

Democrats ease into issues

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Caucus and the members of the committee — both Democratic and Republican — in developing an agenda and oversight plan that serves the interest of the American people...One of my highest priorities will be election reform."

The Judiciary Committee has oversight of the courts, crime, portions of homeland security, and constitutional issues, which includes voting. The committee's hallmark legislation in the 109th Congress was the successful renewal of the Voting Rights Act with bi-partisan support.

Members of Conyers' staff says the normally outspoken congressman is withholding public comment on other specific plans under his leadership until after Dec. 4, the day committee assignments will be made official.

But Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), slated to become chair of the Judiciary's Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity, speaks freely about her hopes for the future.

She agrees that election reform must be a priority, particularly establishing a standard for voting machines so that they are required to have a paper trail and eliminating state-only voter identification requirements. But she lists a string of other issues that she will be pushing, including overturning of some legislation pushed through by the Bush Administration in its so-called "war on terror."

"He has undermined the privacy of Americans with Patriot Act One and Patriot Act Two," says Waters, founder and chair of the 70-member "Out of Iraq" House caucus. She also wants to revisit bankruptcy reform. People filing Chapter Seven bankruptcy used to be able to get off virtually free of legal obligations to pay debts, allowing to get off to a fresh start. However, Bush pushed through legislation that required bankruptcy filers to enter a forced repayment plan and gave lenders and businesses new legal means to recover debts.

"We have to see about overturning some of that stuff and making sure that they fall under the constitution's guarantee for privacy. We ought to

take that bankruptcy bill back up. It was a bad bill," Waters says.

Waters also wants to establish legislation that will curtail the spread of predatory lending through payday lenders. But she concedes some legislation will be difficult to pass or overturn.

"We can't go in thinking it's going to be a cake walk. Some of it will get done," says Waters. "But we're going to have problems. We've got diversity right in our own caucus."

Waters was referring to the Blue Dog Democrats, 37 moderate to conservative members who often vote with Republicans.

Rep. Charlie Rangel, who will become chair of the powerful Ways and Means Committee, which deals with a wide range of financial issues such as the minimum wage, taxes, social security affordable health care and housing, says liberal Democrats may need to curtail their message in order to build broader support.

Rangel ticks off a list of issues for which the Democratic majority should fight.

"I don't see that there's an inconsistency with Democrats and the issues that African-Americans face," he says. "So, how do you compromise in ending a war that so many of your people are being harmed and invited to join because of economic reasons? How many kids are out of school and on the streets without training, without an education? How many are in the criminal justice system because they didn't have alternatives? How many public schools are failing? What is the need for affordable housing? Can we not improve to make certain that no one falls between the cracks of having access to health insurance? Those are principles that the party believes in and that minorities have to believe in. So, I don't see the possibility of compromising those principles. We just can't do it."

Conyers, Rangel and two other CBC members are slated to rise to chairmanships. Waters and 14 others to subcommittee chairs. Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.), is slated to rise to Homeland Security chair and Alcee Hastings (D-

Fla.) is to head Intelligence.

James Clyburn (D-S.C.) will go from chairmanship of the Democratic Caucus to House Majority Whip, the person largely responsible for unifying the party, galvanizing and managing the votes, and attempting to explain legislation in a way that it is palatable to opponents.

Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Mel Watt (D-N.C.), also a member of Judiciary, says his first priority will be raising the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$7.25.

"I think if you look at that platform, I think it's an African-American platform, it's a White-American platform, that is any hyphenated-American that you can think of. If you're American, that's your platform," says Clyburn. "Blue Dogs — I can't imagine the Blue dogs being against raising minimum wage, I can't imagine the Blue Dogs being against having health care more accessible. Are you telling me that the Blue Dogs are against making education more affordable? I don't think so. It's a Blue Dog message. It's a yellow dog message. It's a Hispanic Caucus message. It's a Congressional

Black Caucus message. I think that this is a message that every one of our caucuses can buy into."

With the U.S. Senate divided with a 51-49 Democratic majority, even if Democratic legislation gets through, President Bush could veto a bill that could only be overridden with two-thirds [60-members] majority.

"The real question is does the president want to gridlock us, veto us and lame duck himself?" asks Rangel. "Just as he stayed the course on the war and lost, is he willing to take a risk and staying the course on budget and economic domestic issues I hope he doesn't."

The real test will be whether Democrats will work effectively with Republicans.

"I really know that being in the majority, you have a great advantage in getting your ideas to the floor, but many, many Republicans and many on the (Ways and Means) committee are excited that they too will have an opportunity to be involved in legislations," Rangel says. "And I hope the president decides that gridlock is not the answer for Republicans or Democrats."



Clyburn



Waters



Thompson



Watt



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Breaking ground on M.L. King Memorial

By James Wright

AFRO-AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS

WASHINGTON — Many of the nation's distinguished leaders, including the sitting president of the United States and his predecessor, joined 5,000 people in Washington, D.C., on a cold afternoon to participate in the groundbreaking of the long-awaited Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. memorial on Nov. 13.

When the memorial is completed in either late 2008 or 2009, it will be the first memorial on the National Mall to honor an African American.

"Dr. King showed us that a life of conscience and purpose can lift up many souls," President Bush said of King's impact on America. "And on this ground, a monument will rise that preserves his legacy for ages. Honoring Dr. King's legacy requires more than building a monument; it requires the ongoing commitment of every American."

"We will continue to work for the day when the dignity and humanity of every person is respected, and the American promise is denied no one."

The memorial was the brainchild of members of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, of which King was a member, and it has won the support of both Democrats and Republicans.

President Clinton signed the bill authorizing the fraternity the right to raise money for the memorial in 1998. The fraternity's fundraising has reached about \$65 million, with a goal of \$100 million within two years.

Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) noted that his colleagues were instrumental in the process of the memorial becoming a reality.

"It was Sens. John Warner and Paul Sarbanes who sponsored the bill in the Senate," he said. "It was Thad Cochran and Robert Byrd that got the bill funded."

"This is the first memorial that honors a man who was not a president and not a hero of a foreign war."

Obama noted that in King's later years, he was reviled by the

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