

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.

AL SHARPTON
Presidential Candidate

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

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Thank you. I'm very happy and honored to be here this morning and I'm very happy to join people that are not afraid to stand up and call themselves progressives at a time like this in American history. I think that the first problem we have facing the election in 2004 is that too many of us have been intimidated into apologizing for being right. There are those who say that as a Democratic party we've had to go to the right to win. The results are that today we do not control the Senate, the House, the White House or the Supreme Court. The sell-out of progressive politics has been a total disaster for the Democratic party. Not only is it morally wrong and politically cheap, it doesn't even work! The folks that brought us into this disaster should not be the advisors on how to get us out of the mess they brought us in.

We're coming out of a war that we still don't know why we went in. I was the first candidate to speak out against the war. I made it to all the marches – some candidates came late, left early. I opposed the war because I said it was wrong and there were not any weapons of mass destruction. They're still looking for the weapons. We want to know, where are the weapons that the Secretary of State brought evidence of before the UN? Where are the weapons that they had the video and the audio tapes of? If you could find the weapons before the war, how come you can't reveal the weapons now?

The other night, I was here in a Washington bar, and someone ran over to me and said, "Do you have a comment?" I said, "A comment about what?" They said, "They just indicted Martha Stewart." I said, "For what?" They said, "For lying." I said, "I didn't know you could get indicted for lying in this country!" We have come out of a war with weapons we can't find. God, our President told us a year and a half ago that we were going to go and get bin Laden! He can't find him. We had to go to Iraq to get Hussein. We don't know if he's living or dead, he can't find him. Everything Bush has gone after, he can't find! I shouldn't be surprised because I can't find the votes in Florida that made him the President in the first place!

Why am I running? First of all, in the year 2000, the principles of American democracy were undermined. There are those who say, "We should just get over it." This is the next national election since 2000. What they did in Florida must be answered at the polls in 2004. We don't have 5 votes on the Supreme Court, but we have millions of votes in the 50 states if we go and organize and mobilize and quit imitating the folks that we should be getting rid of!

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The Sharpton platform includes that we must make it a Constitutional right to vote. The argument before the Supreme Court in Gore v. Bush was basically that "states control voting." It was a states' rights argument. The Supreme Court went with that, kicked it back to the state of Florida, where Katherine Harris certified the election. The only way to avoid, or prevent that from happening again, is to propose a Constitutional amendment to give us the right to vote, therefore empowering the Federal Government over states. House Joint Resolution 28, House Joint Resolution 29 guaranteeing quality health care for all Americans and quality education. We cannot just keep arguing with the Republicans about program, without changing the premise. If we made it a Constitutional right to healthcare, we wouldn't be cutting bills in the midnight hours over prescription drugs when our grandma should have the right to drugs in America!

Our problem is, that we have too many leaders of the party who have been elephants running around with donkey jackets on, thinking that we don't recognize who they really are. You cannot be on both sides of the aisle. You cannot stand up for war in Iraq and occupation in Iraq and spending billions in Iraq, when we have 50 states with record state deficits. They say to us, "Well, you've got to understand Reverend, we've got to deal with occupying Iraq." What about the 50 states you already occupy? Then Bush proposes a tax cut. What is really a tax shift. By cutting as he has, it has caused state budget deficits to increase. Then they tax working class people with higher property tax, higher sales tax, higher mass transit. It's a working class tax. They shifted the burden over to us. We need to fight back. We don't need to fight back with a lower tax cut, we need to fight back with no tax cut. Put the money back! Use that money for the fundamental aims of this country to give children education. Not some children. Not privatization schemes. Not giving one a voucher, another child a school. Give them all a quality education. We can afford it if we wanted to!

I'm the only candidate that is unilaterally against the death penalty. It is embarrassing that a Republican governor in Illinois showed more moral courage than members of my own party. We need to deal with this! We must have real progressives that are real because they believe it, not just trying a campaign strategy. There are some that are running that have become progressive to distinguish themselves. Then there are others of us that have always been progressive to define ourselves. Many candidates support the civil rights movement. I was on the front line. Many support fighting for labor. I've gone to jail fighting for the right to work. Many supported stopping the bombing in Vieques. I did 90 days. I'm not a liberal support in progress, I'm a progressive born and bred fighting back and I'm not asking for your help now, I've always been there!

I met my campaign manager, Frank Watkins 27 years ago when I was the New York Youth Director of Reverend Jackson's organization. As I keep meeting these new progressives, I said, "Frank, was he in Rev. Jackson's campaign?" He said, "Nope, just met him." "Were they there?" "Nope, just met them." It's strange to me how people can come to us that scorned us, never walked with us, never supported us, and want to make some last minute road to Damascus convergence and expect us to support them,

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when we don't even know where they will be in 2005. I urge you, let's not play games with people that have never stood with us before. We can't win unless we build a movement! This can't be a clubhouse race with a nice, pretty resume. We've got to go to the streets, we've got to go door to door, we've got to get the disaffected, the disinherited. We've got to get America back so we can Take America Back!

I grew up in New York, but my parents are from the South. I had a grandmother who had a little farm in Alabama and I remember I used to ask her about different animals because coming out of the urban center, I didn't know that much about it. We didn't have a donkey, but I remember reading about a donkey and I asked her, "How do you handle a donkey?" She said, "Well, donkeys are stubborn. Donkeys sometime don't obey the will of those around them. But if you slap the donkey, you can make the donkey respond." There are those that say, "Reverend, don't raise progressive points! Don't say different things of accountability, that's divisive!" I'm not being divisive, I'm trying to slap this donkey! I'm not trying to hurt another candidate, I'm trying to slap this donkey! I'm trying to wake it up. I'm trying to get it up 'cause if I can slap this donkey, I can make it kick George Bush out the White House! We got to slap this donkey 'til we Take America Back!