstrung with artificial barriers that preclude transfer of needed funds from defense to domestic areas. We must seek a human needs budget and a new budget agreement.

-- TAX REFORM: During the last 10 years, the wealthiest 1% of our population has experienced an 86% increase in their real income, while the standard of living of working people and the middle class has declined. Meanwhile, the rich are now paying less in taxes than they paid 10 years ago, while working people and the middle class are paying more. We need to stand with the vast majority of our constituents and pass, as soon as possible, a tax reform program which guarantees fairness for all Americans.

-- MILITARY SPENDING: The Cold War has finally ended and yet, while 5 million American children go hungry, 2 million of our citizens sleep in the streets and city after city faces major economic and social problems, we continue to spend over \$290 billion dollars a year on defense spending. We must terminate, now, the absurd 1990 budget reconciliation agreement which denies us the ability to utilize cuts in military spending for appropriations for housing, education, job creation, environmental protection, and other desperately needed programs.



- JOBS: We need a jobs bill. Economic conditions now are proving to be just as severe as in the recession of 1981-82, which was the worst since the Great Depression. Unemployment has (officially) gone up to 7% in the past year, and over 5 million workers -- 60% of the unemployed -- are not receiving unemployment benefits. Average weekly wages have fallen off even more sharply than in 1981-82, and now stand at \$355 dollars, versus \$370 in the mid- 1980s; they have been dropping steadily since 1986. Furthermore, job losses have been across-the-board; the service sector, which was relatively unaffected in 1981-82, has been hit just as heavily as manufacturing. Millions of American workers are in deep trouble and we cannot continue to turn our backs on them. We must develop an anti-recession package which includes an extension of unemployment benefits and provides financial help to the states, cities and towns for job creation programs.

-- HEALTH CARE: Over 85 million of Americans have either no health insurance or are only partially insured. The U.S. ranks 22nd in the world in infant mortality and 12th in our life expectancy. Insurance rates continue to zoom upward and we now spend far more per capita for health care than any other nation on earth. How much longer does the congress intend to talk about this crisis? If we are to restore our credibility with the American people, we must move forward now toward a single payer, national health care system for all Americans. This can be done without spending one penny more for health care than we presently spend.

-- THE S&L FIASCO: As a result of the "deregulation" efforts of the Reagan/Bush administration, we are now experiencing the most far reaching financial fiasco in the history of the nation. The people of our country are outraged -- and with good reason. With 35% of the failed S&Ls involved in dishonest and illegal activity, the average taxpayers of this country are being asked to pay out between 500 billion and one trillion dollars in increased taxes. At the very least, this payback must be based on a progressive, pay as you go basis. We must make certain that the working people of this country, who bear no responsibility for the cause of this disaster, are not asked to pick up the major share of the bailout.

We have touched upon only a few of the many issues that concern us and, we expect, many of you. The major point is, however, that unless the Congress begins to stand up and fight for the rights of the average American we have no right or claim to ask for his/her political support. Rather, we will continue to be regarded as irrelevant to the needs and problems of the working people of this country, as fewer and fewer of them participate in the political process.

Frankly, we must also be honest and recognize that we bear a significant part of the responsibility for a situation in which the President, who has an absolutely dismal record for addressing the pressing problems of this country, remains "popular." We in Congress have been extremely ineffective in providing an alternative vision to a President who has no position on the health care crisis; favors more tax breaks for the rich; favors higher spending for the military while ignoring our pressing domestic needs; denies the pain caused to millions by the current recession except to tell us, month after month, that the recession is "bottoming out;" and who strongly supports dumping the S&L bailout, off budget, into the already record breaking deficit.

We invite you to join us to discuss these and other issues and the actions we can take to deal with them. If you are interested in working with us to develop a progressive agenda for Congress and restore the faith of American people in their government, we invite you to join with us for a light lunch on Thursday, August 1st at 12 noon, in 2105 Rayburn. Please note, this meeting is for Members only.

We look forward to seeing you.

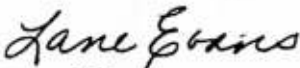
Sincerely,



Peter DeFazio

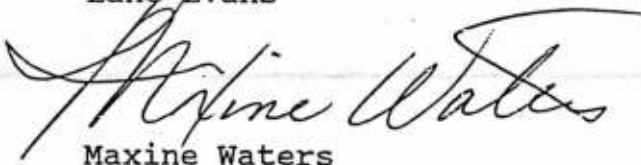


Ron Dellums



Lane Evans

Bernie Sanders



Maxine Waters

