

Chris Dodd for President

Speech to the 2007 DNC Winter Meeting

Thank you very, very much.

What a great, great crowd. Good to see Democrats here in Washington.

Give yourself a good round of applause.

Let me begin by thanking those wonderful folks from Connecticut and elsewhere. I want to thank Nancy DiNardo, our state chair, and others who have come here today to be a part of this great effort.

Howard, I want to thank you, as well, for your tremendous work.

Mark, thank you for that very generous introduction.

I always find, sometimes, the introductions go on longer than my remarks, from time to time in these matters.

I was thinking, as Mark was going through the introduction, I come from a rather large family. I'm one of six children. And one of my older sisters introduced me -- or was present, rather, at an event where I was introduced a few months ago.

And the master of ceremonies, not unlike Mark, went on at some length, and concluded the introduction by saying, "It now gives me a great deal of pleasure to present to you not only a great senator from Connecticut but one of the great leaders of the Western world."

Well, you can imagine -- I'm there with my sister in the audience -- how much I appreciated those kind remarks.

That evening, we're driving back to Providence, Rhode Island, where she lives. And during one of those quiet moments in the car, I turn to my sister, Martha, and I said, "Martha, how many great leaders of the Western world do you think there are?"

Only as an older sister could do, she said, "One less than you think. Keep driving the

car. We need to get home."

So, as a former great leader of the Western world, I'm pleased to be here with great Democrats.

And let me, if I can, this morning, share some thoughts with you about where we are and where we hope to go in the coming months.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, none of us are going to forget how you ignited this audience and America with your speech four years ago and, under your leadership, powered the Democrats.

And the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party is now being felt in 50 states all across this country. And we thank you for that kind of leadership.

About a year ago, President Bush's approval rating stood at 40 percent, his party was in revolt, and the Vice President just shot somebody.

Thanks to you, Howard, the DNC and the American voters, the President Bush now refers to those days as the good old days in America. And we thank you for your great leadership, I'll tell you.

Thanks for your energy and diligence, leadership, and the efforts of millions of people all across this country -- volunteers, contributors -- who worked phone banks, knocked on doors and did a great, great job.

We were able to have a great victory this fall. We watched state legislators win overwhelming seats across the country. Governors' races were terrific.

And, my friends, you're now in a city where the majority party in the House and the Senate belong to the Democrats. And we thank all of you for your great, great work in making that possible.

And remember, if you will, only a few days ago, thanks to your hard work, watching the President give his State of the Union message, and it wasn't Dennis Hastert who was sitting behind George Bush and next to Dick Cheney, it was Nancy D'Alesandro Pelosi, the first woman speaker of the House of Representatives.

How lucky we are to have Nancy in that role.

There were a number of issues, obviously, that ignited the passions of the American people, but none as much as the war in Iraq. And because we Democrats are now the majority in both houses of Congress, we're finally going to have a debate about ending the war in Iraq.

Thanks again for your support last fall.

And I think, now, all of us feel that it's time to do to the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue what we did for the House and the Senate in 2006.

The last time I stood at this podium was to accept your nomination as the general chairman of the Democratic National Committee, along with my great friend Don Fowler of South Carolina.

It had been almost 60 years since the Democrats had re-elected someone to the White House. In 1996, with your help, Bill Clinton was the first Democrat to be elected President since Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1936.

And on January 20th, 2009, we're all going to gather on the west front of the Capitol of the United States to inaugurate the 44th President of the United States. And it's going to be a Democrat that's standing there who's going to accept that inaugural.

I would predict here this morning with certainty that if we listened to the American public, if we pay attention to their dreams and aspirations that they have for themselves and their families and for our country, and if we propose bold solutions for a world we must lead, the 44th President will be a Democrat.

Today, and over the coming 12 months, I'm standing before you to ask you to give me a chance, to give me a chance to be heard, to make my case for my candidacy for the presidency of the United States in 2008.

Just as we did this past fall, I believe America will vote for change in 2008.

No matter where you go in our country, people are tired and fed up with the Bush administration, their enablers in Congress and the greedy few who have enriched themselves while millions and millions of hard-working, middle-class families have fallen further and further and further behind. That has got to stop in our country.

The American people -- the American people are tired and fed up with the deceptions and the incompetence of the Bush-Cheney administration.

And they're tired and fed up with the Bush-Cheney administration who, in a 6,000-word State of the Union address, couldn't bring itself to mention the words "Katrina" or "New Orleans."

What a disgrace.

We talk about our country. They're tired.

They're tired. And they're tired and fed up with an administration that has presided over a crumbling primary and secondary education system, skyrocketing higher education costs, a health care system that today is more expensive and less available to millions of Americans than it was six years ago, and an energy and environmental policy that is on its face shameful.

And they're tired and fed up, I would add, with an administration which, in the face of 3,000 American lives lost in Iraq, 22,000 of our fellow citizens have been injured, thousands more Iraqis who are dead, disfigured and permanently disabled -- they are more isolated today -- our country from the world, with diminishing influence around the globe. And they have the temerity -- they have the temerity to say "full-speed ahead."

We Democrats say no. It's time for change in Iraq and we're going to insist upon it.

And I ask for your support in that effort.

They are tired, the American people are -- they're tired of an administration that tries to scare Americans into supporting policies that undermine our history, our values and our Constitution.

They put a new twist on the old saying, "Scare me once, shame on you. Scare me twice, shame on me."

In 2008, the American people are going to have an answer for the election-defrauding, wiretapping, Abu Ghraib-ing, debt exploding, Exxon-loving, "Brownie, you've done a hell of a job" crowd. And we're going to give them something new.

Get the car out of the ditch. We're not going to take fear for an answer any longer in America. Those days are over with.

I agree.

Now, let me add here, we won in 2006, in my view, largely because of what the other crowd had done to our country -- what they failed to do. I would tell you, candidly, in 2008 that's not going to be enough.

This is a moment of great urgency in our country. We've had leadership the past six years that has squandered so much of what has made our great country so great over the years.

The more I travel around the country, as I'm sure you do as well, the more I see a hunger, as I'm sure you do as well, in our fellow people: a hunger for leaders who will stand up for the values of equal justice and equal opportunity, a hunger for leadership that will keep us strong and safe, a hunger for national leadership that will work harder for working families than they have for the Halliburtons and ExxonMobils of this world.

Let me tell you who I am. Let me tell you who I am.

I'm a proud Democrat. And in the words of Sam Rayburn, I'm a Democrat without prefix, without suffix and without apology. I'm a strong Democrat.

That's where I stand.

Let me also tell you how important I believe it is to be bipartisan in this country. We should try to seek bipartisanship. We certainly can't continue to survive as a nation divided 51-49 as we are.

But unlike some, I believe that before you can have bipartisanship you've got to have leadership in this country. And let me be very blunt about it.

Bipartisanship to me does not mean getting Democrats to agree with Republican principles; it means getting Republicans to agree with Democratic principles. That's what bipartisanship is.

Leadership insists on holding a core set of values, a core set of principles and a demonstrated ability to bring people together around those common values and principles.

That's what I did on the Family and Medical Leave Act, on child care and Central America, on the FIRE Act and many other issues, and what I will do if you will

nominate me and give the chance to be your President.

If we Democrats just spend the next 22 months of the presidential campaign reciting a litany of what the Bush administration and their Republican friends have done wrong, our national audience, I would argue, will grow smaller.

As a candidate for the presidency, I'll certainly remind people of the damage that this administration has done to our country at home and around the globe.

But I also intend to spend more time telling people what I want us to do together to make America great again.

I'm an optimist. I have great confidence in our country. And as great and as urgent as our problems are, my friends, I believe very firmly -- very firmly that our capabilities are even greater.

Let me share with you a few of the issues that I care deeply and passionately about.

People may not have paid much attention last fall to a vote in the Congress to abandon habeas corpus and walk away from the Geneva Conventions.

And the issue has a personal dimension for me. Six decades ago, my father was the number two prosecutor for the United States at the trial of Nazi war criminals in Nuremberg.

The moral authority America earned at that trial set a high standard of human rights and the rule of law.

Every President -- every President, Republican and Democrat, from Truman to Reagan to Bill Clinton honored and abided by these principles.

It was the soft power of our moral authority that I believe contributed to the victory in the Cold War. And it will be the soft power, I would argue, of our moral authority that will contribute to winning the war on terror.

I will make a promise to you today, before this great convention of DNC members: One of the very first things that I will do as President of the United States is to send a bill to the United States Congress that overturns the horrible torture bill that the President signed into law last fall and to begin to restore America's moral leadership in the world.

That we must do.

There's another thing I'm going to do. I'm going to bring our troops out of Iraq.

Let me tell you...

Let me tell you a story.

About a month ago, once again, I was in Baghdad, where I met a very bright young American, an Army captain, a West Point graduate named Brian Freeman. Brian said to me, and I'm quoting him now -- he sent me this e-mail -- he said, "Senator, it's nuts over here. Soldiers are being asked to do work we're not trained to do. I'm doing work that the State Department people are far more trained to do in fostering diplomacy. But they're not allowed to come off the bases because it's too dangerous here. It doesn't make any sense."

When I came home, I spoke about Brian -- Captain Freeman -- in public forums. We started an e-mail conversation, in fact, over the last number of weeks.

But then I received a frantic call in our office from Brian's wife. A military vehicle had stopped by her home in California when she wasn't there, and she was desperate to know why.

Well, we found out the awful news two weeks ago tomorrow. Brian Freeman was killed in Karbala in Iraq in that terrible attack.

If you want to see the human face of this war, the cost of this war, imagine the life of Brian's widow, of his two children -- 2-year-old Gunnar and his 14-month-old daughter Ingrid.

I tell you, it's time for the government of Iraq and the people of Iraq to take responsibility for their own future.

Next week, we will debate in the United States Senate a nonbinding resolution on the war in Iraq. Frankly, I am disappointed that we can't find a way to do more than send a meaningless message to the White House...

... a White House, I would add, that has said it will ignore anything that we have to say about the war in Iraq.

The American people sent us a message this past November. The voters were clear: They want a change in the policy in Iraq.

When you have over 60 percent of the Iraqi people thinking it's appropriate, it's all right to attack the service men and women of our country, then I think it's time to get our troops out of that country.

And I don't believe -- I don't believe spending a week debating a nonbinding resolution is the change that America voted for.

Last week, I proposed that we take a stronger position: that we send the President a bill with strong teeth into it. With all due respect, a real bill and real teeth and real accountability is what is needed in our country again. It's time to say enough is enough in this country.

And let me also add here, quickly, America's security, economic and otherwise, must not and cannot depend on the politically fragile corner of the globe that we're in today. And as President, I will lead America toward an energy policy that within a decade will eliminate our dependency on a line of tankers trying to squeeze through the 34-mile choke point known as the Straits of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.

I will lead America to an economic policy that recognizes that America will get stronger when the middle class gets stronger in our country.

And I'll try to be a national leader that is as optimistic about their hopes and dreams for their children as they are.

We Democrats won elections in the past because we were the party that kicked down doors, knocked over barriers to opportunity. We must show America once again, as Democrats, that we haven't forgotten how to do that.

And as President I will commit that no one who finishes high school, who's qualified to go on and who's admitted to higher education is denied the opportunity because of financial need.

As President, I will fight to rebuild our manufacturing base. It is a dangerous notion, in my view, that manufacturing should no longer be a part of the American economy in the 21st century.

We must not give up our industrial base. We've lost 3 million American jobs in manufacturing in the past six years. That hemorrhaging has to stop.

Now, I understand the value of trade and fair trade. But in our administration, we're going to make it at least as attractive for business to stay in America as the Bush administration has made it attractive for them to leave America.

And as President, I'm going to finish the job that Harry Truman started in 1948. When I raise my hand to take the office on January 20th, 2009, I'll also take an oath that by the time by administration ends we're going to bring health care to every single American, man, woman and child, in the United States. And every Democrat ought to be committed to that.

My friends, let me conclude by telling you a quick story, if I may.

Several months ago, my daughter, my 5-year old -- I'm probably the only candidate with the youngest children: I've got a 2-year-old and a 5-year-old. I'm probably the only candidate who gets mail from AARP and diaper services along the way.

But my 5-year-old, on the way to school, getting dressed for school back several months ago, turned to me and asked me the following two questions. She said, "Daddy, what sort of a day do you think I'm going to have?"

I thought that was a pretty good question for a child who just turned five. I gave, I thought, a fantastic answer to that question.

And about 30 seconds later, she asked me the following question in exactly these words.

She said, "Daddy, what sort of a life do you think I'm going to have?"

That question more than anything else is what brings me to this podium this morning.

I'm sure all of you here as parents or grandparents, with newborns -- have asked that question a million times over: What sort of a life are your children or grandchildren going to have?

And to a large extent, that's what we Democrats have to be thinking about in these coming weeks and months, because it is now our turn, our watch, in a sense, to get this right.

We're in deep trouble in many, many ways, both at home and abroad. We all know that. You don't need to hear me preach about it from this podium.

But we're going to be judged fairly quickly by my children, yours and others, who are going to ask what you and I did at the outset of the 21st century to get our country back on track again.

I stand before you today because I believe we can get back on track. We Democrats stand for the right things that have made this country as strong and as good as it is.

I was challenged some 40 years ago by fellow who, not many blocks from here, challenged the nation to be involved in something larger than themselves. And I joined the Peace Corps, as Mark pointed out.

I want to see leadership in this country once again that challenges people to be a larger -- be a part of something larger than themselves.

I don't think America's changed. Our leadership has. We need to get back the leadership that's in sync with the American public.

I ask you to give me that chance over these coming 12 months to go to our states, to talk to caucus voters, to talk to primary voters, to tell you what I believe in, what I stand for, why I think I'd be a good nominee of our party and a good President for our country.

I thank you for listening this morning, I ask for your support.

Let's have a great victory in 2008.

Thank you very much.

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