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April 13, 2007

GOVERNMENT REFORM: Remarks on Government Reform

It is such a pleasure to be with all of you today at the Institute of Politics here at St. Anselm.

[Click here to read Hillary's plan for government reform.](#)

Thank you, Melissa, for that wonderful introduction. And I hope you will give me a copy of your thesis. I need to read that. Probably some very useful tips in it.

And thank you for welcoming us here. It is wonderful for me to have this occasion to be here at the institute of politics. It is a tradition that is certainly well-known far beyond the boundaries of this state. And I commend the college for having such an active interest and involvement in the political process of our country and having excellent students like Melissa who take advantage of those opportunities. This university for over one hundred years, has been inspiring young people like Melissa and I am convinced of the quality of this school's graduates that I'm looking to hire some of them. And I have already made one hire; Colin Pio, class of 2007 even before he has graduated to join my campaign. Contingent of course upon receiving his diploma. That is the requirement for the kind of employment we are going to be offering.

I'm here this afternoon to talk about the importance of government and how we make our government work for us. Now, I know for some that might be an unusual choice of topic in the "Live free or die" state, where the general feeling is, the less government, the better. But after what I have seen the last six years in Washington, I certainly understand that sentiment.

But what I want to talk about today has nothing to do with whether our government is big or small – and everything to do with whether it is competent or incompetent, whether it is corrupt or honest, whether it is devoted to the public interest or beholden to the special interests.

Despite their rhetoric, for the past six years, we've had an Administration that doesn't believe in less government or smaller government or better government. They simply have contempt for government. Though they lead it, they look down on it, they disparage it, they belittle it at every turn.

And because they view our government with contempt – they treat it with contempt. Since they don't believe government can be a force for the public interest – they treat it as a source of favors for private interests. They've created a government of the few, by the few, and for the few.

Our President has handed out jobs to his friends even when they were not qualified. Given out no-bid contracts to Halliburton – even after they overcharged us by hundreds of millions of dollars. Fired U.S. Attorneys who tried to uphold the law. Silenced government scientists who told the truth. Retaliated against a diplomat who refused to validate fabricated evidence of WMDs in Iraq.

Really, it is a stunning record of cronyism and corruption, incompetence and deception and it has shaken the faith of many Americans in our government.

When government consistently lets us down like this, we become cynical. We distrust our government – and grow to distrust democracy itself. We decide that politics is distasteful, and politicians just out for themselves, so why should we trust our government with our hopes, dreams and ideals?

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It really is a self-perpetuating cycle. Because this Administration doesn't respect our government, they run it poorly, and it fails our people. They then point to government's failure to prove it's not worthy of respect. And this just makes it harder for us to work on the critical issues that affect people's lives – health care, energy independence, making college affordable and so much else that people throughout New Hampshire and America talk to me about.

And today, our families are paying a steep price. Energy costs are up. Health care costs are up. Education costs are up. But wages and incomes are lagging. So while Americans are working harder than ever – they're falling further and further behind, and we're seeing more and more inequality.

It's like middle class and hard working families don't even exist to this Administration. It's like they're invisible. For six long years, our President has looked right through them.

If you were a victim of Hurricane Katrina – if you're one of the nearly 90,000 people still living in trailers – you're invisible.

If you're a soldier who returned from Iraq only to be warehoused in crumbling facilities at Walter Reed, fighting to get the treatment you need – you're invisible.

If you're a parent who can't afford childcare or a student who can't afford college, a family that can't afford to get by on the minimum wage – while the wealthiest of us get tax cuts -- you're invisible too.

Well, you're not invisible to the rest of America. And you're certainly not invisible to me. And when we take back the White House, you will no longer be invisible to the President of the United States.

Now, we know that government certainly isn't the answer to all our problems – that's not even close. But we also know that good government – smart government -- can be a partner for progress. It can help us solve problems and accomplish things together that we could never accomplish alone.

We've seen this in everything from the Peace Corps to AmeriCorps. From curing diseases to building the Internet. From the end of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo to the end of religious strife in Northern Ireland. This isn't about big government or small government – it should be about smart government.

And we all know that in order to meet the big challenges of our day – to lift up the middle class and hard working families – to establish universal health care, energy independence and fiscal responsibility – to end the war in Iraq and restore our leadership around the world -- we need a government that is ready to rise to the occasion and lead us to our goals. We need to return to accountability and a system of checks and balances – to a Congress that once again exercises oversight and accountability. We need a 21st century government to meet our 21st century challenges.

But in order to reclaim our government, in a democracy after all, our government is us. You know as Pogo once said, memorably, we've met the enemy and it is us. Well our government is us. So by denigrating our government we undermine our capacity to work together to solve these problems. So we have to change the way business is being done. And I think we start by looking at what we expect from our families, our businesses, and our communities – and then asking ourselves, why can't our federal government do that?

You can check your bank account online. Why can't you go online and see how your government is spending – or misspending – your tax dollars?

You go to the ATM, stick in your card, and get money – why can't our government transfer medical records from the Department of Defense to the VA?

You make a budget for your family, and you don't spend what you don't have or what you don't need – why shouldn't our government do the same with our federal budget?

You trust your doctor to give you honest advice about the medicines you take -- why can't government scientists do the same when they regulate our food and drugs and study our environment?

Well, I believe our government can do all these things. And that we can be an example to ourselves and to the rest of the world. We can do it in so many ways. We can do it by leading through the government. We can be the institutional support for creating a market for energy efficiency. We can create the architecture for electronic medical records. We can provide information in a way that will enable us to do so much more in a cost effective way.

Now, I do know that people are cynical about our government and that's sort of the American birthright. But I believe that with the right leadership we can restore trust and faith in government. I believe America is ready for change. Ready for a new start. And ready once again to make this government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

We can re-establish the competence of government, the confidence of citizens in government, and the capacity of our government to set goals and achieve them.

Today I want lay out a ten point agenda to do just that – an agenda for government reform. A plan to enhance accountability and transparency. To make government more efficient and effective for taxpayers. To restore competence and end the culture of cronyism. To replace secrecy and mystery with openness. A plan to make our government work for all Americans again.

First, we need to close the revolving door between government and lobbyists. This is exactly what Governor Lynch did during his first term in office when he created an independent ethics commission and required every member of his administration to file public financial disclosure forms.

I think we should follow his lead in Washington, and I'll start by permanently banning any of my cabinet officials from lobbying my Administration once they've left office.

We've seen the consequences of what happens when we let the revolving door keep turning. The recent Medicare prescription drug bill offers a perfect example. By the time this bill became law, many of those who'd helped to write it and pass it had left government to become lobbyists for companies that sought to benefit from it. Well, the way I see it, people shouldn't use what they've learned on the taxpayers' dime to enrich themselves at our expense -- and we're going to put an end to it.

Second, we're going to strengthen whistleblower protections so we can root out corruption and cronyism, wherever it may lie. Over the past six years, we've seen one scandal after another at our agencies, from an official in the White House doing favors for Jack Abramoff to an administrator at the Department of Education buying stock in the student loan companies he was supposed to oversee.

And while whistleblowers play a critical role in alerting us to behavior like this, our whistleblower protection laws don't give people adequate protection – and too many are afraid to step forward. We've seen brave employees who speak up, stripped of their security clearances, pressured into resigning, or outright fired. Take the example of Jack Spadaro, a mining engineer who was head of the National Mine Health and Safety Academy. He blew the whistle on what he felt was a whitewash by the Bush Administration of an investigation into a major coal slurry spill. And he was subsequently forced out of his job. There are hundreds of examples like that.

We need to expand whistleblower protections to ensure that people who do the right thing are rewarded – not punished. That means protecting their anonymity – and protecting those who aid them as well. It means guaranteeing whistleblowers a true day in court. It means making sure those who are vindicated get real relief, including compensation, coverage of attorney's fees, and the option to transfer jobs. Because no one should be afraid to hold our government accountable.

Third, when I'm President, I will once again appoint the most qualified, dedicated,

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public-minded people to serve in government. Now, that doesn't mean that I won't appoint people who support me. But what it does mean is that this administration could have appointed well-qualified Republicans of independent judgment to positions of trust in our government. Instead, they often simply appointed their friends and supporters – qualified or not.

A Republican partisan whose job at the International Arabian Horse Association did not prepare him for a job heading FEMA. People hired for the Iraq reconstruction team based on whether they were pro-life rather than whether they spoke Arabic. They hired scores of environmental, health and safety regulators who came from the very industries they were supposed to oversee. And they purged the professional staff at the Civil Rights division in the Department of Justice.

Well, the results speak for themselves. Tragic incompetence in the Gulf Coast. Environmental standards weakened. Corporate loopholes widened. An industry-written prescription drug benefit that bars Medicare from bargaining for lower prices. And a Department of Justice that, between 2001 and 2006, did not file a single voter discrimination suit brought by African Americans or Native Americans.

Now, we tried to change this. When we were working to improve disaster response after Hurricane Katrina, I proposed that we require proper qualifications for the director of FEMA – something you would think you wouldn't have to write into the law. And my proposal eventually did become law. It was part of an overall reform package of FEMA. But when the President signed it, he specifically said that he wasn't going to necessarily follow the directions of having a qualified person head FEMA. He used what is called a signing statement, to pick and choose from the provisions in the law of what he would and would not enforce. We have to reign in these signing statements. The President has used them to go way beyond what any President before has ever done. And in effect to veto portions of bills that he just doesn't agree with.

Well when I'm President, the entrance to the White House will no longer be a revolving door for just the well-connected -- but a door of opportunity for the well-qualified.

And in order to attract the best people to government, I have joined on a bi-partisan basis with some of my colleagues in both the Senate and the House to propose a U.S. Public Service Academy – an undergraduate school modeled after our military service academies that will cultivate a new generation of leaders dedicated to public service. The Academy would provide a four-year, subsidized college education in exchange for a five-year commitment to public service after graduation. It will help us produce a new generation of law enforcement officers, of civil servants of experts who will dedicate themselves to public service. We're seeing the retirement of so many people who have been doing the nuts-and-bolts work of the government for many years. And we don't see the pipeline filling with people who are willing to take these jobs. And yet I know that many young people are ready, willing and able to answer the call to serve. But they often graduate from college with so much debt that they can't imagine going into a public service career. So I hope that the Academy will open the doors much more widely for young people who want to serve their country.

Fourth, we're going to stop outsourcing our government and put an end to the abuse of no-bid contracts. Over the past six years, this Administration has steadily outsourced critical government functions to private companies, adding more than 2.4 million private contractors to the federal payroll. And today, government contractors have essentially become yet another special interest, with the top 20 contracting firms spending nearly \$300 million since 2000 to lobby the government for more business to leave the government and come to them.

But these contractors, it turns out, are often more expensive than doing the work in the government – in fact, some contract employees cost twice as much as comparable federal workers. They're often less accountable and less competent. And just think of what happened at Walter Reed, when the Army was forced to outsource maintenance to a private contract contractor. The number of people doing maintenance dropped dramatically. The contractor cut corners, fell down on the job --

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and our soldiers paid the price.

All too often, this Administration has handed out government contracts without even shopping around for the best price. Today, there has been an explosion in no-bid contracting, with almost half of the \$329 billion spent on federal contracts being done now on a no-bid basis. The result is fraud, waste, and abuse everywhere from Afghanistan and Iraq to the Gulf Coast.

I propose that we eliminate 500,000 government contracting positions, saving our government between \$10 and \$18 billion a year. And that we insist on competitive bidding for the remaining contracts, so we get the most value for every taxpayer dollar. In the rare case where non-competitive contracts might be appropriate, we'll make sure they have close oversight.

It seems as though the motto for the Administration has been "What's a few billion tax dollars between friends?" Well, when I'm President, the days of billions in no-bid contracts and handouts to companies like Halliburton—that in return for the work given to them picks up corporate headquarters and moves to Dubai—those days will be over.

Fifth, we're going to stop substituting ideology for science and evidence, and we're going to start giving the American people again the facts on the issues that matter to them and their families. Over the past six years, this Administration has tried to turn Washington into an evidence-free zone. Whether it's stem cell research or Plan B Contraception or pollution or global warming or the safety of our food or the quality of our air -- all too often, ideology has replaced facts, and truth has been the first casualty.

The American people deserve better than that. Way back in the 1990s, the White House had an Office of Technology Assessment that was charged with just one task: telling us the truth about science. Sorting out the competing claims and to the best of the scientists' abilities, telling us what to believe. For decades, they cut through the myths and the spin on everything from Star Wars to AIDS prevention to solar technology. It's time we put this office back in business, because our citizens should have the information they need about the issues that affect them.

Sixth, we're going to open up our government's balance sheets so you can see exactly where your tax dollars are going – and the results they're getting. As tax day approaches, you probably find yourself wondering just where all your hard-earned money is going. Well, I propose that we require government agencies to publish their budgets and their government contracts online for all to see. So if someone tries to sneak in special favors for their special interest, we can find out about it with the click of a mouse.

And we won't just track government spending – we'll also track results with a new America Results Initiative. With the technology we have today, we can get real-time data on just about anything – from the purity of our water to the health of our ecosystems to the condition of our roads and bridges. We'll gather and analyze that data to see whether our government programs are effective. We'll then post it online so that our citizens can have the most up-to-date knowledge about everything from the quality of their air to the traffic on their streets. Information technology is revolutionizing every segment of society – from business, to education, to entertainment – and it's time that it revolutionized our government as well.

We also need to go back to doing what was done during the Clinton Administration with the Reinventing Government initiative, known as REGO, which Bill started and asked Vice President Gore to head-up. And the results were astonishing. REGO was credited with saving taxpayers more than \$136 billion over eight years by cutting the federal workforce, trimming layers of management, cutting subsidies for items like mohair and wool. And so, why don't we get back to doing that again if we're serious about having a government that works, we should be constantly asking ourselves the hard questions about why we're paying for something, and whether we should continue to do so.

I also want to establish a new Corporate Subsidy Information Service. This watchdog

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agency will track every tax subsidy that Congress gives to big corporations. So we'll know exactly how much each company gets – and we can track whether those subsidies actually promote results for the country and not just the company. Those subsidies are supposed to have a public good element to them. That's why we provide tax dollars, and yet too often, we have no analysis and evaluation as to whether they are really worth what the taxpayers are paying.

Seventh, we're going to make sure our government pays its bills and lives within its means again – just like our families. That's what we did during my husband's Administration, when we balanced the budget and turned record deficits into surpluses. It took discipline and determination, a lot of hard work, but again, the results speak for themselves. Twenty-two million new jobs. The longest peacetime economic expansion in history. And the savings rate was reflected in our attaining leverage once again in the world. We've moved from the largest debtor nation to a creditor nation. Well, we're back in to the larger debtor nation again. That undermines our capacity to exercise leadership on important issues like trade and other strategic concerns. So, we need to return to the fundamental principle of pay-as-you-go.

Eighth, I want to make government more user friendly across the board – and that starts with bringing more government services online. Last year, 73 million Americans filed their income taxes online. I want to make it possible for virtually every transaction to be paperless. Every day, Americans read the news online, shop online, chat online, and it's time that our government went fully online as well.

In order to do that, however, we're going to have to move to the ninth point of my reform agenda. We have to have government take the lead in modernizing its record keeping systems and take the lead in areas that really can change the market and behaviors to the benefit of us all.

What do I mean by that? Well, I know this doesn't sound particularly exciting, but it's really important. Because, just look at what's happening to our veterans. Just earlier this week, I spent a day in Upstate New York visiting with a lot of our wounded and injured veterans. I was at the V.A. in Syracuse, New York, and then I went up to Fort Drum, which is up in the North Country of New York. And I met with soldiers who had just returned from Afghanistan and Iraq. I met with over 40 of them who had been injured and/or wounded. And here's what they told me: their medical records have been lost.

One young soldier told me that he'd been hit by an IED on his convoy in Baghdad, which is absolutely superb—what our soldiers get at the point where they are beginning treatment to save their lives is extraordinary. We're saving so many lives that we couldn't have saved in the first Gulf War. And then as he was on a gurney as he was being wheeled to the plane to take him to the Army medical center in Landstuhl, Germany, someone came over, said, "Soldier, I'm putting this packet on your chest. It's your medical records, don't lose it." He gets on the plane. He's doped up for the long flight. They wheel him off in Landstuhl. The medical records haven't been seen since. I hear that over and over again. And when a soldier moves from being treated in Department of Defense facilities, which do provide very good acute care, to either outpatient or into the V.A. system, the records don't get transferred. The records get lost. There are so many examples of how our government is inefficient because we can't figure out how we computerize it.

Maybe some of you have read about the years of struggle to get the FBI to have a computer system that keeps track of their cases. Still hasn't happened, at the cost of billions of dollars. Well, we can fix this. We need to bring in private sector partners. We need to cut through red tape, and we need to begin to do what it takes to get our government to have information as readily available as we have in the rest of our lives.

And our government can also lead by example, by pressing national issues like energy efficiency and health care reform. I've introduced legislation to require that government buildings become energy efficient, and that new buildings which the government constructs try to attain the highest LEED standard, which is the gold standard for energy efficiency for a building. We can help to create markets with

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everything from new building materials to more energy efficient appliances to more fluorescent light bulbs by having the government lead by example.

And with respect to health care reform, I've also worked on a bipartisan basis to help create the framework for electronic medical records so that we could begin to realize the cost savings that would come if we have medical records that were private and confidential, with encrypted codes for access, that could be available if you were visiting New York, and you have to go to an emergency room or just visiting another doctor here in New Hampshire, and not have to go through a history again, tests you've taken before. The RAND Corporation has estimated we would save \$100 billion a year in our health care system if we had electronic medical records. And the government has to lead with creating the architecture and standards for us to be able to do this, and not just create thousands of towers of Babel that can't talk to each other.

Tenth and finally, we have to reform our election system. That's where our democracy starts. We have to make sure that every vote is counted and every vote counts – and we know that the best place to hold a government accountable is at the ballot box. Unfortunately, there's been a lot of interference with our electoral system in the last years, and there have been new requirements that have been put up as obstacles, that have really discouraged people from exercising their right to vote.

I've introduced legislation called the Count Every Vote Act, which is a comprehensive voting reform bill. It will make our voting systems more accountable and accessible. It will expand the right to vote of most of our citizens. It will create more opportunities for people to register to vote, and it will give greater assurances through paper-verified ballots that those votes will be counted. We need more oversight in our electoral system to discourage manipulation and deception. It is almost heart-breaking that I have to mention this on my reform agenda. American should lead the world in the best electoral system, using the best equipment.

A few years ago, there was an election in India. We are the oldest democracy. India is the largest democracy. They had an election, and no one predicted the outcome. Everyone thought that the then-BJP Party in power would be sent back in to power. There was an earthquake. Congress Party won the election. There were no complaints. There were no disagreements. People accepted the results, even though Indian politics can get extremely exciting. And I asked some of my Indian friends, "We've had two elections, and we've had complaints; we've had people turned away at the voting booth. We've had people misled about where and when they were supposed to vote. We've had ballots lost. How could you have done this?" "Very simple," they said. "We have turned it in to into a nonpartisan, civil service effort, where we have an independent board," like our Federal Reserve board, "that runs our national elections, and we computerized everything." So whether you were a peasant woman in Rajasthan, or a billion dot-com entrepreneur in Delhi, you voted on computers, and in order to deal with the problem of illiteracy, you had both words and pictures so that people could know who they were voting for. And your vote would be automatically recorded in the computer where you were polled and in a regional server and in a national server as a failsafe.

You know, someone after hearing that story said, well maybe we should outsource our elections to India. I mean, it's sort of is a sad commentary to think about. But here we are the leaders in all this technology. We invented it, and we can't figure out how to use it for our own purposes.

So, I'm convinced we can do everything I've outlined with the right leadership. People are ready for this change. In fact, it's the only way we can restore confidence in our government again.

Now, I know I've covered a lot of ground today, and it's not exactly the kind of subject matter that gets people marching in the streets, but if we don't restore competence in our government and confidence in our government, we will see the steady erosion of our government's capacity. There are some who argue that ideologues may have that in mind—discourage people from believing in government, render it incompetent, make people give up on this great enterprise known as our

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government. Oh, we'll still appropriate money for defense and homeland security but, beyond that, not much else. Well, we can reject such a cynical perspective by beginning to implement this reform agenda.

When I was working on this speech, I remembered a story that former Secretary of State, my friend, Madeleine Albright once told me about a tour she took through the Czech Republic in 1995 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. In every town she visited, the Czech people were out waving American flags. But the flags had only 48 stars. It turns out that American troops had given out these flags at the end of World War II, 50 years before – and that families had treasured them, had kept them through communists and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and all of the problems they confronted. Through all those years of communist repression, the Czech people held on to them and to the hope they represented.

They wouldn't give up on America's ideals – and neither should we.

It is past time that we once again have a government that works and that works for all of us. For leaders who never forget that it is your votes that put them in power – your tax dollars that pay the bills – your nation they are leading. It's time for a President who earns your trust and respect one day at a time. A President who never forgets that, as the great Granite stater, Senator Daniel Webster once said, "We are all agents of the same supreme power, the people."

If you give me that chance, I will be that President.

Thank you all, very, very much.

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