

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.

JOHN KERRY
Presidential Candidate

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

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Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen. It is great to be with you, not just in a Campaign for America's Future, but at the place where we will begin to write the history of America's future. And I'm proud to be here with all of you today. I saw that the President was down in South Carolina a few of days ago. He got an honorary degree and I've been trying for the life of me to figure out what the degree was in. But one thing's for certain, it wasn't in economics. I think the only nine jobs created in the last few years are the nine of us running for President of the United States! I was also in Florida a couple of days ago and a person came up to me with these eyes agog and a great voice, and said to me, "what's it like to be running for the most powerful office in the land?" And I looked at him and said, "I don't have a clue, because I'm not running for Secretary of State of Florida."

But I am here today with a message for the President of the United States. Mr. President, when I was in the Navy I learned something about aircraft carriers, for real. And landing on an aircraft carrier at the hands of a good, well-trained Navy pilot does not make up for a failed economic policy in this country. It doesn't make up for union busting, it doesn't make up for degrading our environment, it doesn't make up for standing in the way of civil rights, and it won't convince America to allow you to privatize Social Security. Americans, Mr. President, don't want a photo opportunity, they want job opportunities, and it's long since time that we created them in this country.

I am running for President of the United States to put America back on track, to put Americans back to work, and to make it clear that the one person in the United States who ought to be laid off is George W. Bush. I believe that Americans deserve a government that has as much faith in the ideals of America as Americans do. And they deserve leaders for whom citizenship and responsibility are principles, not punchlines. Yet for these people in this administration, those words too often have become little more than a backdrop for their political events, background music for their march to replace shared sacrifice with selfishness. With George Bush in the White House we have seen a "Get Mine and Get Out" ethic that glorifies the creed of greed. Polluters are given a free pass, powerful corporations enjoy sweetheart deals at the expense of everyday Americans. Lobbyists come in from the cold on a daily basis and write laws favoring the companies that pay their lavish bills. Insiders ride a revolving door between the White House and major industries. And failed CEOs get golden parachutes while

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their employees get pink slips. And for the first time in this nation's history the most privileged among us got a tax cut while we were at war.

I am running for President of the United States of America to bring leadership to the White House that puts country ahead of campaign contributions. When I am President of the United States, we will have a government that again puts values into action, not just words, and that shows compassion in our achievements, not just in our rhetoric. It is time that we had a President who doesn't just talk about family values, but who values families in the policies we present to the nation.

I'm angry, and I think all of you are, about the way this administration sides with the insiders, the influential, those who have the power to parade their extraordinary sums of money in Washington. Almost 100 million dollars a month, spent to get the Congress to do something or to stop the Congress from doing something. And usually it's a power exercised behind closed doors with privileged secrecy that they deny a spotlight on to the American people. I stand before you as the only person elected to the United States Senate four times without ever taking a dime of soft money, special interest PAC money, or independent expenditures. I will be a President who will get the money out of American politics and restore the democracy of our country for all Americans.

There have always been two views in this country. One side says that if you give those people at the top enough money, well they'll be kind and compassionate enough to share their riches with everyone else. That's Calvin Coolidge economics and under George Bush, it has brought us a Herbert Hoover economy. Then, there is the Democratic view, which believes that America is built every day by average men and women who play by the rules, get up and do their part to do what's right. They raise their kids, they help their neighbors, they try to give something back to community and charity in a world where life has become increasingly difficult and pressing so that it's harder and harder to find the time to do the things that define citizenship, and yet our leaders don't even put those issues on the table for us to discuss. These are people who don't ask for special favors, or for a special break, they just want to be treated with fundamental fairness, and they deserve to be treated with fundamental fairness. I believe it's time we had a President who was literally on the side of the many, not the few. A President with a real economic strategy to get this country back to work and that means investing in people, investing in our communities, restoring fiscal discipline. It means standing up and being counted when corporate excess takes place, not standing in the way of the reforms. It means that when executives from Enron walk away with the retirement savings of countless numbers of Americans, they go to jail and we recognize they need to do that.

Never before in this country's modern history has there been a reversal of economic proportions of what we've seen in these past two and a half years. We've gone in record time from record surpluses to record deficits as far as the eye could see. From high growth to no growth, and from job creation to job destruction. The two and a half million jobs lost and climbing are a statement of the priorities of this administration. Just the

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other day with a stroke of a pen, this President left 12 million children behind because he thought it was more important to give a tax break to people earning more than \$200,000 a year. And we believe it is more important to give those workers earning \$10,000 to 26,000 [a year] the chance to raise their kids and be full citizens in the United States of America.

I'm tired and I think you are of listening to so-called leaders who talk about the virtues of heroes in America, who talk about the need to honor community and honor American values. Well, I've got news for this administration that is so quick with the rhetoric and so slow with the policies that make a difference for the lives of Americans. As they talk about the heroes of New York, they need to be reminded that every single one of those police officers and fire fighters and emergency medical technicians who climbed those stairs so that others might live, so that they might save the lives of their fellow citizens—every single one of them was a member of organized labor and they believed in the right to strike! They believed in the right to organize! They believed in the right to have a wage and to be treated decently in this country!

Those people deserve to be rewarded, and not with the cheap words of politics. They deserve to be rewarded by standing up for the rights of working people in America. Everyday in this country, there are countless numbers of our fellow Americans, your neighbors, members of your families, your friends, who get up and go to work and they go to a workplace that's safe. They go to a workplace where they may have a pension. They have health care, they have decent wages. They aren't members of a union. But there's only one reason they have the benefits that they have. Because once upon a time, people went out in this country and stood up against corporate power and fought for the right of people to be able to organize and do better!

I've been 18 years in the United States Senate and I'm proud of that service and proud of those fights. Proud of standing up to Ronald Reagan and his illegal war in Central America. Proud of blowing the whistle on Oliver North. Proud of standing up and blowing the whistle on Noriega and his involvement with the CIA and drugs, and banks that came into our country to operate illegally. Proud of fighting for democracy in other countries. But I will tell you my friends, it is critical that we now have a President who recognizes that no longer in the United States of America can we call ourselves civilized or call ourselves responsible, when we are the only industrial nation that treats our children as recklessly, and with as much abandonment, as we do in this country. I believe there is no greater challenge than proving to America that our schools are not a photo opportunity for tomorrow's front pages, they are a place for excellence and learning. A place for nurturing. A place to protect and develop the skills of those who aspire to be citizens of our country, but who through no fault of their own live in chaos and a lack of opportunity. I will crisscross this country, from coast to coast, state to state, community to community, and I will hold this President accountable for making a mockery of the words, Leave No Child Behind!

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We will fund education and we will fund special needs. And I am running for President because I am not content, as an ex-Prosecutor, to run a farm system for the prisons of America. It is long since time that we made an adult decision. You want a tax cut in America, I'll give you a tax cut, America. Rather than spend \$50,000 a year to house people in jail for the rest of their life, let's invest in early childhood education, in Headstart, Early Start, in those things that give kids the chance to lift themselves up for the future.

In the 1960s, President Kennedy challenged our great nation. He challenged us to go to the moon. He did it, he said, not because it was easy, but because it was hard. He had confidence in the entrepreneurial capacity of America, confidence in the spirit of the American people. And we did go to the moon. We did it in less time than the President challenged us. I say today, that we need now in this great country of ours, to literally go to the moon right here on earth by deciding that we will never again have our young men and women in uniform held hostage to our dependency on Middle Eastern oil.

I intend to be the President who will set a goal for the United States that by the year 2020, 20 percent of all our electricity will be produced from alternatives and renewables, and I will go further than that. I will go further than that. I will embark this nation on the greatest journey of all, and the most important. We transitioned from wood to coal. Coal to oil. Oil for a period of time to nuclear for some part, and other alternatives. We need now to ask ourselves to harness the capacity of our great universities and laboratories and the capacity to create the high value-added jobs of the future by declaring that our generation will leave for the next the ability for the United States of America to be energy independent and to create the jobs that go with it. That is the challenge for the United States of America.

I am running for President of the United States because I think it is imperative that we have a President who will appoint an Attorney General of the United States who respects and understands the Constitution of our country. And there will be no John Ashcroft trampling on the rights of Americans. I think we need a President who has the experience and the vision to make this country safer, stronger and more secure. Throughout the last century, Democrats have been the party that provided Americans with security at home. We're the party of economic security, of the minimum wage, of workplace security, of the right to organize and the party of retirement security, Medicare and Social Security. But we have also been the party of National Security. Of the tough-minded strategy of international engagement and leadership, forged by Wilson and Roosevelt in two World Wars and championed by Truman and Kennedy in the Cold War. They spoke out for an America strong because of its ideals, as well as its arms. I learned firsthand, as others in this audience have, what it means to fight in a war when you lose the consent and the legitimacy of your country. I learned what it means to make those choices and I learned that our strength as a nation is not defined by what drops out of the belly of the B52, or flashes out of the muzzle of an M16. It is defined above all by the way in which we care for our children and our seniors, for the infirm, the way we reach out to each other in this country and renew our bond of citizenship. Never

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before has there been so much to do in the United States of America and so little asked of us. I believe that we need to speak out as Democrats for a strong America and we need to understand that to make the world safe for democracy and individual liberty, we need to build the international institutions that are dedicated to establishing the rule of law over the rule of the jungle.

For us today, the past truly is prologue. The same principles and strength of purpose that guided Roosevelt, Wilson, Kennedy, and Truman need to guide us today. Our task is to forge a bold progressive internationalism for the new age. As I said last summer in New York, for Democrats to win America's confidence, we must first convince America that we will keep them safe. You can't do that by avoiding the subjects of national security, foreign policy, and military preparedness. As President Clinton said a month ago, the 2002 election proved that strong and wrong can beat weak and right. I believe that I can bring a vision of American involvement and leadership in the world that lives up to the highest standards and values of our nation and that provides the Democrats with the capacity to be strong and right at the same time for America.

I say to you unabashedly that I come to you as a Democrat who is unprepared to allow those who reflexively oppose any US military intervention anywhere or who see US power as mostly a malignant force in the world, or who place a higher value on achieving multi-lateral consensus than necessarily protecting vital interests of our nation. Americans deserve better than the false choice given by this administration between force without diplomacy and diplomacy without force. I believe they deserve a principled diplomacy backed by our undoubted military might, based on enlightened self-interest, not the zero-sum logic of power politics. A diplomacy that commits the United States to lead the world toward liberty and prosperity. A bold progressive internationalism that focuses not just on the immediate and the imminent, but on insidious dangers that can mount for years.

I say to this President and this administration, rhetoric about draining the swamp of terrorists is insufficient. You cannot drain the swamp of terrorists unless you are prepared to address the dilemma of nations like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, where 65-70 percent of the population is under the age of 30, 50 percent under the age of 18, and they are all unemployed and unemployable. The United States of America must engage with the world, not turn its back on global warming treaties, not refuse to talk to North Korea, not refuse to be involved in Russia. We need to set the example to the world. Over the next years and decades we need to move from destructive weapons that consume us today to dealing with endemic poverty and epidemic disease. The export of capitalism – democracy – is not a one way street, it is a street for all of our fellow human beings to do better and to reach the rights that we have achieved in this country.

I say to you with the utmost seriousness, if Democrats are not prepared to make America safer, stronger, and more secure, for all we care about all those other issues we will not win back the White House and we won't deserve to. Because this administration is timid when it ought to be bold, bumbling when it ought to be smart,

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and, to borrow a phrase, "When it comes to Homeland Defense, this administration has left those on the front lines high and dry." We should not be opening firehouses in Baghdad and closing them in New York City. To an administration that lived up to its own rhetoric about smoking them out of the caves and "Wanted, Dead or Alive," would have sent American forces, the best troops in the world, not Afghan warlords who a week earlier were fighting on the other side, into Tora Bora to attack and capture Osama bin Laden and the leaders of al-Qaeda.

A truly strong President would have recognized that the war on terrorism is not ended in a triumphant visit to an aircraft carrier. As we go forward, those challenges will require American leadership and American engagement in the world in ways that go way beyond the willingness of this administration. Today we have 200,000 troops in and near Iraq. We face other threats in many other places. We need allies in this world to win the war on terror, to share the burdens. And that is why I and others thought it was so critical to build a broader coalition, because when you do, you take the target off the American soldiers, you reduce the cost to American taxpayers, and you strengthen the legitimacy of America's involvement.

But terrorism, my friends, is the new fascism. Make no mistake about it. It is the new communism. It is the new totalitarianism. And a grave and global threat to our values and to the values of other nations elsewhere. We can defeat it, we must defeat it, but it will not come mostly in military form, because it is more than intelligence gathering and law enforcement operation. I believe above all that to win that war on terror we will need levels of cooperation with other countries that are unprecedented, and in order to achieve those levels of cooperation, even this mighty military power, the United States of America, needs to make some friends on this planet and we'd better get about the business of doing it now.

I ask your help in this race. Not for me, my wife, my family, for some kind of personal effort. But for us, for all of us. For the hopes and aspirations of a great nation that deserves the opportunity to make real choices about our lives, real choices about how you put Americans back to work. Real choices about how you build strength and how you pursue policies that are fair to all Americans. As President, I will lead and I will make America stronger for all Americans. And we will be able together, I think, to take the "For Sale" sign off the government of America and crack down on insiders, not coddle them.

I was reminded literally as I walked in here. I said, "You know when you're running around campaigning you lose track of the day." And today is June 6th. It is a commemoration of D-Day, but it's much more than that for many of our generation. This last night, 35 years ago, is the night that I returned from my first tour of duty from the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam. And the first radio that we picked up as we approached the coast of California was the returns from the Ambassador Hotel of the primary victory of Robert Kennedy. And then of course, the kitchen and the shots. And today is the day that Robert Kennedy was lost to America and that his campaign was lost to that fateful

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moment of time. I will never forget sitting in front of a black and white television set spending a lost weekend watching America say goodbye and listening to my colleague now of 18 years, Senator Ted Kennedy, deliver a eulogy in St. Patrick's Cathedral. In which he reminded us and seared in me forever the words of the poet George Bernard Shaw. "Some men see things as they are and ask, 'why?' I dream things that never were and ask, 'why not?'"

I want our party and our country to become again a nation where our politics dares to ask, "why not?" Why not, in the richest country on the face of the planet, stop being the only industrial nation that doesn't provide affordable health care to every single American as a matter of right, not privilege? Why not stand up for jobs, stand up for the environment, stand up for children, stand up for health care, stand up for our cities, our rural communities, all of them hurting today. Why not make real choices for this great nation of ours and write history?

This is a young experiment, this nation of ours. It is an evolving experiment, and it is defined by the willingness of all of us to be involved in our politics and to try to make a difference, and we must ask our nation and our neighbors, "why not" again in this country. We must do so building the most significant grassroots movement we've ever built in the history of the nation, remembering that GOTV does not mean "Go On TV", it means "Get Out The Vote!" And I promise you a campaign that is clear and unequivocal, clear in each of the choices we will present this nation. All the loopholes we will close for those who go to Bermuda to escape their burden of taxation. Clear about how we will provide affordable health care, where every single American will have the right to buy into the same plan that the President and Senators and Congressmen give themselves at your expense. Clear about how we make America safer and stronger and lead on this planet.

It is clear to me that we have a record to be proud of, ambitions to fight for, and I pledge to you that I will wage a campaign that makes it clear to all citizens that the one thing we don't need in America is a second Republican party! Thank you and God bless.