

CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

TAKE BACK AMERICA 2006

TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2006

**WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

8:15 -8:45 A.M. BREAKFAST: REGIONAL GATHERINGS

SPEAKER:

SENATOR HILLARY CLINTON (D-NY)

*Transcript by:
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

(Cheers, applause.)

SEN. CLINTON: Thank you so much. Thank you. Good morning! Good morning. Thank you. Good morning.

This is an enthusiastic, energized group, and we need that energy and enthusiasm as we go into these November elections, because we have to take back the Congress in order to stop this administration and their unaccountable undermining of our constitutional democracy. (Applause.)

I want to thank my long-time friend Hilary Shelton for that introduction. It is nice having somebody else named Hilary. He gets a lot of press as well. (Laughter.) He and I have worked together on so many issues, particularly with respect to the Voting Rights Act and the overwhelming need to return integrity to our voting system. (Applause.) And I believe so strongly that if we do not go to the local and state level in the next several months to see what local election commissioners are doing, to see what secretaries of state in the ilk of Katherine Harris and Blackwell in Ohio are doing, that we may not have the victories that we deserve and that I think the American people want us to have in November.

So my first and perhaps most important request to all of you is -- we're not going to get my legislation, Count Every Vote, through the United States Congress; the Republicans have absolutely no interest in changing the way we vote, in holding the machine makers responsible, in having a verified paper trail, in eliminating conflicts of interest so that people who run partisan campaigns can't also run the independent verification of election campaigns for states and local communities. (Applause.) So until we get back a Democratic Congress, we have to hold local and state officials accountable. So please, join with me and make sure you do everything you can in the next several months so we don't have a repeat of what happened in Ohio, what happened in Florida.

There are so many issues at stake, and in order to take back America, we have to take back our electoral system because we meet at a time when the stakes could not be higher. We all are here in part because we are fed up with what has been going on for the last five and a half years.

Now, we've had a few small victories along the way. You know, last week we stopped the Congress from mangling the Constitution by enshrining discrimination -- (cheers, applause) -- and we stopped them from eliminating the estate tax and adding a trillion dollars of debt to our children and our nation. (Applause.)

We stood together, but it is hard when you're in the minority, which is why we've got to elect more Democrats in November because right now that is the only way that we can prevent them from continuing on the agenda that they are so determined to pursue.

You know, it takes daily skirmishes from those of us in the Congress to try to hold the line on everything from college loans to health care for children, even to health care for our veterans. These particular battles should be viewed in a larger context because they do represent the stark philosophical differences between our progressive Democrats and increasingly even some moderate independents and a few Republicans who have found their way back to sanity -- (cheers, applause) -- I think we have a few of those in the audience today -- and the right-wing Washington Republicans, who are determined to set this country on a disastrous path.

Democrats believe in equal opportunity, in shared responsibilities in a more inclusive community. They believe in concentrating maximum wealth and power in the hands of the people they consider entitled to rule the rest of us.

We believe in a government that empowers people to live their own dream, but a government that is also accountable to the people. They believe -- they truly believe -- in a government that is run for the benefit of their partisan and commercial allies and without accountability.

We believe in forming policies based on evidence and argument. They believe ideology determines policy and that evidence is a weak substitute for attack.

We believe in fighting terror and other threats to our security by cooperating with others whenever we can and acting alone only when we are forced to. They believe just the reverse -- in acting alone whenever they can, and cooperating only when there is no alternative. (Applause.)

So for five and a half years, they have controlled the White House and the Congress, and they have succeeded in concentrating wealth and power, in resisting accountability, in ignoring evidence, and going it alone in the world.

And what a price Americans have paid -- in exploding debt, stagnant wages, rising poverty, more people without health insurance, a more polluted environment, weaker workplace protections, an anemic response to the threat of global warming, exploding oil prices, increasing crime rates, a deeply divided citizenry, and more hostility and alienation from much of the rest of the world.

Now, I have been honored to fight for our values against the right-wing determination to take America away from our Founders' vision of a more perfect union for many years. And I'm grateful for the successes we've had, including the great success we had in stopping their frontal assault on Social Security -- (applause) -- and undermining the legitimate right to protection that every generation should have in old age and widowhood and orphanhood and disability. But I am tired of defining success by

what we prevent. It is time for us to start defining success by what we can build -- (cheers, applause) -- and what actions we can take based on that foundation. (Applause.)

Now, when this administration came to power, it became abundantly clear that they wanted to turn the clock back on the Clinton administration. And I admit, I took that kind of personally -- (laughter) -- because I thought we had done a lot of good things for our country and the world in those eight years. (Cheers, applause.)

But, you know what became clear to me is that it wasn't just the eight years of the Clinton administration. They wanted to turn the clock back on the progress of the 20th century -- (applause) -- that starting with Teddy Roosevelt all the way through Bill Clinton, this crowd had been unhappy. They'd been unhappy with saving capitalism, which is what Franklin Roosevelt had done. They'd been unhappy with the bipartisan consensus about how we should act in the world to promote America's interests. They had been unhappy with the extension of civil rights and civil liberties, so they came to town to reinstitute a 19th-century attitude that was basically, "We know best. You don't know anything at all, and we're not going to explain it to you."

And so we've been living with that systematic destruction of everything that happened in the 20th century. I don't care whether it was consumer protection or actually a FEMA that worked and protected people and saved lives and property. (Cheers, applause.) It was an assault on the environment that had been pent up inside of them for decades, despite the fact that the environment originally was not only a bipartisan issue, but the modern environmental movement was led by Republicans.

But not for this crowd. They had a determined effort to suppress science that didn't suit their ideology, to weaken key provisions that protected our air, our land and our water. They had a clear idea with their misnamed Clear Skies Initiative that they were going to turn over control to the air we breathe to the dirtiest polluters in America. Now, we've stopped that in the courts temporarily, but we have absolute evidence that their support of pollution is not only undermining people's lives, it is leading to premature death.

After 9/11, I said repeatedly, this White House, this EPA is not telling us the truth. It is not safe to breathe the air at Ground Zero and Lower Manhattan. (Applause.) And we fought them, and we tried to stop them, and they ignored us and they ignored scientific evidence. And now I have firefighters and police officers and other people who came down to work and to help who are suffering from all of the diseases that they have incurred because they were not protected by their government, and that is the kind of attitude that we have to stand against and end starting this November! (Cheers, applause.)

Well, what do we need to do? Well, first of all, we need a change in direction to make our economy work for everybody, an economy that honors hard work, responsibility and opportunity.

Second, we need dramatic change in direction in our foreign policy and our national security policy to protect our country, to begin to unwind the situation in Iraq as soon as we can and to make it clear to the rest of the world that America's values are what we stand on. (Applause.) It is not only security we seek, it is to build a safer, more prosperous world that will be better for our children and our children's children. We need a change in direction if we're going to have the values that we care about.

I believe in a very simple principle -- that the engine of our economy is a strong middle class, that America is better than the government we currently have, that we can come together once again as a nation. (Cheers, applause.)

We can start by standing up for an economy that honors work again. It is unacceptable that people working for a minimum wage have not had a raise in 10 years! (Cheers, applause.)

You know, my husband and I are often bewildered by the fact that it appears that the Republican majority and the president just can't do enough for us. Every time we turn around, we're getting another tax cut. And we keep looking at each other and saying, "Wouldn't it be nice if people who worked hard and played by the rules got tax cuts? Wouldn't it be nice if they were given a chance to get beyond the stagnating wages?" Productivity is up, profits are up, but people's wages are not up.

I have introduced legislation that would tie the minimum wage to congressional salaries. (Cheers.) No more increases for Congress until we raise the minimum wage! (Cheers applause.)

Now, we also know that education is still a key to our future, individually, as a society. (Applause.) And during the 1990s, Democrats gave students the largest increase in college aid in 50 years. I was very proud of that because I meet people all the time who had to drop out of college or could never start because they and their families didn't have enough money.

So we were making progress in sort of narrowing the gap between high tuition and costs and what the average student and his or her family could pay. Well, this Congress just passed, and the president signed, the largest cuts to student loans in our nation's history. We ought to be doing more, not less, for our students. We ought to be making sure every qualified student can go to college and pursue his or her dreams. (Cheers, applause.)

And you know, there's a very easy way to do that. All we have to do is cut all the tax breaks for oil companies, pharmaceutical companies and billionaires and put it into student aid. (Cheers, applause.)

I also believe in a fair shot in life. I've lived long enough to know that things happen. (Laughter.) Things you never expect. (Laughter.) Well, we ought to reverse

the mean-spirited bankruptcy bill that makes it harder for people to get back on their feet and get a fresh start. (Cheers, applause.)

And we ought to stand up for the right to organize workers and the right for decent health care. (Applause.) You know, this is how they think, though. Just imagine this. After Katrina, after the president finally looked at the video that his staff asked him to look at -- (laughter) -- and saw that there was a major national disaster along our Gulf Coast, what was their first decision? Well, their first decision was to suspend the rules that made sure workers would get prevailing wages. That's how they think.

Well, we successfully reversed that, but they still haven't cleaned up the Gulf Coast. I don't know how many of you have been down there. It is a national disgrace. It is heartbreaking. And it didn't have to happen. But the combination of incompetence and insensitivity have left so many people still all on their own.

You know, when the president talks about an ownership society, that's what he really means -- you're on your own -- (laughter) -- and the rest of us, we're not going to be there for you. (Applause.)

It is also time for us to restore the basic bargain in America and to expand it. You know, I was raised to believe that if you worked hard, you did what you supposed to, you would have opportunities to fulfill the American dream. It's gotten a little more complicated because of global competition, and we have to be smarter about how we do it. But one thing that is clear to me is we still have not recognized how hard it is for people to work for a living and fulfill their family responsibilities. It is as hard in this country as it is anywhere in the world -- (scattered applause) -- and yet, here we are, the richest of all nations.

Why is it so hard for moms and dads to be able to have flextime, to be able to have time off to go to a student-teacher conference or a school play or an athletic event? (Scattered applause.) Why is it still absolutely the case that working women don't get equal pay when so many of them are supporting their families and contributing income that's necessary? (Cheers, applause.)

I really appreciate the work that Joan Blades is doing, the co-founder of MoveOn -- (scattered cheers) -- along with her colleague on the Moms Rising agenda. She'll be addressing this conference, and please pay as close attention because there is an incredible opportunity here for us to make our society stronger by helping working families fulfill the most important obligation they have, which is to care for the next generation, and increasingly the care for our parents and our grandparents. We are in the sandwich generation, many of us -- (scattered cheers, applause) -- where we have family responsibilities on both ends of the age spectrum.

We need to expand the Family and Medical Leave Act. It doesn't cover enough people. We need paid parental leave so that people can afford to have time off. (Scattered applause.) We need to ensure that every single child in America has health

care, and these are the kinds of issues that Moms Rising is promoting. (Cheers, applause.)

Now, much of what we need to do cannot be done unless we return to fiscal responsibility. You know, people say, "Well, is fiscal responsibility a progressive issue?" Well, as Hillary Shelton said, if the strategy on the other side is to bankrupt the government so that it can't do anything, like enforce election laws, like have a functioning FEMA, like take care of people's most basic needs, they're doing a good job of it and their ideologues believe that. You know, one of them famously said they wanted to shrink government so that it was small enough it could be strangled in the bathtub.

Fiscal responsibility gives us an opportunity to promote a progressive agenda. What do you think we were doing in the 1990s? (Scattered cheers, applause.) We were building the capital needed to make the hard decisions, and they knew it. So at the end of the Clinton administration, when we had a balanced budget and a surplus, that was not just to put a checkmark in history against the Clinton administration and say, "Oh, look what they did." That was to equip us to do what needed to be done in reforming Social Security the right way -- (scattered applause) -- reforming Medicare and Medicaid the right way, making investments in clean alternative energy, dealing with global climate change -- (cheers) -- making health care available and affordable to every single American! That's what that was for! (Cheers, applause.)

And sometimes I think our opponents understand us better than we do ourselves because we have to put fiscal responsibility back at the core of the progressive agenda or we will never be able to achieve our goals, and that is equally true when it comes to national security. Because of our fiscal recklessness, we are undermining our ability to lead the world in the way that I think it should be led. You know, we have done so little to send the message to friend and foe alike that the United States wants to lift up the rest of the world, not put it down. (Applause.) We want to be partners, not opponents.

We borrow money -- \$60 billion of it -- every month to maintain the Republican Party's spending habits. And where do we go to borrow that money? Well, we go to China or Saudi Arabia or Japan or South Korea.

Recently the top 10 holders of American debt -- guess who broke in as number 10. Mexico. (Murmurs, scattered laughter.)

I believe in maintaining our own fiscal sovereignty, but we're giving it away. And when I travel around upstate New York -- and we have so many wonderful people who have seen the plants close and move to China, or move somewhere else, and they come up to me, and they say, "Senator, why can't we get tough on China?" And I'll say, "Well, I agree with you." They manipulate currency. They steal our intellectual property. They don't abide by the rule of law and contracts. But do you know how tough it is to crack down on your banker? (Laughter.)

You know, this administration has rendered us weak. You know, they have the toughest rhetoric in the world. They -- much -- they must watch old cowboy movies 24 hours a day. (Laughter.) But when it comes to actually being tough and strong, they leave a lot to be desired.

We need to be building alliances instead of alienation around the world. And we need to be reaching out in an effective way to fight HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria. (Applause.)

I have legislation that calls for the United States to help put children in school around the world. It is not only the right thing to do, particularly because so many girls are left out of school -- (applause) -- but it would help provide an alternative to the madrassas that teach hate.

You know, if you're a poor villager somewhere, and somebody comes to you and says, "Would you like your son to have an education?" -- you're going to jump at the chance because there's no school in your area. I've been in so many of these countries. Sometimes they build a concrete building with maybe a chalkboard and a few chairs, and that's the school. There's no place for students to go after the sixth grade, or maybe there's a place down the road that the boys can go, but nobody will let their girls travel alone. And so when someone comes and says to that village family, "Would you like your son to have an education?" -- well, the answer is most likely going to be, "Of course. We dream of it."

So off they go to these madrassas, where they don't learn; they are given a view of the world. They memorize the Koran, in a language that is often not their own, and that's what passes for their education. And they are taught to fear the modern world. They are taught to hate freedom and our values.

So why doesn't the United States go on record and say we're going to help send children to school, so that they can be part of the new world we want to build together -- (applause) -- that they won't be taken advantage of, they won't be turned into jihadists or terrorists? (Applause continues.)

Many of us have said -- and I know many of you in this room have said that we want to support our troops. And we should. These young men and women are among the very best we have to offer, and we need to keep faith with them and make sure they have the body armor, the vehicles and the other equipment, materials and training they need. (Applause.)

And now that there is a new Iraqi government -- something that many of us have been waiting for and pushing for -- then this Iraqi government needs to be told, they have to take responsibility for their own security and stability -- (applause) -- that there must be a plan that will begin to bring our troops home because they have to take the priority of making sure that they have a unified government that stands up to the militias, stands up to the death squads. That is not the job of the American military. (Cheers, applause.)

Our job is to do everything we can to help this government succeed. And it will be difficult and dangerous, but I am hopeful that the administration -- which doesn't listen to any of us, anyway -- will finally realize that the policies it has pursued from the very beginning, when they rushed to war, when they refused to let the U.N. inspectors conduct and complete their mission, when they committed strategic blunder after blunder, has undermined America's leadership in the world and has put at risk the long-term war against terrorism.

Since 2003, the United Nations has been on record as saying we must try to help Iraq succeed as an independent, democratic government able to take care of its own security and run its own affairs. That is why Zarqawi targeted the U.N. mission, because the U.N. understood that once we were in this situation that was a determined decision by the decider about what he was going to do -- (laughter) -- we had to work our way out of it. And that is what I and the majority of senators on both sides have gone on record for. We voted in a bipartisan way to make it clear that this was a year of transition.

But I have to just say it -- I do not think it is a smart strategy either for the president to continue with his open-ended commitment, which I think does not put enough pressure on the new Iraqi government, nor do I think it is smart strategy to set a date certain. I do not agree that that is in the best interests of our troops or our country. (Cheers, boos, applause.)

It is also important -- it is also important that we recognize the real dangers we face. And sometimes this is a difficult conversation, in part because this administration has made our world more dangerous than it should have been. We were united as a nation after 9/11. We had a commitment that we were going to go after the people who had attacked our country, and this administration didn't follow through. And now we have problems in Afghanistan, we have problems in Iran, we have problems in North Korea. We have a really competitive challenge from China. We need steady, smart leadership, and the only way we can begin to get that is to elect a Democratic Congress that can hold this administration accountable and ask the hard questions and chart the new course that we need! (Cheers, applause.)

And the second-most important thing to do is to have a new energy policy so that we are not dependent upon regimes that are going to undermine our security, our economy and our environment. (Cheers, applause.)

So there is a lot of work to be done. And I have been inspired and energized by the activism and the commitment to a new progressive agenda. It is what I have worked for and cared about my entire adult life. But if we're going to win in November, then we have to be smarter, tougher and better prepared than our opponents, because one thing they do know how to do is win. And we have to reach out to people who may not yet agree with us, and we have to talk about the range of issues that are on their minds, that they talk about around the kitchen table.

We have to ask them if they're satisfied with a government that is undermining personal privacy, civil liberties, civil rights, our constitutional democracy, because I don't think most Americans are.

I've increasingly had Republicans come to me and say that they've had enough. And I say, "Well, why? What's happened?"

And they say, "I didn't sign up for all of this."

"What do you mean by `this'?" For some, it's the deficit and the reckless fiscal policies. For some, it was the unbelievably shameless exploitation of Terri Schiavo and her family in a moment of great tragedy. (Applause.) For some, it was the assault on Social Security. For some, it is the Iraq war, and our failure to protect our homeland with the incompetent policies and misplaced priorities of this administration. For nearly everyone, it was Katrina; how could we let that happen.

Well, the best way we can prevent it from ever happening again is to stand up, stand up for progressive values and progressive politics, but stand up for winning elections. Because we can yell at the TV set -- now that I have TiVo, I yell at it again -- but we've got to win elections, or it won't matter. So let's make sure our elections are of integrity -- (cheers, applause); let's make sure we count every vote -- (cheers, applause); and let's take back the Congress in November and begin our return to take back our country! (Cheers, applause.)

Thank you, and God bless you. (Cheers, applause.) Thank you all.

(End of remarks.)