

Congressman Speaks Against the Act of the U.S. Government

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Around the Square Newsletter

Fall 2002

As part of the College's All -Community Teach -In on the War on Terror, Oberlin's Democratic Congressman Sherrod Brown gave a keynote address to a small crowd at Finney Chapel on Saturday, Sept. 14. After a lengthy introduction by College President Nancy Dye on Brown's background as Oberlin's congressional representative and the importance of the teach -in, the congressman walked down from the chapel stage and addressed the audience more informally from the ground-level.

Surprisingly, although the speech had been advertised by the Office of the President under the title "Congress and the War Powers Act," Brown's hour -long talk did not specifically address the War Powers Act of 1973, which prevents any U.S. President from waging undeclared war for more than 90 days without the approval of Congress. In fact, Brown's address did not even hover long on the related topics mentioned in President Dye's introduction, such as the controversial possibility of U.S. pre -emptive strikes against Iraq.

Instead, the congressman focused at length on what he called the many "disturbing" acts already being committed by the U.S. government and what he deemed to be the "corporatist, unilateralist" agenda of President George W. Bush's administration.

The representative began by describing the behavior of many U.S. government officials as "insidious political profiteering," and compared it to the "war profiteering" of gas station owners who raised their fuel prices during the immediate aftermath of last year's attack on Sept. 11. To support this position, Brown claimed that many politicians since that time have tried to "take advantage" of the crisis by proposing more tax cuts, by spending billions in grants and loans to airline corporations while doing little to aid massive airline employee layoffs, and by rallying around national missile defense, all in order to increase their political standings.

"By invoking Sept. 11, you get more votes... [and] your ratings go up," Brown said, adding that some members of Congress are "like lapdogs."

The congressman's criticism then turned to the U.S. President, whom he claimed allows corporations to determine many government policies. In expressing this opinion, Brown propounded the belief that President Bush has permitted major energy corporations to decide energy guidelines, Wall Street businesses to make social security policy, insurance companies to set Medicare procedures, and oil giants to determine environmental laws.

Brown then quoted Johns Hopkins University economics professor Francis Fukuyama to illustrate the gravity of his next point. He said "Americans are largely innocent of the fact that much of the rest of the world believes that it is American power, and not terrorists with weapons of mass destruction, that is destabilizing the world."

As a basis for this claim, the congressman went on to speak of the major increase in the United States defense budget, which he misquoted as \$47 billion, falsely stating that the increase was greater than any other country's entire military budget and 60 times that of the total budgets of the "axis powers," Iran, Iraq and North Korea. However, to the

congressman's good fortune, his faulty statistics did not completely mar his intended argument that the U.S. military budget, and thus "American power," is quite strong. According to the Center for Defense Information, the rise in U.S. defense funds is actually the slightly higher sum of \$48 billion. In fact, the increase itself is indeed more than any other country's total defense budget except Russia's \$60 billion fund and is about 30 times the \$11.8 billion total of the "axis powers." The rise brings the U.S. defense budget to a tremendous sum of \$396.1 billion.

Representative Brown then went on to give an emotionally wrenching description of the tragedy he sees in spending these billions on defense when the U.S. is contributing only 0.1% of its gross domestic product to international aid, despite the fact that the United Nations (U.N.) recommends a minimum contribution of 0.7%. According to U.N. estimates, he said, diseases such as tuberculosis, AIDS, and malaria, which kill a total of six million people a year, could be managed on \$15 billion, out of which the U.S.'s contribution would be only \$4 or \$5 billion. Brown believes that many of these facts about America's spending priorities will prove detrimental to the country, in light of his view that the U.S. has done "very little to enhance... [its] standing in the world."

In offering his opinions on how best the United States should act to improve its reputation in the international community, Brown suggested that "Americans should cut energy use," cancel debts in the poorest countries and "commit \$5 billion to fighting infectious diseases" internationally.

The congressman then concluded his address on an unexpectedly optimistic note, stating, "Don't give up hope. We're counting on students at Oberlin College to be on the vanguard of this... It's a difficult time, but it's not a pessimistic time."