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

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First, let me express my thanks to my friend and brother, Gerald McEntee, for being such a fearless fighter for our working people, and to Bill Lucy. They both truly represent men and women who make up AFSCME, the union men and women who deliver our public goods, provide our services, protect us from harm and rush into burning buildings to risk their lives to save others. Like his members, Gerald McEntee is fearless and tough, and we are thankful for his leadership. A big hand for Gerald McEntee, please.

And to Fred Azcarate, bless you for Jobs with Justice, for your activeness, for day after day after day putting the street heat on the big boys. A big hand for Fred, please.

To Roger Hickey and my friend and brother, Bob Borosage, I thank you for putting on this conference. Thank you for building up this patch in our progressive quilt, so that it is bigger and stronger and ready to help keep us warm in the cold months to come.

When I ran for President in 1988, I would always tell the story of my grandmother. We were poor, so she used to sew together rags of many colors and shapes to make a quilt to keep us warm in the winter. Even in South Carolina, it got cold in the winter. I want to talk, today, about a real challenge to our coalition—a hard thing to heal and build. The thing about her quilt was that she took the rejected clothes—the old rags, the discarded refuse - and cast them together into a thing of beauty. And that's a lesson for us: The rejected stones of America can become the cornerstones of a new America.

And there's another lesson for us from my grandmother's quilt. All of the patches had their place. If any patch was missing, the cold air would come through the weak part and freeze us at night. But none of the patches was big enough to cover us by itself. All the patches needed all the other patches to work to keep us warm. And liberals, you are right in your analysis, but your patch is not big enough. In round numbers, you are alright, but your patch is not big enough. Union members, you are right, but your patch is not big enough. African-Americans, your patch is right, but you are not strong enough alone. Latinos, you are right, and your patch is getting bigger every day, but it is still not big enough. Women, you are rising, but your patch is not big enough. Peace activists, you are brave and you fought hard. We turned out 15 million on February 15, all over the world, but our patch is still not strong enough. Gays and lesbians, you are strong, but your patch is not big enough.

We need our rainbow of patches. Matter of fact, June 21-25 we are having our Rainbow/PUSH Convention in Chicago. And on that Saturday, we are convening state legislators from 20 states around the nation to work on a common plan for collective action focusing on poverty, predators, prisons, public education and voter registration. On that Sunday, we are going to address the convention, and then relate cities and their needs. And then, a candidate's forum at 3 o'clock. And then, the next day, convening a thousand churches to begin to teach people economic literacy and health literacy and voter registration. And then, on that Tuesday, convening international labor leaders and focus on a plan for labor to act and to go on the offensive again. Ty Willingham will address us from Notre Dame at lunchtime, saying that there's too many of our youth playing ball in March Madness, but to his immense sadness they are not graduating. We'll address that on that occasion. And then, business on that Wednesday. And then planning for a crusade across the South come this fall, as we seek to regain our nation. I urge you activists to be a part of that convention, June 21-25.

We must open the Democratic door wide open to Ralph Nader and the Greens. We need those 3 million votes. We cannot leave any element of our family behind and win. We need the black trade unionists. NAACP. Appalachian coal families. Native Americans. DNC. The family must function under one big tent. The big challenge is to heal and to build.

Remember in 1992, America, I gave you an example of the inner strength required to make opening the door back up a reality. In 1992, Bill Clinton's staff set me up for a deliberate snub at my convention. The infamous Sister Souljah incident. In the aftermath of that insult, as the media exalted in Clinton's guts, I had three basic choices. One: I could, in my bruised feelings, pout and sit out the 1992 election, and give just a little more support to George senior, de facto. I could two: exact payback, entering the race as a fourth party candidate. Remember at that point, Perot was leading and Clinton was running third. Or three: I could take the long view about what was good for our party and good for our people, accept Governor Clinton's prompt apology and move on.

The first two would have hurt our team. I would have gotten some gratification, some vengeance, but it was not the mature thing to do. The stakes were too high to allow private pain to outdistance the need for public policy. And so I took the hit, and then I tried to do more that fall to register and mobilize voters than anyone but the candidate himself. That was the right decision for 1992.

Now I ask you to make a similar and difficult decision, those of you who voted for Al Gore in 2000, as I did, must let go of your anger, must rebuild one big tent party. Those of you who supported Nader in 2000, release your pain. Iran and Iraq are just two of the many good reasons to come back home. For the sake of whatever little children will get bombed by the next chickenhawks, let's move on from 2000. Let's finally come round so we can have all our forces in the field to defend ourselves against these ruthless would-be emperors. Because we need all the patches on our quilt to stay warm.

These chickenhawks have announced a long-term project to rebuild an empire that would destroy our democracy. They expropriated an election in Florida in 2000. They manipulated an election in 2002. But if they fall behind in 2004, don't be surprised if they engineer another big threat to try to scare everyone into line by election day. They've not told the truth about the threat from Iraq. They have repressed the scent. Now they are saying that it doesn't matter whether they tell the truth or not.

And just last week they opened the floodgates to the big media bullies so that our side will get even less airtime. The FCC decision. It was sad that along ideological party lines they made the decision to give more to the few. What was even sadder was the absence of our party at the protests when that decision went down. Lest we forget that too few people owning too much media is a real threat to our democracy. And just as we have the right to be, we must have the right to be heard. Today, in Iraq, if the Shi'ites sought to own 75% of the media, to lock out the Baathites, the Sunnis and the Kurds, then that would be unacceptable. Because they would have had the power to determine our problems, politically and culturally and, in fact, squelch the chances for a democracy.

It is as true here as there. Too few people owning too much media isn't good for our democracy. And our candidates, our party, our activists and labor must not misread the implications of that decision on this past Monday. When they can target activists—target Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon and Danny Glover and they target Senator Byrd and they can target—they are not just covering news, they making news and, in fact, they are lying. Because they have the power.

There's some move on the affirmative action policy, by the way. University of Michigan is not supposed to help the African-American and Latinos to get to college, but the FCC wants to do all it can to help the super-rich Australians and big monies buying all the media outlets in sight. This crowd thinks ruling the world is their God-given right, but my Bible tells me a different story. My Bible tells me that by doing to others as we would have them do unto us, that by taking care of the least of these, that by feeding the hungry, not leaving 12 million children behind, that by sheltering the homeless—you do know Jesus was born to a homeless couple—that by embracing refugees, clothing the naked, beating swords in the plowshares. It tells me of the story of the Prodigal Son, about the father who welcomed him back with love and affection, and that we need to welcome back members of our family. Through all this, we might have a patch strong enough to win and survive.

I know that every now and then, Washington likes to handicap the races - the media loves it. I've heard a lot of talk lately, in this party and in the media, about who can win, about the electability. Well, I've got an idea. Let's give Democratic voters a chance to decide who is electable and who is desirable. There is an important corollary here, especially for those of you who have run with the elite circles. Don't be too quick to abandon your principles in the search for a winner. Sometimes, as Paul Wellstone

taught us, the principles are what makes the winner. Jim Hightower said that every now and then, a politician should do something just because it's right and that's enough.

Now when, in 1988, people told me I was the best candidate, had the best ideas, won all or most of the debates, had the most votes from a rainbow of voters, had a good campaign—even raised \$17 million, which no one believed we could do—but they said that I couldn't win. I ran anyway. In 1984, our campaign helped register 2 million new voters. In 1986, we took back the Senate while Ronald Reagan was at the height of his popularity. Winning has many manifestations. In 1988, I won 13 primaries and caucuses and 7 million votes and more delegates than any runner ever, but they said I still couldn't win. And in part it was the logic that I couldn't win that kept me from going all the way.

But the votes and forces we helped unleash within our party helped elect the first African-American governor of Virginia, the first African-American mayor of New York, the most rainbow U.S. Congress in history, the first African-American female Senator and helped Bill Clinton and Al Gore win the popular vote three straight times. Neither Clinton nor Gore won the majority white vote, even with the gender gap. The margin of victory came from African-American and Latinos, as it will in the year 2004.

And so, look around you today. This is a big conference, a glorious conference, an inspiring conference. We're about to have an inspiring millionaire's march over to the house that Dick Cheney is illegally squatting in today. Before you go, think about the patches and colors that are still not in this room, in the number that they need to be. Think about how you are going to reach out to them—I mean seriously reach out to them—with money, attention, publishing. You want to take back America, but keep in mind: Some of the people who we need, who built America, never had the chance to own that much of America to take back in the first place.

It's another lesson Paul Wellstone taught us, what made Paul so different. He not only talked the talk, he walked the walk. In 1987, he managed my campaign in Minnesota. He defied popular wisdom and, with that, he won the US Senate and would have kept it, had he been alive. To build a big quilt in 1987, along with Jim Hightower and Gweneth Sumners and Sissy Bolinvol and Jan Pierce and Lear Wipunsinger, and a few other brave souls, Paul Wellstone crossed the color line and endorsed me for President. The smart plan would have been Simon or Dukakis. But Paul crossed the color line, and took a risk - a risk for principle - he supported me and, three years later, he won a seat in the US Senate. The only Democrat to defeat an incumbent GOP Senator in that year. A lesson for our times.

Paul's lesson of crossing the color line is especially important now. Because the road to this White House leads through the red states. And the road to take back the Senate leads through Illinois and Pennsylvania and a host of Southern states. And that means we must cross that color line. To win in the South, we must register and vote in the hundreds of thousands of African-Americans and thousands of new Latino residents,

because our winning coalition is in the South. It must be black and white and nut brown and male and female.

In 2000, Al Gore got cheated out of Florida by Katherine Harris, a butterfly ballot, uncounted votes on some old and tired voting machines, and a partisan decision by five Supreme Court injustices. Lest we forget, in every state today, there are more blacks in jail than there are in college. Somehow, someway, we must choose schools over jail. We must somehow get these persons back. We don't need to build more jails because we're scared. Build more job training centers, more drug rehab and put these youth back to work, and we're bringing them home again.

We love them in uniforms. We love our soldiers, but not our veterans. We love them. And they'll tell you that we love them in football uniforms. The civilians, we profile them and arrest them. We must go a better way and be a better nation.

Al Gore lost New Hampshire by 7,200 votes. We can win. He lost Ohio, Nevada and Missouri by only 3.5%. The five key states lost by a handful of votes, with thousands of progressives unregistered and thousands more not voting. We lost the governor's race in South Carolina by 40,000 votes, 40,000 blacks unregistered. We lost the Senate vote in Georgia by 50,000 votes, 600,000 blacks unregistered. The once Democratic solid South has become the totally Republican solid South. We need to bridge that rift between the white and black Southerners. Beyond matters of race divide. Beyond matters of fears that divide.

What do blacks and whites in the South have in common beyond pulling at the football game when Alabama plays Auburn, South Carolina plays Clemson and Florida State plays Florida. In the stands, there are black and white mothers and fathers on both sides. They move beyond skin color to uniform color. What do they have in common besides the battlefield? The need for healthcare pensions. The need for retirement security. The need for high-quality public education for all children. George Bush is offering the photo ops, an empire, tax cuts and the fear of terrorism. Our agenda is better for them, for their families and the future of their children.

But we've got to get out of Washington to reach the voters where they should be ours. To register them. To mobilize them. To redeem the South and rescue our nation. We can beat George W. Bush again. All the talk about a winning message. I know what the winning message is. The message should come out of what's right for our people. The good news is the message can work for us. The message is not tax-and-spend Democrats. It's not cut-and-scale Republicans. Our message is invest and grow in shared economic security.

So, invest and grow. Invest and grow in shared economic security. Invest in public schools. Invest in public housing, affordable housing. Invest in college tuition. Invest in public infrastructure. Invest in 12 million children. Invest in teacher training. Invest in Head Start. Invest in high tech skills. Let's invest and grow. Invest and grow and put America back to work. We don't need to give back to those in the surplus. We need to

invest in the potential of the under-served Americans. Invest to close the vertical gap, to close the digital divide, to close the North/South gap, to close the gap between the surplus culture and the deficit culture.

We know that there's an inverse correlation between investing in Head Start and prenatal care on the frontside and poverty and welfare on the backside. We can get beyond the race divide. We can take away race-baiting wages. We can take away the fears that put people huddling in hunger and deprivation. Most poor people are not black. They're not wild. More whites live in affluence than there are blacks in America. A coal-miner dies every six hours from black lung disease. Most poor folks are not on welfare. They work everyday. Speak to them. They'll vote for us.

Lastly, the Red Zone. In football, they say, around the 10 yard line, where it's hard to get yards, it's called the Red Zone. Many players are very good around the 50 yard line, when defenses are spread out. It gets tougher in the Red Zone. In the 1960s, the struggle for public accommodations, the right to vote, to break down the cotton curtain, came from the South. The Red Zone of divide came in fear. The rise in fear led to a massive shift of whites toward the Southern Republican party. They are not wealthy. Their jobs are in jeopardy. Their kids go to substandard schools. Their jobs do not pay health insurance or a living wage. Half of all the toxic waste dumps are in the South, in their neighborhoods. Many activists steer away from in the Red Zone. The most uninsured seniors, the most uninsured women live there, the biggest education gaps are there, yet they are driven by fear to vote against their own interests in the Red Zone. They have nothing to gain from the economy, the same with all those tax shelters and tax rebates to the top 1%. But they are driven to vote, by fear, against their own interests and not for hope. We must not let them stay there. We must lift them up to where they belong.

We also notice in the South, by the margin, are hundreds of thousands of African-Americans in despair. Their spirits must be revived. Their hopes must be rekindled, or they will not vote, and we lose a race in Georgia by 50,000 votes. Six hundred thousand blacks unregistered. We must go another way.

Lastly, to score, we must march through the Red Zone. The closer we get, the more intense the resistance. Sometimes we will have to attack, and sometimes defend. We must never allow Tom Delay and Karl Rove to use our dreams as punching bags or treat our allies like sitting ducks. Politics is a contact sport. When one of us is attacked, we must all strike back. Never again should we allow the right wing to compare Tom Daschle to Saddam Hussein, while we just lapse. We have to stand up and fight back.

I say, it's time to march again. We've lost three million jobs in two years. We've lost \$5 trillion in stock value. Billions in 401K plans decimated. Pension plans stolen. Enron, Halliburton, MCI, World/Com. Scandals, immorality. No enforcement of OSHA or EPA. We must march again. We've lost jobs: in Massachusetts, 71,600. It's time for our workers' march. California, 250,000 jobs lost. It's time for a workers' march. North Carolina, 125,000 jobs lost. It's time for a workers' march. Ohio, 130,000 jobs lost. It's

time for a workers' march. Michigan, 110,000 jobs lost. It's time for a workers' march. Texas, 130,000 jobs lost. New York, 107,000. Pennsylvania, 170,000. It's time to march again. It's time for a workers' march.

We need to join hands in labor, the members of our Democratic family, those who most of all need the jobs, and job security and healthcare. It's time to march across these states in a gigantic march on Washington. In a working-people's march - a working-people's march on Washington. Break your spirit - it gets difficult sometimes. They say marching doesn't matter. Marching does matter. Marching inspires us. Marching matters. The more you march, the better you feel. Marching matters. It wakes up sleeping people. Marching matters. It worked for Moses. It mattered. It worked for Joshua. It matters. It worked for Gandhi. It matters. It worked for Martin Luther King. Marching matters. In the fall of 1968, Dr. King was killed. On June 5, 1960, Robert Kennedy was killed. Last year, Paul and Sheila Wellstone were killed. And so, Dr. King cannot march today. Paul and Sheila cannot march today. Robert Kennedy cannot march today. We who are in that tradition, march for them. March for the future. March for hope. It's dark, but the Lord has come. The Lord is our light. We do have the power. And nothing is too hard for God. Keep hope alive. Keep hope alive. Keep hope alive. March on.