

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

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Thank you very much and good morning! You know, the President keeps telling us that he wants to have a debate about values in 2004. We're going to give him a debate about values, because this President's values are not the values of the American people. I grew up in a family where my father worked in a mill all his life. When I was young, we moved from mill town to mill town, finally settling in a small town called Robbins, North Carolina. We did it because my father believed in the basic American bargain: if you work hard, you're responsible, and you play by the rules, you can build a better life for yourself and for your family. This President is doing everything in his power to break that bargain every single day. He is betraying the American people. He comes from a completely different place. He comes from a place where wealth is inherited, not earned. He comes from a place where we make sure we value wealth, not work. He believes in making sure that those who have it, keep it. That they are part of an exclusive club. That we put up barriers, that we put up walls, that we close doors. We are about knocking those barriers down, knocking those doors down, giving opportunity to every single American!

The fundamental difference between George Bush and us is that he honors wealth, and we honor work. We believe in giving real chance to every single American. He takes the side of insiders, we take the side of regular Americans. Look at the decision allowing media giants to own more of the airwaves. Five hundred thousand people commented to the FCC, a handful of people supported what was being done. The FCC went ahead anyway. It's bad for our democracy, it's bad for free expression, it's bad for rural America. Yet they did it. You know why? Because the insiders were for it, and this President is for it. It is clear that he will always stand with the insiders against the interests of regular Americans every single time.

Look at this tax cut. It's about exactly the same thing. He's about rewarding wealth, not work. He wants to make sure that we leave out millions and millions of working families and put a priority on cutting taxes for those who get money from trust funds, instead of those who drive the cars and answer the phones for those who get money from trust funds. Under the Republican plan, if you're a wealthy investor, you pay a lower tax rate than the men and women who mow the lawn, answer the phone, and wash the car for the wealthy investor. These guys are making it tougher for working dads to get \$400 from an earned income tax credit, while they're letting corporations shield \$40 billion in offshore tax havens. These are not the values of the American people!

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What's the thread connecting all this? They value wealth, they want to protect it. They value wealth, while we value the work that creates it. We cannot play defense with this President, we must play offense. We must take this right at him, in the toughest possible way. This is a fight about values, this is a fight for the American people and it is a fight we will win!

This President believes that the way we get this economy moving again is to help insiders. I think we need to do exactly the opposite. We need to take on these insider deals. There is not just an economic crisis on Main Street America, there is a moral crisis in corporate America. I want business to succeed, I want CEOs to succeed, but I want them to succeed by doing the right thing -- by helping their workers, by doing right by investors. Today we are seeing extraordinary irresponsibility in some corporations. I'm not just talking about WorldCom and Enron. Look at what just happened at American Airlines. Working people were willing to take big cuts in pay and benefits to keep their company going, to keep their company out of bankruptcy. While they were making those concessions, the top executives were squirreling away \$41 million to protect their own paid pensions in case the company went bankrupt. According to Fortune Magazine, CEO pay last year rose by 14 percent at the same time that the value of the companies went down 22 percent.

This is wrong. It is morally wrong and it is wrong for the economy. People work hard if they believe that they are working for a company that's doing the right thing. Families are going to invest more if they believe the information they're getting is actually accurate and they can trust what's going on. This is why I am proposing a new Shareholder and Worker's Bill of Rights. It is not complicated.

First, it's time for pension fairness to make sure that what happened at American Airlines never, ever happens again in America. We need a Right to Know law for CEO pay to make sure the companies that are getting big tax deductions for big pay only get them when that pay is actually linked to the performance of the companies. Finally, we need to bring democracy into corporate boardrooms. Shareholders should be able to nominate board members so they can have a say in how the company runs. Shareholders and workers need a seat at the table. They need not find out what happened months ago behind closed doors. This will make our economy stronger, not weaker. This will restore confidence in markets and it will restore fairness on the factory floor.

I also want to take a minute to talk about health care today. It is a disgrace, in a nation of our prosperity, to have 41 million Americans without health care. Last year, at some point during the year, there were over 70 million Americans who did not have health care. We're going to change that, we're committed to changing it. We have 9 million children without health care. Over the coming months I'm going to lay down a very clear plan about what needs to be done to move us in the right direction.

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Today, I want to focus on one element: cost containment. We are going to have to have the courage to fight against this culture in Washington and to take on the big pharmaceutical companies, the big HMOs, the big insurance companies. This is not an either/or choice between controlling costs or expanding coverage. We need to do both. The truth is, that the only way we're going to be able to cover millions more Americans and achieve the other priorities in our country, improving our schools, investing in preschool and afterschool, strengthening Homeland Security. The only way we're going to be able to do that is if we take on these corporate interests and bring costs down.

So let me talk to you today about one area where we can seriously lower costs. Prescription drugs: one of the largest factors driving up costs in health care today. Congress will debate a prescription drug benefit over the next month. We need to pass a real prescription drug benefit, no American should be choosing between their food and their medicine. But, we cannot afford a real drug benefit unless we address and take on the cost of prescription drugs. This is an issue that needs our commitment as a nation. It goes to a fundamental values difference between George Bush and us. This is a question of whether we're going to put consumers first, whether we're going to put the American people first, or whether we're going to put corporate interests first. This President has made his priorities absolutely clear. He wants to force people into HMOs in order to get a prescription drug benefit. Drug prices won't go down under his plan, but benefits will go down. I've got to give this president credit. He was elected by the big drug companies, by the big HMOs and the big insurance companies and he has served their interests very well, every single day that he has been in office.

We need to pass a real drug benefit, and we need to make it a part of Medicare. But we have to bring down the cost of these drugs. This will be a very tough fight. The big drug companies plan to spend \$150 million this year to lobby the government so they can remain the most profitable industry in America. One-hundred-fifty million dollars! Imagine what could be done if that money were being invested in research and development? There is nobody that has more lobbyists on Capitol Hill representing their interests and nobody pushes harder. They don't just push you to vote a certain way. If you vote against them, if you stand up for the American people against them, they come after you. The pharmaceutical industry is important, they can do some very good things. They develop therapies that save people's lives and medicines that improve our quality of life. They deserve a reasonable profit for what they do. But what they don't deserve is to inflate that profit by stifling competition, gauging consumers, and cutting secret deals at the expense of patients and taxpayers. The President of the United States ought to be on the side of patients and taxpayers, not protecting the profits of pharmaceutical companies. So let me tell you what I'd do, six steps I'd take. Some of these things the President can do himself with just the stroke of a pen.

First, we should stop these misleading drug advertisements that flood our homes every single night and drive up the costs of providing prescription drugs. If we're going to have these ads, they should be held to a much higher standard of accuracy than they meet today. These ads promise miracles without explaining the risks. They say you'll be

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running around a field or dancing with your spouse every night in the kitchen. We live in the real world, don't we? They don't tell you how sometimes the drug might not be much better than a sugar pill. Or, that a similar drug will get you exactly the same result for much less money. At the end of the day, these ads are about one thing: making billions of dollars for drug companies. That is no surprise, because pharmaceutical companies spend way more money on marketing than they do on research and development. The Bush administration has actually made it harder for the FDA to get misleading drug advertisements off the air. I want to make it easier. We need a new law that says prescription drug ads on TV have to meet a simple test: the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. They have to tell consumers what the drug's side effects are, what they cost, and how they stack up against the competition. They need to double the enforcement of the FDA and enact tough new penalties for drug companies that violate these laws and air misleading ads. We are not selling paper towels here! This is about people's lives.

Second, we need to stop these backroom deals that are going on between drug makers and Pharmacy Benefits Managers, PBMs. It's pretty simple. PBMs are basically HMOs for drugs. They do some good things, but a lot of what they do, no one knows about. The manufacturers pay what amounts to legal kickbacks to the PBMs and the PBMs promote the drugs, their drugs, even if they cost more. Even if they are more expensive than the alternative. The PBMs push the drugs, and they pocket the kickbacks. We should require full disclosure of all of these deals. This system exists for patients, not for PBMs.

Third, we need to use the purchasing power of Medicare to bring the costs for Medicare down. It's pretty simple. The more you buy, the less you pay. The administration actually wants separate HMOs to buy drugs to pay the drug companies more. I want Medicare to buy drugs so we can pay drug companies less and the American people pay less for their pharmaceuticals. We ought to be negotiating for good prices, if it doesn't work we should require a rebate in Medicare. Just as Medicaid and large private purchasers already get a rebate.

Fourth, we need to crack down on drug companies that are cheating taxpayers by overcharging Medicare and Medicaid. I would direct the Justice Department today to conduct a top to bottom review of price fixing of the drug industry. For companies that are breaking the law, I would enact tough mandatory new penalties. If you are a drug company CEO and you defile the public, you ought to be held responsible for the consequences.

Fifth, we need to stop drug companies from keeping cheap generics off the market by using legal loopholes to extend their patents. Today, drug companies stop the competition by filing ridiculous new patents. One company applied for a new patent on an old drug because they said they wanted to sell the pill, the same pill they have been selling for over a decade, they wanted to sell it now in a brown bottle instead of a clear bottle. This is their excuse for keeping a monopoly and keeping generics off the market.

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Last year, Senators Schumer, John McCain, and I wrote a bill that would stop these games and reduce the cost of drugs by \$60 billion. What a surprise, the President blocked the bill because the pharmaceutical companies were against it. We have a chance to pass this bill this year and we should. Right now. Today. We have worked out a deal that will get this bill out of the Senate and we need to get it done.

Finally, when it comes to drug patents we need a real, honest investigation of whether our patent system is working, whether it's working for the American people. Are we actually encouraging real innovation to cure diseases? The vast majority of new drugs today are "me, too" drugs that provide healthy profits, big money for drug companies, but they don't do a single thing to improve people's health. These are real hard questions. We need a non-partisan commission, a commission not controlled by the drug companies, to do a top-to-bottom review of these laws to make sure they're working.

This is going to be, every step of the way, a very tough fight. But, we are going to do something about the cost of health care in America. We, the Democratic party, the leaders of the Democratic party, and our Presidential candidate. In 2004, our President has to be willing to stand up to big pharmaceutical companies, stand up to big HMOs, stand up to big insurance companies and fight the fight for the American people. That's what we're about.

I want to end today with a subject that's personally very important to me. I know that you're going to have some other speakers talking about this during the course of your conference. I serve on the Senate Judiciary Committee, I see these judges that are coming out of the White House that are lifetime appointments to the Federal bench. Let me be very clear about something, this is not about statistics. This is not about how many judges got confirmed in the Clinton administration, how many judges may be confirmed in the Bush administration. I want to put this in simple stark terms. Some of these judges, they will take your rights away. It is no more complicated than that.

I grew up in the South, in a small town out in rural North Carolina. It is so important to me that we not go backwards in the cause for civil rights. I was brought up to believe in an America where we embrace and lift up everybody, no matter who you are, no matter who your family is, no matter what the color of your skin. If we're going to move forward in the march to civil rights in this country, well we actually have to have judges who will enforce our civil rights laws.

The President is dead wrong about the Affirmative Action program at the University of Michigan. I personally filed a brief in the United States Supreme Court in support of the University of Michigan's position. And just so you know, I feel a personal responsibility to lift up people who today, not 40 years ago, today still suffer the effects of discrimination every minute of their lives. We live in an America where African-Americans make about half of what white Americans make. We have work to do! We have work to do in the march for civil rights in this country!

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Just so I'm clear about this, this is not just civil rights at stake, equal rights are also at stake. A woman's right to choose is in jeopardy every single minute this President is in the White House. These judges are looking for the opportunity to erode Roe v. Wade. You will never hear a word out of this White House about a fundamental issue of equality. We are living in an America where women are making \$0.76 on the dollar for doing the same work men are doing. How are we going to have equality in America until we actually pay women the same wage we pay men for doing the same work?

Finally, the subject that people here in Washington will tell you that you shouldn't talk about. This is politically dangerous. You know you need to be careful, you need to be cautious, I've heard it over and over and over. Well, I have traveled the country and I will talk about this subject every day of this campaign. I will talk about it when I am the Democratic nominee for President. I will talk about it when I am President of the United States, because I believe it goes to the heart and soul of what makes this country great. We cannot, in an effort to protect ourselves, in an effort to fight this war on terrorism, let people like John Ashcroft take away our rights, our freedom, and our liberties. Those three go to the heart and soul of what makes this country great! We cannot let them take the fabric of America! Thank you! Thank you all very much. Thank you for having me.