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

**Plenary: A Program for a New Majority**  
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Well, let me calm you all down a little bit. Let me open this wonderful session and once again thank everybody at Campaign for America's Future for the hard work of putting this together and bringing so many wonderful people into this room. Let me say that, for myself, I'm quite honored to be up here in front of all of you, and also to be on this panel of so many hard-working and distinguished people who I am looking forward to introducing. I'm looking forward to joining all of you in talking about this agenda of taking back America. Thinking about the very broadest of agendas, about how we engage everyone across the country, in politics, in democracy, in participation and involvement, in the work that all of you have been doing every day. And how we make sure to continue to do it in the long term, as Ellen Malcolm said, and in the short term in the issues that we care so much about.

I want to talk briefly about a couple of lessons that I've learned along the road, as I think about the work that I do every day, and the work that I share with so many of you. Those of you who know me know that I come from the state of Maine. I actually come from a town of 350 people. I always say that most everything I needed to know about politics, I learned on an island 12 miles off-shore. I learned the lessons of small-town America that are true to many of you, in a community where people go fishing for lobsters and make their money from tourists in the summer. So don't forget, go visit Maine whenever you get the chance.

I started in local politics, working my way up, eventually becoming a chair of the school board and went on to serve in the Maine Senate for four years. And in the last session I ran for the United States Senate. Somewhere along the way, I learned more lessons. Often, they were things that people told me couldn't be done, and I just thought we had to go ahead and do them.

When I first decided to run for the Maine legislature, back in 1992, people told me two things. You have a geographic base of 350 people – you don't have a very good chance of winning. Even more than that, you represent a district – or you are attempting to – that would be 40 percent Republican, 40 percent Independent and 20 percent Democrat. You've got to start out with better numbers than that. But I had this idea that the people of my district would share the same values that I did. And if I had a way to look them in the eye and talk to them about how we share those values, I might have a chance of getting elected. So I started going door-to-door, as so many of you

have done over the years canvassing for the issues you care about. I knocked on doors through 17 towns across Knox County, Maine, and I said, "You know what, I care about the local school in my community. I care about making sure that you have a job where you can make ends meet. I care about making sure, in the state of Maine, that we have a clean and healthy environment to raise our children. I run a small business. I'm raising three kids. I'm active in my community. I bet there are a lot of values that we share." I listened to what people had to say. And you know, Democrat, Republican, or Independent, most everybody shared the same values. All I had to say was, "I want to find a way for us to work on this together." Well, when election day came, I won with 62 percent of the vote.

When I got elected to that district, everybody said to me, now this is how politics works. You've got to be strategic about this. You've got to throw one to this side, you've got to throw a vote to that side. You've got to calculate to make sure you keep everybody happy all the time. And then when you come back for re-election you'll have all these people who say, she voted with me, she voted for this. And, in the end, you'll win again. I thought about it, and I said, you know, the people elected me because of my values. The people elected me because they thought that I shared the same kinds of concerns that they had, and every time I take a vote, I've got to do what I think is right. Because frankly, as Bill Frist said, I did think I knew the difference between good and evil and right and wrong. And I thought I could share those values with my constituents.

Every time we took a vote, and every time I was asked to be a leader on an issue, I did what I thought was right. I stood up for increasing the minimum wage. I stood up on corporate accountability. I stood up on environmental laws. I stood up against the pharmaceutical industry. And every time, the voters sent me right back in there because they appreciated that I was standing up for what was right. It was an important lesson to me. People said to us in the Maine legislature, never take on the giants. When I became majority leader, they said you've got to raise a lot of money for your caucus. So stay away from the insurance companies. Make sure you're on the right side of the Chamber of Commerce. And whatever you do, don't take on the pharmaceutical manufacturers.

So, in Maine, in 2000, we decided to put forward a bill that said, we can lower the cost of prescription drugs and we can do that by controlling the prices that you're allowed to sell them for in the State of Maine. The pharmaceutical companies came to me and said, this is it, no more campaign contributions. And I said, you know what, sometimes you've got to stand up with the Maine Council of Senior Citizens and all the activists in our state and do what we think is right. We won in the state legislature on that bill. Thanks to the help of many of the organizations in this room, organized labor and people who stood with us. We had a vote in the Maine Senate where every Republican and every Democrat voted with us because they knew it was the right thing to do, and they didn't want to be on the wrong side. I was very proud to see, about two weeks ago, the United States Supreme Court had to vote in favor of the Maine Bill. And we won at the Supreme Court. That's brought me to the most important lesson – to never be afraid of the bold ideas. Because even though sometimes the other politicians are

afraid of them, you look right behind you and there are the people. They're right there with you.

In 2002, I decided I would run for the United States Senate. I learned a couple of important lessons in that race. You know, everybody said to me, here's how you win. The American public is divided, and everybody sits right there in the middle. So kind of soften your stand, and take a stand that looks kind of like the middle ground, and you'll make a few people happy on this side, and few people happy on that side.

Then I looked into my heart and I said, you know, I couldn't do that. I've been out there fighting the pharmaceutical industry, I believe in single-payer healthcare insurance. We've got to toughen our environmental laws. I think we have to stand up to big corporations who are using their money to influence us today. In fact, I don't think we should take on a war in Iraq. So, I took that stand in my campaign. And you know what I learned from that? My opponent didn't take the other side. She just moved as close as she could right next to me, and ran the best me too campaign you could ever run. In spite of that, we had young people knocking on doors, crossing Maine, talking to people, looking them right in the eye and saying, here's the values of this candidate, here's why you need to get to vote. I shook hands with as many people as I possibly could. We didn't win that race, but we got 42 percent of the vote, because we stood the ground of where we needed to be.

When you don't win an election, you get a lot of phone calls. People say, why don't you work for us. Why don't you think about this. I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to do next. I got a call from Common Cause, I asked a lot of people, what do you think about Common Cause? It's been around for thirty years. Is it the right place to go? Is it the right place to be in the fight? And I know there are a lot of people in this room who were probably members when this organization was first started thirty years ago. And one of the things I said is, do we need Common Cause anymore? Do we need this organization? And you know what everybody said to me is, we need Common Cause, we need organizations like this now, more than ever. And I'll tell you what I've found in the last two months that I've been in Washington, it is a wonderful time to be in Washington, to be one of the good guys. Because the bad guys are so bad.

When I think about the kinds of issues that a citizen's lobby can get involved in today, there is no end to the way that we need to make sure that people are talking about the issues, as many of you have been. The issue of what's being done in secrecy to take away your privacy. The issues of what's being done under the cover of war, and security, to allow government to be done in a way that's not open and accountable. The incredible influence of money and politics. The likely buying of the Presidency by probably the first candidate ever – George Bush – who may run not under the Presidential public financing system. And the incredible money that's being spent today to buy what's going on in healthcare. To take away the laws around the environment. To do damage every single day to the things we care about so much – particularly around the healthcare industry, where this administration has actually embedded

members of the pharmaceutical representatives right there in the White House every time you turn around.

We decided with MoveOn and Free Press and other organizations to get actively engaged about a month ago in this FCC media consolidation issue. As many of you know, and have watched this, it wasn't the vote that we wanted when the vote came down on Monday. But once again, it was another wonderful lesson for me. You know, everybody said FCC media consolidation, you know, it's kind of obscure. The American public doesn't really care about that. Like MoveOn, we decided we had to take out full-page ads in the newspaper. We worked with them to do wonderful work on that. And what we found was, we got more email contacts than on any issue we've ever done before. And what the FCC found, 750,000 comments later, was that groups as diverse as the NRA and the Family Research Council and NOW and the Pink Ladies were all concerned about this. And when I sat through one of the meetings that Commissioner Hobson and Commissioner Alisteen had, someone said, either the earth has spun off its axis, or we've found an issue that's fundamental to America. So, once again I've learned that we often have to go against the conventional wisdom, and find ourselves talking to America, looking people right in the eye, and talking about the very issues that we care about.

Now before I introduce the panel, I want to read one last short quote here. When I was thinking about coming to Common Cause, one of the wonderful things that I got to learn about was the history of John Gardner, who started this organization, back when their weren't any citizens activists organizations. And John Gardner had a slogan that was: "everybody's organized but the people." He was the Health and Education Welfare Secretary under the Johnson Administration. He was a Republican – the only Republican in the Johnson Administration. He was the creator of Medicare and one of the key architects of the great society, which we are seeing be dismantled in front of our very eyes.

And on August 18, 1970, he announced the formation of this new organization, Common Cause. And every time I read this, I think how true it is today what he said in 1970, to what we all have in front of us as the challenges right now. He said he was going to start a citizen's lobby to encourage citizen's participation in the revitalization of politics in government. He said many people today recognize that national priorities must be changed, but they don't know how to go about it. They are shocked by the fact  
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We want the phones to ring in Washington, and in the State capitals and town halls. We want people watching and influencing every move the government makes. We believe the problems of poverty and race must be among our first concerns. We will call for new solutions in housing, employment, education, health, consumer protection, environment, family planning, law enforcement and the administration of justice. We take the phrase Common Cause seriously. The things that unite us as a people, are more important than the things that divide us. No particular interest group can prosper for long if a nation is disintegrating. Every group must have an overriding interest in the

well-being of the whole society. It follows that our agenda must be an agenda for all Americans. For the poor, for the comfortable and those in between. For old and young. For black and white. For city-dweller and farmer. For men and women. And I don't think our agenda needs to be any different today. We have a tremendous amount of work. I have big shoes to fill. We all have big responsibility. Shame on us if we can't take back America. Thank you very much.