

Ohio Democrat blasts Bush

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WASHINGTON - A full 10 hours before President Bush's State of the Union address Tuesday night, more than a dozen House Democrats took the commander in chief to task.

Saying there was no need to wait until the president delivered his speech because they already knew his message, Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-Lakewood, flanked by 14 other members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, presented what they dubbed the Alternative State of the Union address.

In a cramped fifth-floor meeting room in the House office building, the CPC, comprising 54 Democrats, held a morning news conference where they blasted the Bush administration's foreign and domestic policies.

"We are gathered to offer to the American people an alternative vision.... There is an alternative to the Bush administration," said Kucinich, co-chair of the Progressive Caucus.

Kucinich, who is said to have presidential aspirations, said a war with Iraq is unjustified and called for a halt to war preparations.

"The administration has not produced any compelling evidence linking Iraq to the attacks of 9/11, nor any evidence that Iraq poses a threat to the United States," Kucinich said.

He went on to attack the Bush administration for "assaulting" the basic civil rights and liberties of all Americans, supporting policies that endanger the environment, and wrecking the U.S. economy.

"We can forge peace abroad and security and prosperity at home," Kucinich said.

The Ohio congressman's words were echoed by a parade of Democratic House members, who took turns berating the Bush administration.

Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., said that since Bush took office more than 1.6 million Americans have lost their jobs.

"The state of our union is not sound because our families are insecure, they have lost their jobs or are in fear of losing their jobs," DeFazio said.

To underscore the point, the Progressive Caucus introduced three people who have lost their jobs, including a steelworker from Massillon.

Robert Fothergill, a 45-year-old father of two teen-agers, lost his job in October when Massillon Stainless Inc. began shutting down.

"I've lost my job, my health care, and the government even taxes my unemployment benefits of \$199 a week. But Bush complains about the rich paying too much in taxes," Fothergill said.

Janice Schakowsky, D-Ill., said when it comes to the economy Bush is a "one-trick pony -- tax cut for the rich."

Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., bashed the administration for implementing measures he called hostile to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

"It is Big Brother government. The Bush administration used the fear generated by 9/11 to ram through a wish list assault on our civil liberties. Welcome to John Ashcroft's America," Nadler said.

During the hourlong news conference, the Progressive Caucus outlined its agenda of peace; improved education, housing and health care; the creation of new jobs; securing living wages; and the protection of civil rights and liberties, including reproductive choice.

Kucinich said it was up to the Progressive Caucus to "keep the attention and focus on those issues."