Civil rights leader Andrew Young: “We’ve got probably the dumbest Congress we’ve had in a long time”

By: Michael Cass

Civil rights leader Andrew Young, a former congressman from Atlanta, had some harsh words for the nation’s current crop of lawmakers in the midst of a government shutdown and a quickly approaching deadline to raise the nation’s debt ceiling.

“What we have is a Congress that is trying to hold back history,” Young, a Democrat, said in an interview before Nashville’s Meharry Medical College gave him an honorary degree Monday. “It has nothing to do with the color of the president. If everybody in the United States were the same color and the same economic class, we would still have massive upheavals simply because of the technology and the fact that we can now wire more money abroad on a cell phone than existed a hundred years ago.

“Instead of trying to understand the world and give leadership to it, they say it doesn’t matter about the government’s default. Well, they know that when they don’t pay their bills on time, their interest rate increases. And if the United States doesn’t pay its bills on time, the Chinese and Europeans who hold American debt paper, if they increase the interest rate one-half a percent, it drives us deeper into deficit.

“And yet we’ve got probably the dumbest Congress we’ve had in a long time. They don’t have passports. They haven’t been anywhere. When I was in Congress, almost everybody in Congress before me had been in the second world war or in the Korean War. They knew the world. They knew America had to give leadership to the world. We either gave leadership to the world through vision and creative, nonviolent means like education, trade, or we ended up at war. …

“They have forgotten that you’re not just responsible to your congressional district and to your re-election. If you are re-elected and let the whole world go to hell, you’re going with it. They don’t seem to see that.”

Young, who was one of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s top aides at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was elected to Congress in 1972 and re-elected twice. He resigned within months of his 1976 victory to become the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations under President Jimmy Carter, a fellow Georgian. He was forced to resign in 1979 after meeting with a representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which was considered a terrorist organization, according to the New Georgia Encyclopedia.

Young later served as mayor of Atlanta for eight years. He ran unsuccessfully in 1990 for the Democratic nomination to become the governor of Georgia.