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## Moakley, Conyers Interview Transcript (MS100/09.01#29)

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**Program Title:** "Representative Moakley with Representative John Conyers,"

**Program Participants:** Congressman John Joseph Moakley and Congressman John Conyers

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**Recording Overview:** This recording includes two interviews with Representative John Conyers that were recorded as episodes of a radio show featuring Congressman Moakley on WILD. In the first segment Representative Joe Moakley interviews Representative Conyers about Community Anti-Crime Assistance Act and solutions to reducing neighborhood crimes and increasing neighborhood involvement. They also discuss the possible impeachment of President Richard Nixon and the plans for his succession. The second episode focuses on controversial aspects of President Nixon's administration and his possible impeachment. They also discuss issues facing the nation including healthcare, employment rates, and poverty.

### **Part I: Conyers Transcript Begins**

**JOE MOAKELY:** My guest today is one of the senior members of the Congressional Black Caucus,<sup>1</sup> Representative John Conyers of Michigan. Congressman Conyers, who represents the 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District of Michigan, is now in his fifth term in the House of Representatives. John is a lawyer and is now serving as chairman of the Crime Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee and also serves on the Government Operations Committee. A man in the forefront of the fight to retain the Office of Economic Opportunity, Rep. Conyers has been very busy lately working with other members of the Judiciary Committee on the possible impeachment of President Nixon.

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup>The Congressional Black Caucus, formed in 1969, is a coalition of African-American members of Congress working to address the legislative concerns of black and minority citizens.



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John, it's very nice to have you on the show today as we approach the end of our first session of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Congress.

**JOHN CONYERS:** Well, it's a pleasure to be with you.

**MOAKLEY:** John, you're a sponsor and I'm glad to be a co-sponsor on the Community Anti-Crime Assistance Act, which would assist all of our communities in fighting crimes. And I wish you would tell our listeners just something about that measure that you are the prime sponsor of?

**CONYERS:** Well, I'm happy you're with me on it. A number of congressmen are looking at the bill in the terms of the reality of the experience of crime and its impact on people in their neighborhoods. And what we found missing and it's been put in study after study, investigation after investigation, is that the community has to be more involved in helping keep crime out of the neighborhood, or else there's no way that the police themselves can do the job. Now, your city isn't too different from mine. We have about four thousand policemen servicing 1.3 million people in Detroit. Well, automatically, you recognize the fact that you can't really have a policeman at every block or working day and night to be looking for crime unless you have the massive cooperation of the community. Now, all we do is put aside something like fifty million dollars for a start-- and we only pick that figure because we just don't have anything else to go on-- and we would allow communities, neighborhood organizations, block clubs, civic groups, fraternal groups, businesses, labor unions, churches, any kinds of groupings of citizens come together and say, look, in our neighborhood we need walkie-talkie radios for men that can supplement the police patrol.

And another one they need funds to promote young people's operations. But we would just give federal grants directly to them without the interference of state or local authorities and we've had a tremendous response. I'm hoping you'll testify on that bill to when we get through with [President Nixon's] impeachment and get back to the anti-crime bill.



**MOAKLEY:** You're a very busy man these days being on the Judiciary Committee. I know that some of these things I'm—unfortunately, will have to go on the back burner, because there is only so much time that you have to devote to it. I'm very interested in the citizen preventative patrols that you talk of. Do you think they can really work effectively in doing what you want them to do?

**CONYERS:** Well, it's been proven. We have already a congressman that came in with you, Fortney Stark from California. They had them going, but they've had to go out of business because they ran out of funds. They just can't possibly subsidize themselves. So, the whole idea he testified before the committee is that we need this kind of legislation so that we could keep it going. We've proven that it works. And citizens want to help reduce crime, cooperate with the police, but there has got to be an incentive. And right now there isn't. And I'm against professionalizing the police force and bringing in much of the military hardware we've used in the war to turn on our own citizens.

Sure, we have to be tough on the pusher. Certainly, we've got to move aggressively against people that are breaking and entering, robbing, or committing street crimes. But the other part of it is us beginning to learn how to convince our citizens to work more closely with the police.

**MOAKLEY:** Actually, if we go back in history we'd find that when our pilgrims first landed here that everybody in the community used to take turns in patrolling the streets. But then they got off in their own businesses and then they had to hire professional people. So, actually, all we're doing is reverting to the situation. It's just not enough that we say we've got police departments and we don't have to worry about enforcing crime. It's everybody's business. If you want a clean—you want a crime-free community, everybody has to pitch in, and people have to cooperate with the police. And this is what I find is lacking in many communities, that the police have become a separate society. And people don't have any trust in the police because they're not from the community. And I think that by the community participation that your bill



excellently, by the way, alludes to this, would really do the job by involving the community people so that it isn't snitching one another, but it's really protecting each other.

**CONYERS:** Well, you've talked with me about the hostilities that can be built up in the inner city against policeman because of the insensitivities. And pretty soon you don't get just a neutral relationship. You get a negative relationship where the police are looked upon as much a part of the problem as the people who are committing the crime. Well, when you deteriorate to that kind of situation, and I'm sorry to say a lot of cities have, you're in trouble.

**MOAKLEY:** That's right. It's a third society. We both know that small businesses and industry in the inner city suffer very greatly from the crime problem. And you feel that people can get out of the communities and help the businesses also keep their property without being vandalized?

**CONYERS:** Right. The nice thing about some of our studies is that there are businesses that want to join in with the communities. There are labor unions that want to join in with citizen groups. There are all kinds of possible combinations that under the LEAA federal program, we've never really looked toward community involvement. That's why I wrote a bill when I saw that less than one percent of all the LEAA money, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, which spends a billion dollars a year, less than one percent was going toward community programs. Well, they're rearming the police. They're buying helicopters. Some are buying automatic rifles, tanks in some places, believe it or not, uniforms. You know but when you start talking about what are you doing to build up the relationship so that we all feel that we're fighting the crime war together, they're not doing anything.

So, that's why I think we're on to something that is going to, I think, someday become an effective tool in your community, as well as mine.

**MOAKLEY:** I'm very happy that you filed a bill and I really believe in it, and I'm sure that it will be successful. John, getting onto another facet, as I told the listening audience, you are a



member of the Judiciary Committee and you're not studying the possibility of impeachment of President Nixon. And I was just wondering if you can talk about the inquiry and how it's coming along.

**CONYERS:** Well, I'm going to be honest with you, Joe. I objected strenuously to this nomination and confirmation process of Gerald Ford, the minority leader, Republican who has now been nominated for vice president going on before the impeachment. And I'd like to just spend a second on it. I don't recall if our views are similar or not on it but I know that you've been following this in your own way. Now, in my judgment, because there was a resolution of impeachment filed against Richard Nixon in the 92<sup>nd</sup> Congress before you got here, there was one pending in the 93<sup>rd</sup> Congress. And subsequent to that it had been referred to the Judiciary. Then the president nominated Mr. Ford. After the Agnew scandal<sup>2</sup> we find a man that's in public office taking pay-offs right in the White House. So, obviously, the only way he could escape going to the federal prison was to resign his office.

But I have argued unsuccessfully with our friends in the Congress that we should, because of the crisis we're in, not just nominate the replacement of the vice president, because that's not the problem. The problem is with the president. As you know, more than seventy-five members have offered resolutions of impeachment, resolutions of censure, or resolutions of inquiry into that may lead to impeachment. The Judiciary Committee, and I just checked this out yesterday, has received over 164,000 letters or telegrams demanding impeachment or the resignation of the President of the United States; more mail than we've ever received on any one subject since we've been recording mail in the Congress.

Now, we're in a crisis in this country. I think it's unreal for us to suggest that we're not. And to be routinely confirming a vice president under the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment when we know that the real

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<sup>2</sup> Vice President Spiro T. Agnew was investigated on charges of extortion, conspiracy, bribery and tax fraud but only convicted of tax evasion. On October 10, 1973 he resigned; becoming the first U.S. Vice President in history forced to resign related to a criminal conviction.



problem is the person that was nominated by him is a tremendous mistake, because we may be putting ourselves in the position of rationalizing what Mr. Nixon did. Because just after we take him out we'll be left with the man he hand-picked for president who will then name his vice president, and you will have the anomaly of the American people having an unelected president and an unelected vice president. And I think that is contrary to my feeling that the people should be able to do what you've so thoughtfully done in the first bill on this subject, that is to introduce legislation creating a special election in the event of a double vacancy, which would take care of the problem in a very intelligent way.

**MOAKLEY:** John, you're right, and that's a bill I filed. And actually, all it requires is an act of the legislature. It doesn't require a constitutional amendment. This is the way the law was back in 1792. And I know you've talked to your constitutional leaders. I've talked to Raoul Berger and Dr. Freund who both agree with me that this—all it needs is a simple act of the legislature to have the special election when a dual vacancy occurs.

**CONYERS:** You'll be happy to know that I was just talking to Professor Brandt in Oregon who wrote the definitive six-volume work on impeachment. And you'd be happy to see his letter in which he says the simplest, most logical solution to our dilemma is to have a special election. It would be non-partisan. It would be fair. There would be no chance of anybody being subject to the accusation that there was partisanship or we were taking advantage. Let the people pick the next replacements.

Now, at least sixteen times in the history of this country we've been without a Vice President. We went without one in the forties for about three years.

**MOAKLEY:** My predecessor, John McDonough was acting vice president for thirteen months and the country ran on a very even keel. I agree. I think that—I couldn't vote for Gerald Ford because I just don't believe that a president who has a cloud hanging over him that our president does has the right to send down a nominee until that cloud is either removed by the courts or



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some other way. And I feel that if President Nixon did resign, the vacancy of the vice president would still be open that we should have a general election. And that's what my bill calls for and I know you've supported me. Thank you very much for that.

**CONYERS:** Well, you know what Mr. Ford's civil rights record looks like. So, I need not go over chapter and verse with that. He's been fighting me got every year since I've been in the Congress and every year you've been in the Congress on questions of civil rights.

**MOAKLEY:** John, I noticed that besides being an outstanding congressman, you are very fortunate to be picked on that very elite group known as the President's enemy list<sup>3</sup>. How do you feel about being on that list?

**CONYERS:** Well, first of all, I'm preparing or considering a lawsuit, not because I felt bad that I was select, but that was a direct conspiracy on the part of the Executive Branch to deprive the half million people that I represent from their full rights. We've been researching it. It's a classic civil rights suit. Because what they intended to do was to destroy everyone, discredit them, bring in the agencies of the government to operate in a political fashion. And it's a perfect example of what the federal law was intended to protect citizens against, not me. I've never heard of an Administration that couldn't remember their enemies enough that they had to write them down.

**MOAKLEY:** Or maybe this Administration has so many maybe they have to put them on IBM cards. Thank you very much. My guest today was Rep. John Conyers of Michigan. And as I said, John Conyers is a very influential man in the Congress and is now sitting on a Judiciary Committee which is determining the fate of President Nixon and also of Gerald Ford. John, thank you very much for being on my show.

**CONYERS:** It's a pleasure. And good luck.

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<sup>3</sup> The President's Enemy list refers to President Richard Nixon's running list of people he identified as enemies because of their political or social views.



END OF INTERVIEW

## **Part II: Conyers Transcript Begins**

**JOE MOAKLEY:** My guest today is one of the senior members of the Congressional Black Caucus,<sup>4</sup> Representative John Conyers of Michigan. Congressman Conyers, who represents the First Congressional District of Michigan, is now in his fifth term in the House of Representatives. John is a lawyer and now serving as chairman of the Crime Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee and also serves on the Government Operations Committee. A man in the forefront of the fight to retain the Office of Economic Opportunity, John has been very busy lately working with the other members of the Judiciary Committee on a possible impeachment of President Nixon.

John, it's very good having you on the show today.

**JOHN CONYERS:** Well, I'm happy to be with you and chat with you about some of the frustrations that we share serving in the Congress. As you know, the Congress was intended to be one of the three co-equal branches of government, but something happened somewhere along the way.

**MOAKLEY:** Well, there's one very obvious thing that happened. Nobody told President Nixon.

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<sup>4</sup> The Congressional Black Caucus, formed in 1969, is a coalition of African-American members of Congress working to address the legislative concerns of black and minority citizens.





**CONYERS:** Well, it's been in a state of disintegration before Nixon, in all fairness to him. But no one has ever used impoundment, executive privilege and other precedence in the executive branch to the extent that he has with the full intention of diminishing the stature of the Congress. Now, of course, he's going to pay dearly for that because now we in turn consider his impeachment. And with seventy-five members already on some form of impeachment resolution or the other, I think it looks very ominous for him.

**MOAKLEY:** There are many things that happened under President Nixon's administration. We can go through them; the whole litany of the ITT [International Telephone Telegraph], the Vesco, the milk, the oil and on and on. But I think the thing that will probably be the straw that broke the camel's back is the energy crisis to show the very poor planning.<sup>5</sup> And when you disturb the creature comforts, I think, then is when the man on the street is going to get up on his legs and say, "Let's go. Let's get them." And I think that that's what is happening now.

**CONYERS:** I don't know if this is different in your area, Joe, or not, but in mine, the people who supported Mr. Nixon only a year ago are more vindictive toward him and are urging his removal from office more vociferously than those of us who did not support him. Have you noticed that?

**MOAKLEY:** Well, we in Massachusetts, we're the only state that went for George McGovern. And it's much more difficult in our state to find people who did support President Nixon. But I agree with you. I feel that they felt that they'd been had and that the Republican Party has really suffered as a result of his actions.

**CONYERS:** Let me ask how you would react to the feelings that I have of frustration in the Congress with regard to four very basic issues that I have not really been able to say that we've solved as a Congress or as an executive branch. The whole question of health, of developing a

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<sup>5</sup> Conyers refers to several controversies involving President Nixon, including the 1973 oil crisis and purported campaign finance irregularities related to federal milk price supports, his involvement with financier and convicted felon Robert Vesco and his intervention in the ITT anti-trust case.



set of medical delivery systems so that everybody in this country can receive the healthcare that we know we've developed scientifically to the point it should be made available to everybody.

**MOAKLEY:** I agree. I think that we need something very similar, if not the Kennedy-Griffith Bill so it gives everybody good health distribution. People in foreign countries laugh at this country with our gross national product we're supposed to be the leaders and everything. We're leaders in many things, but we're not the leaders in medical care.

**CONYERS:** Well, we're trailing, as a matter of fact. We're going further and further down the list. Now, let's take the question of housing, low income housing, federally assisted mortgage payments in some form subsidization, the questions of just creating full employment in this country and the general question of poverty. These are the issues to me that the Congress has failed to deal with. I have criticized the leadership. And to me I feel badly that we haven't made more progress in these areas.

**MOAKLEY:** Well, I think Congress has made a little progress. But I think that these are just the areas that the President has been pounding all funds. So, what little progress Congress has made, the President has done away with by just doing away with the funds.

**CONYERS:** Well, Nixon has never said that he was in support of any of these kinds of fundamental people type programs.

**MOAKLEY:** Well, that's because you won't find anybody in the forefront of any of these programs high on his contribution list.

**CONYERS:** Right.



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**MOAKLEY:** John, it's very nice to have you on the program again, and you've really helped explain a lot of things to our Boston audience. It's been a pleasure working with you in the Congress.

**CONYERS:** Well, I'll be looking forward to seeing you next term so we can get back to these kinds of issues.

**MOAKLEY:** Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW