

Remarks to the Take Back America Conference  
On Receipt of a Lifetime Achievement Award on Behalf of John Kenneth Galbraith  
Washington Hilton Hotel, June 1, 2005  
James K. Galbraith

First, my father's response:

"I am delighted, as who would not be, by the invitation of April 6 from the Campaign for America's Future. Of course I accept with all appropriate pride and pleasure, but health is a major barrier. I am banned by the full force of the medical profession from both travel and events such as this. Thus my proposal: Have the award made on my behalf to James K. Galbraith [and here, I repeat, these are my father's words] a distinguished economist, *well steeped in my views...*"

You may have seen my father's brief appearance on the News Hour last week, at the end of a segment devoted to Richard Parker's magnificent book. He was asked whether there would be a revival of his ideas and values. He said he was not so optimistic as to think it would come in his lifetime. That might seem discouraging, until you think a bit, and realize it was a typically Galbraithian remark. When you're 96, after all, the phrase "not in my lifetime" doesn't preclude very much.

It's therefore not too early to give a blueprint for a Galbraith revival. Mine rests simply on three themes.

- Democracy. The civil rights struggle of our time must be to regain, for all Americans, the right to vote, the practical capacity to exercise that right, and the right to a full, accurate and verified count. I was in Columbus, Ohio on election day. I saw the voting machine shortages and the two and three hour lines they produced. I spoke with voters who came to vote and could not stay. That's the simple reality, in part, of how the court-picked government of 2000 was returned to power in 2004. I ask you not to let it happen again - not in Florida, not in Ohio, and not anywhere else.

- Peace. The world is dangerous but war is no solution. Sixty years ago my father showed what bombing cannot do. Iraq now shows what an occupation army cannot achieve. Undaunted, some seek a wider war and a deeper disaster. We say, No. Let's work instead to end the war we are in. And if we need new strategists, unafraid to weigh the costs of war, let's get them. My father contributed one line to John F. Kennedy's inaugural address: "Let us never negotiate from fear, but let us never fear to negotiate." It's not the most soaring line in that speech, but it's perhaps the one we need most today. Above all, let us rise to the warning just issued by Robert McNamara that our nuclear policy is "illegal, immoral, militarily unnecessary and dreadfully dangerous." Life itself is at stake on this point, and about no other does my father care more deeply. It is truly time to stop the bomb.

- Truth. Yesterday we were reminded dramatically that three decades ago Watergate taught us the potential for malice in high office and cleansing power of revelation. When did Bush decide to invade Iraq and why? Who ordered and who approved the disgrace of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib? Why and how did the trail of Osama bin Laden grow cold? We are passing through a sorry moment of history. These and many other questions demand answers, and they will continue to do so, long after this administration leaves town.

Finally, inevitably, a word on economics. Full employment prosperity is not a birthright, it must be earned. It doesn't come by magic, by cutting deficits or through prayer to the Great God Greenspan. Full employment prosperity must be created in the solution of our own national problems. Let's therefore rebuild our cities, conserve our energy resources, save education, extend health care, restore the environment and preserve Social Security. When we have taken back America, we will surely have to rebuild it, finally ending the long age of "public squalor" of which my father wrote in *The Affluent Society* fifty years ago.

I'll close on a personal note. My father has been in the hospital for several weeks, trying to regain some strength after a touch of pneumonia. I have word today that he is walking, and the doctors have given him a date of June 10 to return home. On his behalf, I thank you very deeply for the honor of this lifetime achievement award, and I will write him tonight of your affection.

But, get to work. Working together, we might take back America in his lifetime after all. And I have to say, much as he dislikes being proven wrong, I don't think he'd mind at all.

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