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Rep. John Larson (D-CT) Headlines First “Benevolus” Policy Series of 2010!



Rep. John Larson

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Congressman John Larson (D-CT) headlined the Franklin Center for Global Policy Exchange’s first 2010 “Benevolus Series” policy discussion on Wednesday, January 20, 2010, in the House Democratic Caucus Room. Rep. Larson represents the first district of Connecticut and has served in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1999. Currently, he is the Chair of the House Democratic Caucus and is on the House Ways and Means Committee, serving on the Subcommittee on Trade and the Subcommittee on Select Revenue Measures.

Congressman Larson opened the discussion by thanking former Congresswoman and Vice Chair of the Franklin Center Connie Morella for her work across the aisle during her time in Congress. He then outlined the status of the health care bill in both the House and the Senate, the Massachusetts special election and the upcoming State of the Union Address by President Obama.

One day before this session, voters in Massachusetts elected Republican Scott Brown over Democrat Martha Coakley in a closely-watched election, removing the Democrats 60-vote (and filibuster-proof) majority in the United States Senate. This power shift raised immediate questions about the future of the President’s top domestic priority of health care reform. Mr. Larson said that one option being discussed was to pass incremental reforms instead of a larger, more comprehensive package. This, he believed, would give Congress ample time to explain changes to the public, while still helping people with health care.

The election, he said, reflected the frustration of independent voters, the so-called “Tea Party” movement, and people who were concerned about jobs and the

independent voters, the so-called Tea Party movement, and people who were concerned about jobs and the economy. Mr. Larson also believed the election was more of a referendum on incumbents than the President, and said that Senator Brown should be seated as soon as possible.

Changing subjects, the Congressman was looking forward to President Obama's first State of the Union Address, and specifically his comments on the economy, jobs, the deficit and health care. He acknowledged a significant shift in the political climate over the past year, and suggested that the President would be focusing on populism and domestic issues in 2010.

Within the Caucus, the Congressman said Democrats will also focus their efforts on improving the job market and the economy. He remained hopeful that the unemployment rate will drop considerably between now and November, but doesn't think that will happen on its own. He also thinks the unease amongst the American electorate will continue to put pressure on the President and Congress to deliver real results that people can feel. While it may be the right policy to require banks to repay bailout funds, for instance, he felt additional policy was needed to help create jobs.

On another domestic priority, legislation to reduce climate change, Rep. Larson spoke highly about natural gas and his support for a carbon tax. He saw natural gas as a real energy source for the future with limited environmental impact. He also was hopeful for more bipartisanship in terms of addressing climate change.

Education reform also held out the promise of attracting more bipartisan support. Updating schools with the newest technology will allow students from K-12 to flourish and pursue ideas that will benefit the country in the future, he said. Expanding broadband access and creating infrastructure banks are just a few other ways to accomplish this.

Despite all the changes he hopes to see America embrace, he acknowledged it was important to move incrementally for success. Medicare, Social Security, and many other major domestic reforms happened over a period of years, and health care should be no different. In closing, the Congressman said he still had great hopes for the country and was very positive for the future.



