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NEWS

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Judiciary GOP pulls the plug on Conyers 'forums'

By [Albert Eisele](#) and [Jeff Dufour](#)

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COMMENT

If the Financial Services Committee is the best in the House when it comes to bipartisan comity, then the Judiciary Committee may well be the worst.

In December, ranking Democrat John Conyers (Mich.) began holding “forums” — gatherings with all the trappings of official hearings — after Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) refused to hold hearings on topics Conyers requested. The forums have been held in smaller committee rooms, often with C-SPAN coverage and formal witness lists.

In a sign of how far relationships on the committee have soured, majority staff recently announced a new policy to deny any request from a committee Democrat for the use of a committee hearing room.

Majority spokesman Jeff Lungren said the Republicans have given Democrats three opportunities to make clear that the forums are not official committee business. Nevertheless, Lungren said, in at least one case, members were addressing Conyers as “Mr. Chairman.”

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“They were unwilling or unable to make those changes,” Lungren said. “At this point, if they want to hold these forums, they’ll have to find some other place to do it.”

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Sean McLaughlin, deputy chief of staff for Sensenbrenner, recently wrote to a minority staffer in more pointed language.

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“I’m sitting here watching your ‘forum’ on C-SPAN,” McLaughlin wrote. “Just to let you know, it was your last. Don’t bother asking [for a room] again.”

FEATURES

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A committee source said committee Democrats are still planning to hold the forums when they find other available space.

Ford: Iraq could use an NAACP chapter

Capitol
Ambitions
Uncommon
Lives
Restaurant
Review
Book

After spending the Memorial Day weekend in Iraq, Rep. Harold Ford Jr. (D-Tenn.) thinks he may have a strategy to end the war in that country: Send in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Reviews

Ford, who is running for the Senate seat of retiring Majority Leader Bill Frist (R), told an NAACP dinner in Knoxville on Friday night that “Iraq could use an NAACP chapter.”

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Ford explained that the NAACP’s ability to work together for a common goal could be the missing link in bringing the two-year-old conflict to an end, according to the Knoxville News Sentinel.

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“Even with our military sacrificing their lives over there, they cannot solve this problem alone,” he said.

Hill docs readying for Capitol triage

**PREVIOUS
ISSUES**

“I was thinking that we doctors in Congress need to offer our services in the event of a major

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catastrophe, and I was thinking that as I was fleeing the Capitol down D Street,” said Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-Ga.). “We were just no help to anybody.”

While many have criticized the Capitol evacuation May 12 as disorganized or even unnecessary, Gingrey found that the experience validated an idea he had been working on for a while.

Over the past two months, Gingrey and Rep. Vic Snyder (D-Ark.) have held two meetings to discuss the formation of the Congressional Medical and Dental Doctors Caucus. The two will co-chair the nascent organization.

At a meeting Thursday with John Eisold, the attending physician to Congress, the caucus discussed the logistics of an emergency plan that would allow the 13 doctor/dentists in the House and two in the Senate to aid emergency workers.

Gingrey said he hopes to develop protocol, a communication system and various meeting points for the doctors, depending on the nature of the catastrophe. They are also considering reviewing basic skills such as CPR and how to use a defibrillator, as well as how to perform an emergency tracheotomy.

“Some people are further from practice than others, and base skills are easy to refresh,” he said. Gingrey estimates that so far the caucus has about 60 percent participation.

Though the May 12 evacuation gave Gingrey and Snyder the impetus to further organize the caucus and make more specific plans, Gingrey had been giving the concept some thought for a long time.

“Every once and again I think about what would happen if good old Joe is discussing his or her amendment and collapses,” Gingrey said. “Am I going to be up to snuff to give him a fighting chance

at life? I want to be prepared.”

Weldon trades accusations with CIA over book

As of yesterday, Rep. Curt Weldon (R-Pa.) can add “published author” to his résumé. Make that “controversial published author.”

Countdown to Terror: The Top-Secret Information That Could Prevent the Next Terrorist Attack on America ... and How the CIA Has Ignored It, which hit shelves yesterday, takes the CIA to task for refusing to take seriously the tips and leads Weldon has received from “Ali,” an Iranian expatriate living in Paris. He says that Ali has provided him with crucial warnings about future terrorist attacks but that the CIA has not taken these warnings seriously enough.

“I’ve gotten all this information that I’ve given to the intelligence agency,” he said, “but they’re simply not acting on it.”

Weldon began pushing for the CIA to establish a collaborative capability among the 33 classified systems in the late 1990s. But after losing some of his close friends in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, he decided that he needed to do more.

“I basically have had it in my mind for the past three or four years that I could have and should have done more to fight the CIA to put into place a system that would have allowed us to not only understand 9-11 was about to occur, but perhaps even to predict it,” Weldon said.

So, with the help of his former aide Peter Pry, Weldon produced **Countdown to Terror**.

But one former CIA official, Bill Murray, says that it’s not the CIA but rather Weldon’s source that’s the problem. “He’s never given us any information

that was the slightest bit credible,” Murray said.

Meanwhile, Weldon says he’s received classified letters from the CIA saying that the agency welcomes more information from Ali, and that it doesn’t dispute the things he is saying. Weldon says he has requested that the CIA allow him to release the letters.

Additionally, other former CIA officials, including James Woolsey, CIA director under the Clinton administration, have praised Weldon’s book. In a letter to Weldon on March 9, Woolsey said Weldon “accurately diagnoses larger problems in the intelligence community that can result in intelligence failures.”

Among Amazon.com readers, where the book currently ranks No. 703 in sales, there is no middle ground. As of yesterday, every review either rated it one star or five stars, with comments ranging from “on the money” to “bovine excrement.”

McCain and Carville play themselves in new movie

As if they weren’t visible enough already, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Democratic political consultant James Carville are going to appear in a new comedy movie due to hit theaters around the nation July 15.

McCain, the subject of a Memorial Day TV movie about his experience as a POW in Vietnam, and Carville, the ubiquitous TV political commentator, will play themselves in “The Wedding Crashers,” a new movie about two friends who sneak into weddings to pick up the bridesmaids.

The duo was enlisted by actor Owen Wilson, who called McCain’s and Carville’s offices directly to ask them to provide some authenticity to the film, which involves the daughter of a powerful politician

modeled after the father of the Kennedy dynasty, the late Joseph P. Kennedy.

According to The Wall Street Journal, Wilson told a producer that McCain called him back and told him, “He said he’s in.” So was Carville.

K Street is no longer the sole domain of lobbyists

It’s long been the instantly recognized catchword for the lobbying industry in the nation’s capital, but the term “K Street” has taken on new meaning with the arrival of the Washington Nationals baseball team.

Now, after a Nationals pitcher strikes out an opposing batter, one of the electronic displays at RFK Stadium flashes a photo of a K Street N.W. sign, signifying the baseball scorekeeper’s shorthand for a strike out, the letter K.

That seems only appropriate, given the fact that many lobbyists are taking advantage of the Nats’ surprising success to woo clients.

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