

A PROGRESSIVE ASSESSMENT Of THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S FIRST 100 DAYS

Congresswoman Barbara Lee Headlines Panel and Meets
Emerging Leaders in Massachusetts

Progressives say Obama Sets Tone
for 2010 Mid-term Elections

America's Greatest Opportunity for Progressive Change since 1930s and
1960s is Now

While our times call for a great transformation, and our new president has called for "turning the page on the old politics," are President Obama and progressives ready and able to lead?

Please see the panelists' full remarks and the complete Q & A discussion videos on this page. [[View Video.](#)]

PROGRESSIVE PANEL

National leaders gathered with activists from Massachusetts at Suffolk University on Saturday, May 2, 2009 to assess President Obama's first one hundred days of leadership and policies, and discuss opportunities for progressive systemic change. The event was organized by the [Jobin-Leeds Partnership for Democracy & Education](#) and [Suffolk University School of Government](#).



The panel included [Congresswoman Barbara Lee](#) (CA-9: Oakland/Berkeley), Page Gardner of [Women's Voices-Women Vote](#), and Bob Borosage, of the [Campaign for America's Future](#). The panel was moderated by [Suffolk University Professor of Government Teri Fair](#). Each of the panelists was asked to provide their definition of "progressive" and make their evaluation of President Obama's agenda and progress.

CONGRESSWOMAN BARBARA LEE

Congresswoman Lee thanked the panelists and audience for helping build “coalitions of conscience.” Rep. Lee defined progressive as an individual or a movement that cares about democracy and "addresses systemic causes of many of the issues we are faced with today. Often I see liberalism as tinkering around the edges" attempting to "make bad things a little better.” [View Video.](#)



Currently Chair of the [Congressional Black Caucus](#), Rep. Lee served previously as Co-Chair of the [Congressional Progressive Caucus](#). The agendas of the Progressive Caucus - "[Progressive Promise](#)"- and CBC are very similar and call for changes "that every American should be proud of and every American should embrace whether they are progressive because it speaks to the core values of our country", according to Lee. The Progressive Promise advocates for economic justice and security, civil rights and liberties, and global peace and security. Along with the Hispanic and Asian Pacific caucuses, progressives comprise the largest group in the House.

Regarding the Obama Administration, Rep. Lee would give the President "an A or an A+ for the first 100 days." She cited Obama's pledge to end torture and close Guantanamo, signed the Lily Ledbetter Act for equal pay for women, extended the children's health care program, ended the "global gag rule" on abortion counseling and international family planning funding,

allowed federal funds for stem cell research, lifted restrictions on the Environmental Protection Agency imposed by the Bush Administration, and targeted funds in the economic recovery act to distressed communities facing high rates of foreclosure.

Lee called on activists to get involved in politics and bring their values with them. Progressives in the US House have approximately 100 votes, but 218 votes are needed to pass legislation. Congress could vote stronger, more progressive measures into law but cannot “because the progressive movement has not been as political as it should be.” Lee urged the audience to "be hardball players in the political arena" and "hold Members of Congress accountable to the progressive agenda. That's what we have to see as our mission from here forward, as academics, as community groups as civic organizations, as individuals we have to organize politically."

Prior to the panel, the Congresswoman met with 30 young and emerging Massachusetts leaders of color for an hour.

[Page Gardner](#), President of **Women’s Voices, Women Vote** defined the ["rising American electorate"](#) and outlined its importance to President Obama’s election, the progressive agenda, and the 2010 mid-term elections. [View Video](#).



Gardner said that it was an “exciting day and it’s great to be with people talking about the strength and power of progressive-ism and progress.” She described how the “nation’s history is defined by progress and the efforts to include people more and more equitably and more fully in economy, our democracy and entire society. “

Obama's presidency is "like no other." The President "hit the ground running" with a “bold agenda and many promises.” She said his presidency is "about remaking America" and "rebuilding the social infrastructure, repairing the environment, preventing discrimination in the workplace and doing the smart thing about health care." President Obama is "offering America a country built for the many, not for the few" and he is not doing too much too soon he is “multi-tasking," said Gardner.

She encouraged the audience to "remember those Members of Congress who refuse to reach out to help this president rebuild America, those very same Congress people who were so eager to help the last [Bush] Administration. They should be ashamed of themselves and, in a very nonpartisan way we should get rid of them."

Gardner described the incredible impact the Obama candidacy had on voter turnout. New voters came out in droves, voters from communities of color, new citizens, younger people and single women. "[President] Obama won with the emerging electorate and he needs to govern for them," she said. The groups turned out more in 2008 than any election prior giving the President his margin of victory.

President Obama's success depends on people “traditionally shut out of system.” These new voters need to [vote in 2010](#) if President Obama's and progressives' agenda will be advanced. Gardner's group polled new voters just after the 2008 election and then near the 100 day mark to assess whether they will vote in the November 2010 mid-term elections. Just after Obama’s victory, two out of every five new voters (40%) said they probably would not vote in the mid-term elections, compared with 1 of four other voters. But, after 100 days of President Obama's leadership and Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, only 1 out four new voters (27%) indicated they would likely not vote, compared with 23% of other voters.

ROBERT BOROSAGE – CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA’S FUTURE

[Bob Borosage](#), Co-Director of [Campaign for America’s Future](#) began his remarks by praising Congresswoman Lee for her leadership building the progressive movement. "Many good progressives are dissenters but are not interested in building a coalition to move an agenda forward.... Rep. Lee is that special person in congress on our side." He thanked Page Gardner for seeing "what was in front of everyone’s face- this block of unmarried women- and got them out to vote." [View Video.](#)



For Borosage, progressives are part of a long history of activists working to make American society work for the majority. The progressive movement "started in the last gilded age of the late 1800s with its satanic mills, no labor rights, extreme inequality and poverty." Progressives organized and populists mobilized across the nation, winning changes so the economy would work for working class people. These efforts culminated in the 1930s with the New Deal.

After the success of President Franklin Roosevelt and the New deal, “progressives worked to get the groups excluded from prosperity—African Americans and women—into the working economy and American democracy,” said Borosage. These efforts culminated in the 1960s. But since that time, conservatives and corporate interests won changes that have “produced another gilded age and we are now looking again at core economic rules so it works for everyone. That’s my definition.”

Democratic Party victories in 2006 and 2008, electing a new President and liberal congress have changed the national agenda, but it is not liberal enough, according to Borosage. “[President] Obama has done much more than most people expected in the first 100 days. The Recovery Plan made the greatest contribution to poverty spending since the Great Society,” said Borosage. “It’s an extraordinary thing. He doubled the education budget at the national level. Tripled the energy budget, and made significant investments in infrastructure.” When President Obama put together his first budget, “they took on just about every entrenched interest in Washington from agribusiness to the military industrial complex, to the private student lending industry.” He’s leading a transformation of our foreign policy, at least by gesture, and he’s created a sense of optimism and pride in America. People like the fact that we elected this man to be president, and we like the fact that he represents us in the world,” Borosage said.

Looking at the present, Borosage said “this era represents the greatest potential for progressive reform since the 1960s and the 1930s. Over the next few years, we will set the framework for our society and our economy, perhaps for our survival, that we will live with for decades.” Borosage argued that “while we have an extraordinary leader as president, he will need powerful independent progressive movements to go out and make him do what needs to be done.”



For the next hour, the panelists and audience engaged in a lively discussion.

Please click [full remarks](#) to see VIDEO of the panel. Click here for [Q & A discussion](#) video.



Maria Jobin-Leeds, Congresswoman Lee, Myron Miller, Professor Teri Fair, & Joel Barrera.



Caprice Mendez-Emerge MA, Congresswoman Lee, & Alejandra St. Gullien-Oisté?.



Jeffrey Thomas, Remona Davis, Michael Fogelberg of the Partnership, Congresswoman Lee, Page Gardner-Women's Voice, Women Vote, Bob Borosage-Campaign for America's Future, and Maria Jobin-Leeds of the Partnership.



Congresswoman Lee speaks with emerging leader of color prior to the panel.