

Every declared Presidential candidate was invited to deliver a speech on public policy issues and policy alternatives at the Take Back America conference. The Campaign for America's Future and the Institute for America's Future do not endorse candidates.

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Presidential Candidate

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Campaign for America's Future / Institute for America's Future

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Thank you very much! Thank you very much, Bob Borosage. I didn't hear all of what you had to say, except that I hope you took some credit for helping me get elected in the first place in 1992.

You know, I recently have returned from New Zealand, where I served as Ambassador to both New Zealand and Samoa. The indigenous, native people there are the Maori people, and I was honored to be the first United States Ambassador to be made an honorary Maori. But I want to share with you a perspective that the Maori have as a part of their own ancient philosophy that is very different than ours, but I think very illuminating in terms of the relationship of the past, the present and the future. We tend to think of the past as something that is behind us, something that is over and done. Something that we just don't pay much attention to. And the future is something that stands in front of us, the glorious days ahead that we're moving in the direction of.

The Maoris see it as just the opposite. They see the future as standing behind. The future is, after all, mysterious, unknown, unknowable and so it is what is behind you. It is the past, in that view, that stands in front as a guide. It's what you know, it's what you've experienced, it's what you've already done. And to Maoris, having the past in front means that the future is something that gets created by your actions in present time. What you do in present time, in relation to where you've already been, will create tomorrow's reality. The whole challenge to every generation is to take that present time and transform it in relation to the future, into a better future, into something that moves ahead.

I mention that to you because I think the lessons from our past as Americans are very instructive to us as we debate the direction in which we will go. As we look at the challenges facing our country, taking the fullness of our past as Americans, the good, the bad, and the ugly, all of it, and looking at it in relation to us, where we are now, will help us to create a future that is better than what we inherited. That, after all, is our responsibility as a generation.

And so, of the lessons from the past, I want to share three particular observations, as we talk about the issues that are taken up by members of the campaign. The first is that progress is not linear. It does not move in a straight line. It moves in fits and starts, and stops, and about two steps forward, three steps back; it moves gradually. The question

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for us is whether or not that progress will be something that moves in the direction of a vision of a future that we embrace, or a vision of a future embraced by someone else. The lessons of our past have been that we have moved in fits and starts in the direction of the promise of liberty, guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. In fact, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called the Declaration of Independence, "a Declaration of Intent." He made the point that it was a Declaration of Intent because when the Founding Fathers wrote that document and said, "we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal," what they wrote were not truths. Or at least, they were not self-evident. Women could not vote, blacks were three-fifths of a person for purposes of the census, poor people were not enfranchised. The Founding Fathers sketched a vision that was not in evidence at the time that they wrote it. But our country has moved in the direction of the expansion of liberty to all Americans over time. And instead of actions that have not been linear, but have always moved in the direction of justice, as Dr. King again said, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." That is the direction in which we have continued to move. So when you fight for choice for women, when you fight for affirmative action, when you resist the extreme political agenda of This Crowd (that's what I call them), when you do those things, you are giving life to the promise of that Declaration of Intent. You are moving the arc of the moral, you are pushing in the direction of the promise of liberty that we all embrace as part of our Constitutional birthright.

The second message, a second lesson from the past, is that we have to keep to the moral high ground and meet greed and hate with a message of hope. Many of the people in this room who fought for civil rights will recall that when Chaney and Goodman were murdered in the South, all that came of it was an ennobling and inspiration for non-violent resistance to what was American apartheid. We claimed the moral high ground and were able to move our country closer to the direction of that Declaration of Intent as a result of it. If we go to another episode in American history and look at what happened when the excesses of capitalism and the robber barons came at the turn of the century, what happened, what came of that when that collapsed? It gave rise to Social Security, and FHA, and VA housing, and the GI Bill. We moved in the direction, again, of expanding the blessings of liberty because we had claimed the moral high ground.

Today, as people are rallying around extremists who would go around bombing—Americans who would go around bombing, like Mr. Rudolph and many others—we have to remind the people that as Americans, we're all in the same boat. And that leaves no room for that kind of extremism. We have to bring people together to provide for the security and the harmony of the whole community.

My campaign for the Democratic nomination for President proceeds from a passionate patriotism that can show America the way to rebuild, both physically and spiritually. This economy has to work for everybody, not just the wealthy. And frankly, the budgetary and fiscal policy of This Crowd gives voodoo economics a bad name. Trickle down economics fails every time they try it. I was on the campaign trail convinced that I could

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make the statement that this kind of economic policy does not work for the American people. This Crowd has made it so bad, and gone so extreme in their decision making, that the American people will recognize this immediately. And then I ran into a statement that was made as part of William Jennings Bryant's famous Cross of Gold speech, which I know will be familiar to some of you. I want to read this, this was in 1898 and I just want to read this little part because it was really kind of perplexing to me.

He said, "There are two ideas of government. There are those who believe that if you will only legislate to make the well-to-do prosperous, their prosperity will leak through on those below." Sound familiar? "The Democratic idea, however, has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous, their prosperity will find its way up through every class which rests upon them." And so when I read Williams Jennings Bryant, I came back to what I started with. The Maori idea that if we put that in front of us, what that tells us is that it is our generation's time, our turn to take the same fight and carry on the same message to the American people and that's what this campaign has got to be about.

Rebuilding America means investing and creating good jobs, not just in rebuilding our public schools, but also rebuilding our cities, rebuilding our roads, building new industries through technology transfer and financial support of environmental initiatives that would lessen our dependence on foreign oil and address the neglect and abuse that our water, air, and land have suffered under This Crowd.

Rebuilding America means investing and reforming the way we pay for education. There is no good reason why the cost of schools is still borne by local property taxes. We have a national interest in educating a work force that is capable of meeting the challenges of this global economy. So instead of ascending the state's unfunded mandates, like No Child Left Behind—which in some parts of the country they're calling No Behind Left—we would do well to help states that are drowning in a sea of red ink by expanding the federal contribution to elementary and secondary education from the 6 percent. That's all we're paying for now, 6 percent of the costs for elementary and secondary education. It should be a scandal. We can expand to 10 percent, we can expand the federal roll and help local communities fund quality schools by rebuilding their schools and providing technology support and assistance and letting locals use the money that's freed up to enhance programs, to support their teachers and to better educate our children.

Rebuilding America means, to me, providing universal health coverage. Not just by tinkering with the current employment-based system, but by shifting to a more elastic, more progressive and less burdensome funding base on working people, as such is the income tax. But most importantly, or as importantly, rebuilding America, to me, means restoring hope that we are as Americans clever enough to defeat terror without destroying our own liberties. That we can lead this nation and the world out of strength and purpose, instead of fear and uncertainty. This President was the first in history, as far as I have been able to determine, to use the occasion of the State of the Union

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address to call on the American people to imagine the worst that could happen to them. This administration has destroyed not only Iraq, but also relations with our international institutions and with our closest friends in the world. They are using, and I'm going to be just as straightforward as I can and as honest as I can about this, this administration is using our pain out of 9/11 as a smokescreen for an extreme political agenda.

I'm going to digress and get in trouble again. I went to a dinner last night and the Vice President made a joke about somebody's phone being tapped. And it wasn't funny. They're tapping our phones, and emails, they're rolling back freedoms we thought we had, people are disappearing in this country for the first time, they're trying to pack the courts with right wing ideologues, and give those ideologues a cloak of judicial authority. They're spending trillions of our dollars on military misadventures that have little to do with bringing to justice those criminals who visit terror on American soil.

You know, when you come from the south side of Chicago, you sometimes can make analogies of things that may not resonate with a whole lot of people, but I'm going to make this analogy anyway. What they've done is the functional equivalent of someone having a crack house down the street from them, with murderers in it who killed their brother-in-law and their sister, and going in and blowing up the crack house while the murderers got away! That's what they're doing. They have not only said, you know, where's bin Laden? bin who? As Harold Washington would say, "I looked for bin, I said 'bin, where are you?' And I went to Baghdad and I said, 'bin, are you here?' and I went to Afghanistan and I said, 'bin, where have you been?'" And we still haven't found bin Laden, much less the weapons of mass destruction, but the fact of the matter is Bob Graham was right, we not only let them get away, but have given them room to regroup and recruit. Not in my name!

Okay, I'm really going to get ugly now. This un-elected President is acting on an illegal grant of authority that the Congress should never have given in the first place. I carry the Constitution with me everyday and Article 1 makes it clear that it's their job to declare war, not pass it off to an un-elected Executive Officer. This administration has made decisions that have made the American people less secure and more bombable, all the while pandering to fear to keep us in war until the elections are over.

Lesson three, as we look at our past is that every person makes a difference. Laws, policies, politics all arise out of a climate of opinion. A climate of how people see an issue. And I like to say that the climate of opinion is just like any other weather system, it depends on the hot air rising from the ground. And so, I'd like to in closing take this moment to thank and congratulate the Campaign for America's Future and all of you who support this campaign, for what you do to create an climate for inclusion, for community, for civility and for the promise of our Constitution.

Our generation must not become the first generation to leave less for the next generation than we got from the last one. And your work helps to reveal reality to the American people and to create a path towards justice. I am grateful that you stand for

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and work for the truly big tent. That you work to empower women, to take the message of hope to minorities and working people and progressives all over this country, and help to bring a voice and a perspective that makes a difference. That is the reason why I am running for President of the United States. I've served in New Zealand where the country is on its second woman Prime Minister, both parties, both parties! Both parties had women in leadership in that country. Creating a climate of opinion in this country that having a woman in leadership is not a stretch of fantasy, but rather an opportunity to tap talent that might not otherwise have a chance to contribute. I believe that as a candidate, and as President, I can rebuild and transform policy in this country. And with your help, with your support, with your prayers I look forward to doing that. As the Maori people would say, everything has a time. I believe it's time. Thank you.