

CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

"TAKE BACK AMERICA"

SPEAKER:

BERNIE SANDERS (I-VT), U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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ROGER HICKEY: Bernie Sanders is a phenom. (Applause, cheers.) He was born in Brooklyn – (cheers) – he studied amazingly at the University of Chicago. He saw those conservatives up close and immediately became a man of the left. He went on to be the mayor of Burlington, Vermont, where he transformed that city and made himself into the state’s leading advocate of working people.

In 1991 he became the first independent elected to the Congress in 40 years. (Applause, cheers.) I remember when he first came to the Congress, one of the first things he did was he formed the Progressive Caucus and became its first co-chair. That caucus now has 56 members. (Applause, cheers.) Working people have never had a better friend in the Congress than Bernie Sanders.

And now, he hasn’t announced his race for Senate, but Senator Jeffords has announced he is retiring, and there is one candidate that is leading in every poll and that will lead in every poll all the way through the election, the next senator from Vermont, Bernie Sanders. (Applause, cheers.)

REP. BERNIE SANDERS (I-VT): Thank you. Thank you. Let me congratulate the Campaign for America’s Future and Bob and Roger, and all of the people who helped put on this extraordinary conference, and let me thank them also for acceding to a last-minute request to allow me to say just a very few words to you.

One of the difficulties that many of us have in dealing with the Bush administration and the extreme right-wing leadership in the Congress is that the word “outrage” has lost its meaning! What can you say about these guys? (Applause.) Virtually every day there is another action, another lie, another assault on the very foundations of our society, so much so that when we see this all of the time we cease to be shocked, we cease to be appalled, and we simply shrug our shoulders and we say, what is new; what is happening tomorrow?

What does outrage mean when we have an administration that took us to war under false premises, a war that has resulted in 1,600 dead, 12,000 wounded, 300 billion (dollars) spent, and terrible suffering for the people of Iraq? What does outrage mean? (Applause.) What does outrage mean when we have a majority leader in the House who threatens our independent judiciary, who leaves the voting rolls open for three additional hours to twist arms, to win a disastrous prescription drug bill written by the pharmaceutical industry?

What do we say about a guy who calls a special session to address a tragic situation affecting one family? What does the word outrage mean? (Applause.) What does outrage mean when we have a president who tells us how much he loves the troops, who is always posing with armed-force members behind him and yet threw 140,000 veterans off of VA healthcare – (applause) – has cut back on the needs of our veterans so that when our men and women come home from Iraq and Afghanistan, the care that they need will not be there? What can we say about outrage?

What does the word outrage mean at a time when the United States has the most unfair gap between the rich and the poor of any industrialized nation? We have a president who gives hundreds of billions of dollars to the wealthiest people in this country and then cuts back on healthcare, education, and affordable housing. How do we describe that?

What does outrage mean when the White House and the Republican leadership are some of the few people in the entire world who do not understand the profound dangers of global warming, and who day after day aid and abet those who are destroying our environment? (Applause.) What does outrage mean when we hear a president give speeches every day talking about freedom, freedom, freedom and then gives us the USA Patriot Act, which is undermining the constitutional rights of our people? (Applause.)

Now, I could go on and on and on, but talking about what Bush and the Republican leadership are doing is not enough. What we have got to do and what this conference is about is determining how we come together, how we reach out to ordinary Americans, how we develop a progressive agenda so that government works for all of the people and not just millionaires and right-wing fundamentalists. (Applause.)

Let me just very briefly, in that regard, tell you what we are going to do in Vermont as we elect the first independent senator in the modern history of our country. (Applause.) Now, we're going to put ads on television, and we're going to put ads on radio, and we're going to use the Internet, and all of that stuff, but what we are going to do also is build the strongest grassroots movement that the state of Vermont has ever seen. (Applause.) We are going to have thousands and thousands of people from our small state knocking on every door in the state of Vermont. We are going to hold rallies in small towns. And in Vermont, let me tell you, we have some very small towns. We're going to register many thousands and thousands of people, especially low-income people and young people who are alienated from the political process, and we are going to change the political culture of the state so that people are talking and thinking and eating and fighting for political struggle. (Applause.)

Now, there are a lot of issues that we are going to be talking about, but we are primarily going to be focusing on one issue and that is the collapse of the middle class in America today and the growing gap between the rich and the poor. We are going to demand that Congress pass a national healthcare program that guarantees healthcare to all people. (Applause.) We are going to fight to end our disastrous trade policies that are costing us millions of decent-paying jobs. We are going to fight to make sure that when workers try to form a union, they can do so without harassment from their employers. (Applause.)

We are going to fight to raise the minimum wage to a living wage so that everyone who works in America does not live in poverty. We are going to fight to rescind all of those tax breaks that went to the rich and we are going to provide educational opportunity, we're going to build affordable housing, we are going to rebuild

our infrastructure, we're going to make sure that every kid in America who has the ability can go to college regardless of the income of his or her family. (Applause.)

And lastly, when George Bush tells us that we have to privatize Social Security, we are going to tell him no way. Not only are we not going to privatize Social Security, we're going to make it stronger, we're going to improve benefits, and we're going to make sure that Social Security is going to be there for our kids and great-grandchildren. (Applause.)

I just want to thank all of you or many of you for the support that you have given us in the past and we look forward to fighting with you on this historic campaign. Thank you very much. (Applause.)