

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.

HOWARD DEAN
Presidential Candidate

Take Back America Conference
Campaign for America's Future / Institute for America's Future

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Thank you. You know, Paul Wellstone and Sheila Wellstone were extraordinary human beings and one of the things I always liked about Paul Wellstone, something that I now share, and something that's going to be the slogan for this party during this election, is that, "we're going to be from the Democratic wing of the Democratic party!"

I want to thank Bob Borosage and Roger Hickey, and all the folks that put this together. A little while ago, some folks on K Street decided they didn't like my elitist point of view. I welcome the opportunity to talk about how elitist all those people who didn't get that tax break were. The President says he thinks the military is great, he's all for the military, how come all those folks in the military didn't manage to get that Child Tax Credit Exemption for their kids? How come folks in the military are on food stamps, Mr. President? Military are people too, don't just send them to Iraq, how about taking care of them when they get back here?

Before we get into the red meat, which will be really great, let me thank you for what you're doing. Last night 32,000 people met in this country, in nearly 300 cities to figure out how to make Dean For America the campaign that wins back the White House for the Democrats in 2004.

The next biggest campaign had 1,000. I went to Seattle about two weeks ago and 1,200 people came out to hear what I had to say. In the middle of the speech I stopped and said, "if you have not been involved in politics in the last 10 or 15 years, please raise your hand." Six hundred people raised their hand. I think the Democratic Party has made a fundamental mistake in the last few years, thinking that we're going to win by being like the Republicans. What we need to do—and the way we're going to win—is not to plant our flag in the middle of the shrinking rightward-moving electorate. We need to understand that a lot of people have given up in the last 10 years. They don't think it makes any difference which party gets elected. But we're going to give them a reason to vote this time and we're going to put our flag in the middle of where America ought to be and bring people to us!

I believe in balanced budgets because I think that if you don't have a balanced budget you don't have social justice. I realized that when this President passed his second round of tax cuts, this was not his ideological adherence to a discredited economic

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theory, supply side economics. This was a simple attempt to de-fund the federal government, remove all the new deal programs. That is not what America is all about! We need to repeal the Bush tax cuts, all of them.

Now, lest our friends at the other end of K Street think, "oh my goodness, how's this progressive Democrat going to get elected talking about the repeal of the President's tax cuts?" We aren't going to just go out and say we should just repeal the President's tax cuts, because if we do people are going to say "No." What we're going to do is respect the voters for a change and say, "would you rather have the President's tax cuts, or would you prefer health insurance for every man, woman, and child that can't be taken away? Would you rather have the President's tax cuts, or would you like to fully fund Special Education so we stop pitting the parents of kids with disabilities against the parents of kids who don't have disabilities? Would you rather have the President's tax cuts, or would you rather invest in infrastructure and balance the budget so we can have jobs in this country again?" I think that most Americans are going to say, "I'll take jobs, health care, and education because I didn't get the President's tax cut." I said this one time in New Hampshire and a guy got up and he said, "well, Governor, you may make some sense here. I got that \$600 check from the President. But my 401K went down \$60,000, I think I was better off before the President's tax cut!"

I want a foreign policy that is consistent with American values. I find it hard to believe that I'm the only major candidate running, who's in reasonably good shape in the polls, who voted "No" on the Iraq Resolution. I don't think this is a matter of being a pacifist, I think most of you know that I'm not one. I don't think you can run for President if you're not willing to use the military might of the United States in defense of our country. But Mr. President, where are the weapons that you told us about, where is the evidence? Where is the evidence that those weapons were going to Sadaam Hussein? All the Democrats [were like] "oh, oh! This is a clear and present danger to the United States!" It is? Well let's see the evidence now, and let's not give the President of the United States the authority to go to war any more, timed six months in advance of that presentation of that evidence, like before the election. We can do better than that! We'll defend our country and we'll use the military power of the United States to do so if necessary, but we're not going to lose nine American soldiers every week in Iraq because we can't figure out how to bring democracy to Iraq and make a long-term commitment to building middle class nations with Democratic ideals, where women fully participate in the governments of those countries. That's what our foreign policy should be about, because that's a long-range strength for our foreign policy.

I want health insurance for every American and I've got a plan to do it. It's based on what we did in Vermont. You simply expand Medicaid, you call it another name, everybody under 25 gets health insurance. And if you want, if you don't fit into those categories and you don't have it, you can buy into the same program that your Congressman gets for 7.5% of your gross income. It works, it works, it's reasonably cheap, less than half of the Bush tax cuts, and most importantly overall, it will pass.

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To be honest with you, I'm tired of having the ideological debate in the Democratic party over whether we ought to have a single payer or something else. Because when we do, the Democrats fight among each other, the Republicans and their special interests kill the bill, and the 42 million people in this country with no health insurance go for another 10 years, until there's another Democratic president, without health insurance. That's not what we want! We're going to end up with a comprehensive plan that will pass, insure everybody, and then we're going to have a big fight about how to reform the health care system, but we're not going to keep those 42 million people out in the cold anymore.

Now here's the problem. The Democrats and Republicans have been arguing for a long time about the Patient's Bill of Rights: who should be covered, who shouldn't be covered. The truth is, the Patient's Bill of Rights is a great thing. If it passes or not, it's not going to cover one more American, as health insurance isn't going to be five cents cheaper. What we ought to be demanding as Democrats, is what Harry Truman put in the 1948 Democratic Party platform: health insurance that covers everybody, just like they have in Germany, France, Costa Rica, Israel, Canada, Japan, Ireland, Italy, and Great Britain! Every single industrialized country on the face of the earth has health insurance for all of its people. Mr. President, why can't we have what all those countries have? Why can't we have what all those countries have? Why are Americans second-class citizens, Mr. President? We can do better, we can do better.

People say, "well, we can't beat the President. He's so strong on Homeland Security." 98% of all the [inaudible] containers that come in this country are uninspected. The Russians have stocks of enriched uranium and plutonium that we were supposed to be buying, but we spent the money kicking Saddam Hussein out of Iraq. States have been promised a lot of money to deal with health care, to deal with defense, to deal with state troopers and first line responders. We haven't seen any of that money and we have no renewable energy program in this country. Or let's drill in the National Parks so our oil money goes to the Middle East to fund terrorism, Mr. President. Don't tell me how strong you are on Homeland Security until you stop talking about drilling in ANWR and start talking about renewable energy and a sustainable economy.

We need, if we're going to win this election, to stop thinking the way they think inside the Beltway. This President's not popular because people like his policies, he's popular because people think he's a strong leader. And you know what, Bill Clinton said five or six months ago that "America will always vote for someone who's strong and wrong before they'll vote for someone who's weak and right". We appear to be weak and right, we appear to be willing to say whatever it takes to get elected. As long as we're willing to say whatever it takes to get elected, we're going to be in the minority party for a long time. You know what, those folks at the Democratic Leadership Council were wrong. The way to get elected in this country is not to be like the Republicans, it's to stand up against them and fight!

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The most despicable thing this President has done is to use the word "quota" five or six times on the evening news. The University of Michigan does not now have a quota system and it never had a quota system. And the word "quota" is a racially loaded word designed to appeal to people who are afraid they're going to lose their jobs, their places in the University, to people of color. We should call the President on that stuff and not back away from it.

Let me tell you something. In the last two years, we've lost 2.5 million jobs under this President, we've lost the respect of a lot of people nationwide. Of all the things we've lost and the thing I want to get back more than anything else, is our sense of community. What we have lost, is the understanding that everyone of us is responsible for each other. I am tired of the divisive politics which say that every person for themselves, and if you're poor, well that's just too bad for you. And if you're middle class, well that's just too bad for you. Who do you think is supporting all those tax cuts? It's middle class people whose property taxes are going up because there's no more school aid. It's middle class people who are afraid they can't send their kids to college and they can't pay the tuitions because there's no more higher education aid. It's state governments who are raising taxes and local governments who are raising taxes on middle class people and working people because all that money was taken out of Social Security and taken away from property tax payers. I think most people would rather have a property tax cut than an income tax cut any day of the week.

Here's what I want. I want a country where we admit as citizens that it's not just my kids that need health insurance in my community, that every single one of us as a citizen of the United States has an obligation to make sure that every kid in America has health insurance. That it's not just my kids in my school in my community that need to have excellent public schools. We have an obligation as citizens and Americans to make sure that every kid in America has decent public schools. That's what this country is about. The biggest lie that people like me tell people like you at election time, is that if you vote for me I'm going to solve all your problems. The truth is, that you have the power to change this country. Not me. You have the power to vote for a President of the United States who will balance the budget and create jobs. You have the power to insist that the President of the United States join every single other industrialized country in the world and have health insurance for all Americans. You have the power to give the 50 percent of Americans that don't vote and the 80 percent of kids under 25 that don't vote a reason to vote again. Abraham Lincoln said that a government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from this earth. This President has forgotten ordinary people. You have the power to take back this party, you have the power to take back this country, we have the power to take back the White House in 2004 and if you make me the nominee of the Democratic Party I will make you proud to vote Democratic again. Thank you very much.