

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH JOHN DINGELL

SUBJECT: REP. JOHN DINGELL, THE MICHIGAN DEMOCRAT WHO HOLDS THE RECORD AS THE LONGEST-SERVING U.S. HOUSE MEMBER EVER, WILL GIVE A SPEECH ON "WHEN CONGRESS WORKED"

MODERATOR: MYRON BELKIND, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**MYRON BELKIND:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome. My name is Myron Belkind. I'm an adjunct professor at the George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs, former international bureau chief for the Associated Press, and the 107<sup>th</sup> President of the National Press Club. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession's future through our programming with events such as this, while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the Press Club, please visit our website at [press.org](http://press.org).

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists who are Club members. And so if you hear applause in our audience, I'd note that members of the general public are attending, and so it's not necessarily lack of journalistic objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. You can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLunch. After our guest's speech concludes, we'll have a question and answer period. I will ask as many questions as time permits. Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd like each of you to stand briefly as your name is announced.

From your right, Aaron Kessler, automotive writer, *The New York Times*. Marisa Schultz, Washington correspondent for the *Detroit News*. Christina Marcos, staff reporter for *The Hill*. John[?] Barrow, former head of the House of Representatives Office of Legislative Council and guest of the speaker. Kevin Merida, managing editor, *Washington Post*. Richard Franklin[?], former House Energy and Commerce Committee counsel who handled environmental matters and guest of our speaker.

And skipping over our speaker for a moment, Jerry Zremski, the Washington Bureau Chief of the *Buffalo News*, Chairman of the NPC Speakers Committee, and a past NPC President. Angela Greiling-Keane, a Bloomberg News White House correspondent, the 2013 National Press Club President, and a member of the Speakers Committee who organized today's luncheon. Angela, thank you very much. Consuela Washington, retired House Energy and Commerce Committee counsel who handled SEC and financial matters and a guest of the speaker. David Shepherdson, Washington correspondent. Laura Litvan, Congressional Reporter for *Bloomberg News*. And Warren Rojas, CQ Roll Call Heard on the Hill columnist.

[Applause]

When our guest today took his seat representing Michigan in the U.S. House, it was the same year the first McDonalds opened and Coca-Cola was first sold in cans, in addition to bottles. Gas cost 23 cents a gallon. And you could buy a car from the Motor City for only \$1,900 dollars.

John Dingell took office in 1955 during President Eisenhower's administration. He served alongside 11 presidents and is not only the longest service member of the House now, he's the longest serving member ever. He announced in February that he'll retire at the end of his 29<sup>th</sup> full term. Dingell, when he was only 29, succeeded his father in the Congressional District.

His district is the heart of the Big Three Auto Country. He is hoping that the Dingell dynasty continues, with his wife Debbie, an auto industry heir and former GM lobbyist being elected in November to succeed him. Dingell spent a decade and a half as the Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and then was its ranking Democrat until Henry Waxman ousted him in 2008.

Dingell is known for his quick temper and questions to witnesses that *People Magazine* called "intimidating." He earned the nickname "The Truck" for his six foot-three stature and for his style wielding the Chairman's gavel. The Committee has wide-ranging jurisdiction. So he's authored laws on clean air, endangered species, and health insurance, including shepherding through the Affordable Care Act.

In spite of passing the Endangered Species Act and other environmental legislation, Dingell has a reputation as an ally of the auto industry and its main union that has led him to fight attempts to strengthen environmental regulations for cars. He's watched Congress since he was a child at his father's knee and serving as a House page

in the 1940s.

We invited him here to the Press Club to give a farewell speech. But Mr. Dingell said he's not done working or governing yet. So he's here today to speak to us about "When Congress Worked." Please help me give a warm National Press Club welcome to Congressman John Dingell for his seventh appearance at a National Press Club luncheon since March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

[Applause]

**JOHN DINGELL:** Well President Myron Belkind, thank you for your very gracious introduction. And thank you all, my dear friends, for your kindness in such a gracious and gentle welcome. I hope that when this is finished, that you will feel the same way. [laughter] I want to thank the Press Club for inviting me and for allowing me to bring so many of my friends here today. I am particularly pleased that my colleague Jim Morand is here today. [applause] Stand up, Jim. We are very proud of you. [applause] It has been a particular honor and privilege for me to serve with you. And he has been a role model for any and all.

I also want to welcome and to recognize so many of my dear friends and former members of my staff who are here today. And I ask that all of you who ever worked on behalf of the people in Southeast Michigan or with me on the Energy and Commerce Committee, will you please stand and be recognized? [Applause]

There is a strange thing about my association with my staff. I have picked not only the most extraordinarily able, but also some of the finest and most loyal people who ever drew a breath. I am proud of you all. And I am grateful that you would be here today, and grateful, indeed, that you would be my friends.

It is true, I've served in the House for nearly 60 years. And I've seen many things, good and bad, and much change. I've had the privilege of watching Washington change from a little town in the woods to an institution then into a major city of international proportions. And I have had the privilege of serving with-- not under and not for-- 11 presidents, from Eisenhower to Obama. And I would observe that Sam Rayburn[?] used to get very much touched off when people would ask how many Presidents he had served under.

I've had the privilege of casting some 25,000 votes. I have served alongside more than 2,400 colleagues. And I have sat in the Chamber of the House of Representatives to witness some 51 State of the Union speeches from all of the 11 Presidents with whom I've served. In my service, I have been able to author and to pass landmark legislation that helped to protect the environment, ensure Civil Rights for all, and to help our middle class to grow and prosper. And I'm proud of what I have been able to do.

I was thinking, as I made my mind up whether I was going to run, as to whether I should stay and serve. And when the lovely Deborah and I sit to talk about these things,

we looked to see. And we have completed those things which my dad set out to do when he was here. And we've also been able to move forward to complete all of the goals which I had when I started out here.

I want to make it clear, this is not to brag about my accomplishments. It's simply to show that there was a time when Congress could and did work, and when Congress had passed major legislation and earned bipartisan support to move the nation forward. Where its business was done with hard fighting, but also with goodwill and mutual respect.

I want to make it clear I did not do these things by myself. No man and no woman could. We did them with colleagues who were more interested in seeing this nation grow than to seeing it falter. People who were willing and able to put partisan labels on the shelf and instead work for greater and common good, were the hallmark of those Congresses.

In those days that was how it was. In these days, I often remind my colleagues of the very definition of the word "Congress." It means "A coming together." It means "A body which has come together." And it is a part of the historic understandings that this country had when we had a Congress which worked.

Sadly, however, it has not been doing much coming together lately. And I imagine that you have observed this also. This is not a Congress that is working. But it could be. And, frankly, it should be. Last year, we saw some 57 bills signed into law by the President. That's 57 total. We created as many laws as there are varieties of Heinz's main product. [laughter] Perhaps that is the way we should name that Congress. [laughter]

But do not get me wrong. Getting things done does take time. I remember years ago, I brought up a set of bipartisan clean air amendments. It passed the House with a vote of 401 to 21. Just 13 hours of work took the House to complete this effort. Folks came up to me afterwards and said, "Dingell, how in the name of commonsense did you manage to pass that bill in just 13 hours?" I looked at them, and I said, "It took me 13 hours to get a bill that both sides agreed to on the floor. But it took me 13 years to do the work that made that possible." That tells you how hard legislation is to do. And my former staff here, most of you newsmen and women, and my good friend Jim Morand, can testify to the difficulty of the process of compromise, of getting legislation with goodwill.

One of the interesting things about the Congress is the change. It's become, in too many instances, a money chase. It has become, in too many instances, an instance where it is the goal of members to have the name of a committee on their letterhead, which draws and attracts attention and support politically. It is unfortunate, indeed, that this is so, because the Congress is an important national trust. It is something where we have a duty to the people to do what is necessary in the broad public interest. And regrettably, it is the case that we do not see that occurring on many instances in the Congress.

The committees are too large and should be shrunk. The subcommittees are too large. I serve on one committee, or served on one committee, where I found that the number of members in the subcommittees exceeded the number of members on the full committee when I went on there. And it could go on and on as to how it has gotten so big as to be incapable of carrying out its responsibilities and its functions.

Other forces are making things go badly. The Supreme Court decision in the Citizens United case has allowed unlimited anonymous or dark money to flow into our political system. We have a court that has taken the most literal approach to so many of these important decisions that the consequences are beginning to have a very serious effect on not only democracy, but the trust of people in their government.

And I regret to note that there are still more God-awful cases rattling around over there at the Supreme Court that are almost certain to do more harm. Any layman reading the Citizens United decision will assume that surely, this was in no way written by a group of intelligent individuals. [laughter] [applause] Or people even remotely aware of what's going on in our current political structure.

The decision flies in the face of so much of what our representative government was founded upon. Allowing people and corporate interest groups and others to spend an unlimited amount of unidentified money has enabled certain individuals to swing any and all elections, whether they are congressional, federal, local, state, or whether they're votes about the creation of some kind of local entity or resolution of local question.

And that's why we've seen the rise in the super pacs. And people are now dipping their hot hands into every kind of election. And state ballot initiatives. And anything under the sun that will help them to get what it is they want. Unfortunately and rarely are these people having goals which are in line with those of the general public. History will show us that there is a very selfish game that's going on. And that our government has largely been put up for sale.

We've also had many in Congress that wish to do nothing more than shrink the size and the scope of the Federal Government. And this, without taking into account the families, the veterans, active duty military, the countless others who rely on this government and on our nation. And these people forget that there are even more than 300 million Americans, and that those 300 million Americans and more are living in one of the most dangerous times in American history.

Many of my Republican colleagues now find that they must sign a Grover Norquist pledge when they run for Congress, saying that they will carry out his goals to shrink government down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub. These are his words, these are not my words.

And so, with this Norquist pledge and similar litmus tests, these quandaries are only made worse by redistricting, where a similar event has occurred before, to enable

legislatures to be owned by these same special interests. We see state legislators draw and state legislatures draw our congressional lines with little interest in fair representation, with small concern about protecting regional boundaries, or about any blink of consideration for any part of the Voting Rights Act, which is, again, under attack.

They operate simply in the interest and the making of majorities for one political party. And for achieving one particular set of views. As redistricting creates more and more safe seats, we see members focused only on winning primaries, not about the public interest, and not about real discussion of the concerns that members have or that citizens have. The pledges are signed. And they attempt to become the ideological image of what their primary electorate sees, their political party is, or should be, with a work product that equals their goals and facilitates their wishes.

Now there is also no incentive to stick one's neck out and to compromise. And it should be noted that many on both sides can only run further on the fiercely narrow and partisan fringes. A simple analysis will tell us that this does not help our democracy. I have said before that I would be scared to bring up the Ten Commandments for a vote in the Congress because I'm not sure they would pass. [laughter] And I'm almost certain that they would have a vast number of amendments laid upon them. [laughter]

Unfortunately, I still am compelled to stand on the validity of that concern. We also now know that we have a Congress that is decidedly begun running policies and legislative priorities out of the Speaker's office. The Congress was built over a long period of time to achieve particular goals by seeing to it that every member, and that everybody in the chamber, and that everybody outside the chamber represented by people in the chamber would have a right to be heard and would have the right to be able to see to it that the Congress functioned in a way that heard and attended to the fears and the hopes and the dreams and the concerns of every American.

And so beginning back with Gingrich and DeLay, the-- That's a funny word isn't it, DeLay? Who came out with the idea that they would facilitate it by allowing one man or one entity to run the Congress of the United States. And so now, we have seen a clear effort by both Republicans and by their Democratic successors, and now the Republicans again, to ultimately usurp the committee process.

When I started, there were only a handful of members on each committee and three to nine members on each subcommittee, three to nine. And the interesting thing was, some of the most complex and difficult questions would be dealt with in the committee, where members would come together. They would first hear the testimonies. Then they'd run everybody out the room, remove their coats, and one of my colleagues used to say, "fight like hell" for however long it took.

The result was the result that we had committees that knew and understood legislation. They could explain it and defend it. And they had the trust of their colleagues. Today there are committees with nearly 100 members on them. If each member gets five minutes, multiply that out and see how much opportunity there is for real and intelligent

discussion of the important issues of the day. And at any time there is an important meeting, each member then gets only minutes, and maybe seconds, to address their interests or ask their questions. I repeat. What do you think the chances are for intelligent debate of important national questions and important national concerns?

Now one of the other things, we see new members who come in and they head right to the floor to make some of those great big wonderful speeches before they even know where the restrooms are. [laughter] They land in Washington on a Monday, or maybe a Tuesday, and their first question is, what time is the first plane on which they can return home? Again, how is this going to facilitate a significant national debate or intelligent discussion of the legislative business?

We hear from the members, "I am against this, and I am against that." Do we ever hear much about what they're for? But, more importantly, the question is, what are they willing to make a compromise on? Because compromise is an honorable word. And I am going to try to continue pushing that view during my remaining time in the Congress. And so, we ought to ask these new members, "What are you for? What are you going to compromise on? And what are you going to try to achieve to see to it that we come up with a program in government that gives us a resolution of the difficult controversies and difficult national questions of the day?"

Now I am sad to leave the Congress. I love the Congress. And I am delighted that the lovely Deborah, my wife, is running for the Congress, because I think she's smarter and decent and certainly much prettier than I am. [laughter] I will observe that my sadness is ameliorated by the poisonous atmosphere that we see in American politics today. So, while I'm troubled by the many hurdles this Congress faces in refocusing its efforts on the important matters at hand, I'm comforted to know that they can only improve.

So when the dictionary defines the word Congress as "a coming together," it also defines the very way we can emerge from this current mess. First and foremost, it will take a Congress willing to put aside petty differences and to live up to the definition of the word. It's compromise is not a dirty word. It is not an evil thing. Conciliation is not a bad idea. Cooperation is not an unspeakable act. The sooner that the Congress realizes this, and that American citizens realize this, and that they begin impressing this view on our candidates, the better the situation is going to get.

So then, the Congress could begin to focus its work more on the public interest. But it also is going to take an American people who are willing to, and interested in, seeing to it that the Congress works. It also is willing to begin to require a control on expenditures of money. First race I ran, I spent \$19,000. I thought, "Good God, what an awful number." [laughter] I later had the fight of what, up to that time, was my life, \$35,000. More recently, I had a serious fight with an incumbent colleague, and I had to spend, in that race, \$3 million. She spent \$6.

So there are some needed changes where people understand that their Congress is not something that should be traded or should not be traded on the commodity exchanges. But Congress is something which belongs to us all. And it's something which has been achieved only at the great bloodshed, great loss of life, great suffering, huge hard work, and the wisdom of men and women far smarter than any that we see running around now.

And interestingly enough, those men and women were not people who had prodigious education. They were rather people who understood, by hard study, of the wisdom of persons earlier in the history of this world. So what we need to do is to have the American people dictate that which must be done.

I am proud that I have been able to be a part of the body and truly a child of the institution. I intend to keep this nation and all my colleagues in my thoughts and prayers. And I have to say, more often in my prayers than in my thoughts. [laughter] In any event, thank you for what you do. Thank you for the great power which you wield with your pen and your typewriter and your ability to communicate thoughts, including the wonderful computers. And thank you for your leadership in what you are doing, because we desperately need good thinking people, and people who are determined to see to it that this oldest institution of its kind in the world continues to be the greatest gift of all.

You know, when I go to bed at night, and when I get up in the morning, I thank the Good Lord for the gift which He has given to me, making me a citizen of the United States some 87, or shortly 88 years. And the opportunity to be an American having more real good things and more money, but more freedom, independence and opportunity than any person in the world before. So thank you. And God bless us all. But, more importantly, God bless the United States of America. Thank you. [applause]

**MYRON BELKIND:** Thank you again, Congressman Dingell, for being with us today, for delivering your speech, and for following the tradition of a question and answer session. And the first question is, what has changed in Congress the most since you first visited Capitol Hill while your father was a member of the House from 1933 to 1955?

**JON DINGELL:** Well obviously, the "reforms," which have opened the place out. And then, point of fact, which has denied us the ability to really talk about the concerns which we have. Second of all, the size of the committee. Third of all, the unworkability. Fourth of all, the lack of capacity of the members to carry out their function because of the size of the committees, the size of the subcommittees, and the harsh fact that nobody trusts the committee.

We used to have an entity which was called the Tuesday through Thursday club. And this was the crowd which showed up on Tuesday and dropped the hell out of Washington on Thursday. It's not the way that government should run. Government should be a fulltime business where we seek to serve the nation and see to it that its business is well conducted. This is not-- Washington and the Congress is not a place where everybody comes to have a good time. This is a place where the most important of



the nation's business is supposed to be addressed.

There are other things that I could mention to you which I'm sure you all would recognize, in which any or all of you could come forward with your own wise and necessary additions to my comments.

**MYRON BELKIND:** Do you ever see Congress returning to a more bipartisan ways of days gone by? What would make that happen?

**JON DINGELL:** Well, two things. One, some kind of a national event which forced the members and the leadership to do that. Roosevelt, a war, something like that. But beyond that, there are other things that could do that. One would be some kind of a national calamity, or perhaps something else which would be almost unique. And that would be a wiping out of almost the entire membership by seeing to it that the voters threw us all the hell out of Washington and installed their own people in our place. There are other things, but that would be a fair summary of some of the things that might be helpful.

**MYRON BELKIND:** Do Democrats deserve any of the blame for the partisan divide in Congress?

**JON DINGELL:** Of course. [laughter] Everybody deserves it. Democrats deserve it, Republicans deserve it. But you know, if you look around, you will find that the news media, the public at large, the citizenry in general, all have their faults in this and their reason for feeling guilty about this. Look and see what the listenership of the President's State of the Union message is on TV. And you will observe one thing, that it is usually timed to fall after and instead of Super Bowl or something like that. I'm not going to tell you that Super Bowl is not important and not good to watch or listen to or not exciting. But I am going to tell you that, from the standpoint of the nation's wellbeing, it's not important.

And so what we have to do is to get the American people to say, "You know, we want you to do something." And when you have a town meeting, you have to get up and say, "Okay, Dingell, what are you going to do about compromising this matter into something where citizenry can accept it?" One of the strengths I had as committee chairman was that I always would see to it that I got the left and the right to compromise together on legislation. The end result was, we passed enormously difficult legislation after oft times huge fights. But we passed it. And we passed it with very large votes. That's still doable. But again, it requires leadership. And again, it requires that people be elected to lead in the Congress.

**MYRON BELKIND:** You had some less than kind things to say about the Supreme Court. [laughter]

**JON DINGELL:** I thought they were quite kind as a matter of fact. [laughter] As a matter of fact, I thought they were not only deserved, but right. But truthfully, if they had listened, perhaps would even have been helpful. [laughter]

**MYRON BELKIND:** And following on, what do you think motivated their Citizens United decision?

**JON DINGELL:** Money. And the fact that almost the entire court was selected on the basis of ideology and not legal training or anything. I probably shouldn't say anymore. [laughter] So far, I have been overly kind to the Supreme Court, and I think that probably staying in that particular mode and vein is where I will remain in the day.

**MYRON BELKIND:** What has been the lowest point in your congressional career?

**JON DINGELL:** Oh boy. I saw my world come down around my ears when I had to get a divorce, and get the custody of the kids, and raise four kids alone. Thank God I was able to do it with the help of a sister who was going to find the Lord waiting for her in Heaven. And I was able to do that in a way which made my kids solid, successful citizens. It was tough.

And at that time, we were having a huge battle over energy and energy prices, something that we regularly do on the Hill. But something which, where the administration was putting out a publication entitled "Shove It To Dingell." And so I was in the midst of this dog fight about whether they were going to shove it to Dingell, or whether or not I was going to survive. And, by a narrow margin, I did. And some of the people in this room here were there to help me through those very, very difficult days.

**MYRON BELKIND:** And carrying on, what's been the biggest highlight of your time in Congress?

**JON DINGELL:** You know, I could answer this this way. Every day is a blessing. And when I get up in the morning, I always look down and see there's a little green underfoot, and I say, "Thank you, Lord." [laughter] But more importantly, the highlights of this thing, what I remember, was ObamaCare, or the wonderful bill that we got through that took care of healthcare reform. It was something my dad wanted. It was something we finally did. But a lot of other bills that we did, too, that were important. And in the legislative standpoint, that, I think, was probably the one thing that was most important.

**MYRON BELKIND:** Why does Congress need members like you, who stay for many years, as part of the institution?

**JON DINGELL:** You learn the business. A lot of people think you walk through that door, and all of a sudden you're an expert. You're not. There are a lot of people that never learned where the hell their office is or anything. We have a lot of

people who, frankly, never learn how to get along, or don't know the names of their colleagues, or aren't able to compromise because Congress is essentially a necessary and necessarily compromise. It's getting along with your colleagues. It's knowing what it is they need and what they want, what they've got to have.

Years ago, I got a little guy by the name of Gross from Iowa. Everybody said, "God, you know, that's awful." I said, "Hell no. Gross is a good and decent man. And if I can get a reasonable relationship with him and a reasonable relationship, we will run the committee. And we will run it well." And we ran a subcommittee, but we wrote more conservation legislation there than we had done since. It was a tremendous period.

I got another guy, and today God rest his soul, he's gone, who I still think warmly of him. Another guy was Bud Brown from Ohio. Bud, a lot of people said, "Oh, he's got a terrible acid sense of humor." "Bud?" "Yeah, terrible acid sense of humor." But he was a wonderful, wonderful guy. If you got underneath that, you'd find what a wonderful fellow he was down there. And Brown reported to me one day, he says, "You know, Dingell," he says, "My wife is filing for a divorce. And she is going to name you as a correspondent." [laughter] "We're spending more time together, you and I, than we are," than he was with his wife.

Brown would catch unchartered hell from his right wing crackpots. And I would have a few crackpots of my own. And we had to get along with them and get things done. We contrived to do it. And we did it because we had trust and then friendship. And I solved a bunch of rail strikes because I had trust in friendship and got the Secretaries of Transportation up. And I said, "You don't know me from Adam's [00:44:49] Fox. And I don't know you." But I said, "We got to work together. And our word's got to be good. And we got to trust each other." And we did.

One of these strikes we sold, we solved in 48 hours. And the other we solved in 18. Probably the worst mistake I made as a Chairman, because damned if I didn't find that they took jurisdiction of railroads away from the Commerce Committee, because we had done-- nobody had known we had done anything. But there have been a lot of instances like that. And to know how important that human relationship is between members in the Congress. If you have that, you have almost everything. If you don't, you've got nothing.

**MYRON BELKIND:** One of the criticisms often made of politics in the United States is that it is corrupted by money. During your six decades in the House, you have amassed a net worth between \$2.8 and \$7.6 million dollars, according to an analysis of personal finance disclosures, making you the 71<sup>st</sup> richest member in the chamber. How do you account for that wealth? And did a lifetime in Washington help you get rich, if that is a true portrayal?

**JON DINGELL:** Well first of all, I ain't rich. Second of all, I live very frugally. Third of all, I am very careful about how I spend money, as is Deborah. We have lived in the same house in Virginia for better than 30 years, almost 40 years. We have made

money [00:47:45] houses. And the average American, if he does, uses good sense, can do something like that too.

**MYRON BELKIND:** How have relations between the press, the members of Congress changed over the course of the past 58 years?

**JON DINGELL:** They're about the same. [laughter] It is kind of interesting now. It used to be a guy on the committee, I could always tell when the media was going to be there because he'd show up. [laughter] And that was always the case. Things were pretty important. The business of the House has been a little bit corrupted, not a lot, but a little, because it's interesting to note-- It's interesting to note that that money, or rather that relationship with the media is one which generally scares the members of the House.

It also is a situation where, if you watch the members-- and do this on C-SPAN or something, and watch. He's not talking to his colleagues. He's got his eye on that television there. And if you look, you will find that, instead of an intelligent debate, all of a sudden you've got a guy who is making a big speech to the television, which is quite different than it would be were he to make his speech to somebody with whom he was having a real discussion of important issues.

And just to return to one point. I've done pretty well because I learned something. And that is how one can take and use the compound interest rule to benefit himself. And one of the reasons you know that is that I have to report it. So you can be pretty sure that it's very truthful and it does, very frankly, keep me in the system [00:51:05]

**MYRON BELKIND:** Now onto some questions about the issues. At the start of every Congress, you have always introduced a bill establishing a national healthcare system. We don't have that, but we do have ObamaCare. How is ObamaCare working in your estimation?

**JON DINGELL:** One, it's a little bit like asking how is this child going to do in this Presidential race as that child, boy or girl, does in his or her race for the Presidency. I happen to think very well. This is the biggest single undertaking of this kind ever done by this nation. Social Security was something like maybe 50 million. This is more like 350 million. And it is not done by people who are working with their government. It is done by people who are working with insurance companies. And so all of these things have got to be done by everybody pitching in and cooperating.

We didn't get a nickel's worth of help from the Republicans. They sulked. And so their complaint that they weren't heard. But we'd invite them, and they wouldn't come. So I don't have any questions about the fact that it's doing about as well, given the circumstances, as it could. But going a little further than that, if you look, first of all, almost every American is covered. Second of all, the longstanding complaints of the American citizens about how they were treated have been largely addressed. Citizens are able, now, to know that they're not going to cancel their policy when they go into the operating room on the gurney. They're also going to know that there is not going to be

any preexisting conditions following them. The numbers of recipients' benefits is almost 100 percent.

We had a young fellow in the office who was paying \$360-something in insurance. Guess what. He went on into the market, they said, "You can't have this. It's not going to do the good for you that he wants. We'll give you the same policy for \$160." He said, "Wow." So then, he went into the market, and they looked at him. And they said, "This is costing you too much for your wage. And we're going to cut it." So he winds up paying about \$68 bucks a month, same policy. Haven't heard a word or squawk from him. [laughter]

Although you hear from the Republicans yelling their heads off that it ain't working. And insurance companies, if insurance companies are not satisfied, they're all of a sudden finding that they've got to pay, if they exceed the cap of 80 or 85 percent, depending on the size of the facility, they got to return, send you a check. A lot of people got that. You aren't hearing the Republicans complaining about that. I guess they're busy with other, more important things.

**MYRON BELKIND:** Speaking of Republicans, Republicans point to the IRS scandal, the VA scandal, and Iraq, and say that President Obama is incompetent. But how do you think he compares to other Presidents you have served with?

**JON DINGELL:** Well, he didn't get us into the Iraq war, did he? [laughter] And he wasn't involved in Watergate. And he's done a pretty honest administration. So let's take first the VA. Well, the reasons of VA's problem is that he's got to take care of 100 million vets. And he's got to see to it that he not only takes care of them, but that he sees to it that they get the care that they're supposed to. And that's against the skinflint Congress that had a cut of \$10 million dollars or 10 percent that the Republicans were prepared to give. So I don't have any real problems with that. And a lot of these people are getting-- in the VA are getting their benefits. And a fair number of these guys are waiting because they are not qualified to go in at this particular time. These are non-service connected guys. The service connected are, for the most part, not going-- are not confronted. What was the other one?

**MYRON BELKIND:** Well I think that we have covered everything, as we're nearing the end of our hour.

**JON DINGELL:** I don't want to run out of here with my tail between my legs. I want to address what these no-good Republicans say, because every once in a while, they say the truth. But I'd kind of like to praise them if you could find me an instance. [laughter]

**MYRON BELKIND:** The question was, I thought you had covered the three. The Republicans point to the IRS scandal, the VA scandal, and Iraq.

**JON DINGELL:** Oh the IRS? [simultaneous conversation] Here we're giving gigantic, gigantic amounts of money under the Citizens United to fat cats that are trying to buy the government. So the IRS is looking at them. I say "Hooray." These guys, the guys that are doing this are a crowd that, very frankly, would steal a red hot stove and then go back and get the smoke. [laughter]

**MYRON BELKIND:** Ladies and gentlemen, we are almost out of time. But before asking the last question, we have a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of. First of all, I would like to remind you about our upcoming events and speakers. On July 17<sup>th</sup> Anthony Foxx, Secretary of the Department of Transportation. July 22<sup>nd</sup>, Dr. Thomas Frieden, Director of Centers for Disease Control, will address concerns about the MERS virus and other key health issues. July 31, Goodluck Jonathan, President of Nigeria. August 1, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo will discuss peace, security and stability in the Central African region.

Next I'd like to present Congressman Dingell with the traditional National Press Club mug. I don't know if you already have a set of a half a dozen, but here is another one that we're honored to give to you.

And finally, our traditional last question. Given your reputation as one of the toughest questioners in Congress, what advice do you have for reporters asking members questions as you experienced today? [laughter]

**JON DINGELL:** Know the answer before you ask the question. [laughter]

[applause]

**MYRON BELKIND:** Thank you Congressman Dingell. Thank you all for coming. And I thank, once again, the National Press Club staff including its Journalism Institute and Broadcast Center for organizing today's event. [sounds gavel] We are adjourned.

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