



JOIN THE CAMPAIGN TO CHANGE AMERICA

Transformational Change For America And The World

Mar 15, 2007

Remarks as prepared for delivery Manchester, New Hampshire

A little more than three years ago, I gave a speech here in New Hampshire I called "In Defense of Optimism." Some of you probably wonder if I could give a similar speech today. After all, a lot has happened since then – and a lot of it hasn't been good – the escalation of the war in Iraq, the aftermath of Katrina, health care costs rising, incomes staying flat, mounting evidence of global warming. I could go on.

But as a matter of fact, I am still optimistic – maybe even more so than I was then. I am still optimistic that America can be a country where anyone who works hard is able to get ahead and create a good life for their family. I am optimistic that we can restore America's moral authority. The challenges may be larger, and we may have even more work to do to build a country that lives up to our ideals and our potential. But we can do it.

I am optimistic we can do these things because my own life says it is possible. I am optimistic we can do these things because everything I love about America and our entrepreneurial spirit and sense of decency says it's possible. But most of all, I am optimistic because of you and the millions of people like you. You don't have to look very far or dig very deep to find people determined to make the changes we need. Millions of people are impatient to take control of their own lives and to take the responsibility to get our country back on track. Millions of people who know we can't just wait for the next president to come in and fix all of our problems or for government to do what needs to be done.

Millions of people who know that America is so much more than just a place – America is an idea. And the idea of America – real, fundamental equality – equality of opportunity, equality of culture, equality of respect – equality for all – matters more than ever. Our job is to make the idea of America real for all Americans, and to rekindle that idea around the world.

So I want to take a few minutes today to talk about some of the challenges we face. But I want to spend most of my time talking about the opportunities before us if we have the courage to do what it takes.

Because we have not yet realized the promise of America; we still struggle to live up to the idea. There are still two Americas here at home, one for the powerful and another one for everyone else. And there are two Americas in the world, the America that we aspire to and has been a light to the world, and the one you've seen too often on the news lately.

Here at home, the country with the most advanced health care in the world, we have more Americans without health care – 47 million – not fewer.

In the richest country in the history of the globe, we have more millionaires and more billionaires than ever – but we also have more Americans living in poverty – 37 million people unable to fulfill their basic needs of food and shelter, no matter how many jobs they work – not less.

As someone who grew up in the segregated South it hurts me to say that more than 50 years after the Brown decision, we still have two school systems – one for people who live in the right neighborhoods and one for everyone else. And the truth is that opportunity is too often denied to people because of the color of their skin, their ethnic background, their gender, or their sexual preference.

And you all know that we are not leading the world in a way that lives up to the idea of America – or is good for us here at home.

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What we used to call foreign policy has such a profound effect on our everyday lives that there really is no such thing as purely foreign policy anymore. Trade policies affect jobs and wages here and throughout the world. Energy policy affects climate change here and all over the world, and it impacts domestic and foreign security. Poverty is an issue for us here – I could talk about that all day long – but poverty is also an issue directly related to the rise of terrorism and our place in the world economy. A well-known politician from a neighboring state used to say that all politics is local. Today, all policy is local.

We are not going to solve these problems with the usual approaches. These challenges are too big, too connected, and too complicated to be answered with the same old politics of incrementalism. Meeting them requires more than just a new president—it requires an entirely new approach.

To build the America we believe in requires fundamental, transformational change. Not change for the sake of change, but change for the sake of getting to where we know the country and the world can be, should be, and needs to be. Not incremental, baby-step changes, but invigorating, uplifting, challenging, daring, boundary-pushing changes that address the root causes and understand the complexity of our challenges.

So if we are going to lead from this point in the 21st century, we must lead with a bold and confident step – confident in the greatness of the American idea, and bold in our plans to make it real.

To lead the world in addressing the challenges of our century, America must restore our moral authority.

Restoring our moral authority isn't just about feeling good about ourselves. When the world looks to America for leadership, we are stronger and safer, and so is the rest of the world.

Restoring our moral authority means leading by example, and making clear that hard challenges don't frighten us, but call us to action.

To me, there is no better opportunity to make this clear than the enormous challenge of helping the 37 million Americans who live in poverty.

Maybe you've heard the phrase "it's expensive to be poor." Well, it's also expensive for America to have so many poor.

We all pay a price when young people who could someday find the cure for AIDS or make a fuel cell work are sitting on a stoop because they didn't get the education they need.

And don't think for a second that addressing poverty is charity – addressing poverty makes our workforce stronger and our economy stronger.

That is why I've set a national goal of eliminating poverty in the next 30 years – and laid out a detailed plan to do it by creating what I call a "Working Society," building on what we've learned to create solutions for the future.

In a Working Society, we will reward work with a higher minimum wage, stronger labor laws, and tax credits for working families. We will offer affordable housing near good jobs and good schools, and create a million stepping-stone jobs for people who cannot find work on their own. We will help workers save for the future with new work bonds and homeownership tax credits. And we will *all* take responsibility for the problem of poverty and not just leave it to government.

By building a Working Society, we won't just try the old solutions and the old politics. Instead, we will work, as a nation, to change fundamentally the culture of poverty itself and create the conditions that allow people to lift themselves up into the middle class.

Rebuilding our middle class for the 21st century also means getting at the root of one of the main obstacles to middle class prosperity -- the cost of health care.

Americans spend more than \$2 trillion per year on health care -- more than any other country on earth.

Despite this incredible expenditure, more than 47 million Americans don't have any health insurance at all.

That's not just morally wrong. It undercuts our personal security and our competitiveness in the global marketplace.

That's why I've introduced a true universal health care plan to cover every man, woman and child in America – by the end of my first term as President. I'm proud to be the first and only candidate to do so.

We cannot wait to transform our health care system. My plan sets up health care markets around the country to give people a choice of good health care plans, including a choice between private and government plans. It provides access to preventive care. It creates

Education Roundtable

Oct 23, 2007
Merrimack, N.H.

Community Meeting with John Edwards

Oct 24, 2007
Glenwood, Iowa

Community Meeting with John Edwards

Oct 24, 2007
Sidney, Iowa

Community Meeting with John Edwards

Oct 24, 2007
Shenandoah, Iowa

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efficiencies that don't exist today by dramatically lowering administrative costs. Under my plan, if you don't have health care, you will. If you have health care, your costs will go down.

It may seem complicated in its details, but I see health care as a simple matter of right and wrong. I believe every single one of us has equal worth, and we should not treat anybody as better than anybody else. Every American – rich or poor, no matter which America we live in – has the right to health care. My plan delivers it.

Our domestic problems are intertwined with our global challenges, and nowhere is this truer than at the nexus of global warming and energy independence.

Global warming is a problem that is here, now, and not going away. The United States must lead – lead smart, lead courageously, and lead by example.

It is time to ask the American people to be patriotic about something other than war. We need investments in renewable energy – more efficient cars and trucks – and a national cap on carbon emissions.

By taking personal responsibility for our energy use, we can all reduce our impact on the environment in big ways and small. This week, I announced that we're going to do exactly that in our campaign – our campaign is going to be carbon neutral.

Tackling global warming through responsibility and conservation helps reduce our reliance on foreign oil. And reducing our reliance on foreign oil strengthens our national security. But we won't stop there.

By creating a new energy economy – by transforming our energy infrastructure and investing in research, development and deployment of alternative energy technologies – we can not only address global warming and energy independence, we can create more than a million new jobs in America, and lay the foundation for a secure middle class and a manufacturing base for America in the 21st century.

Our education system, too, needs fundamental change. As I said a few minutes ago, more than 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, our education system remains shockingly unequal. There are nearly 1,000 high schools where more than half of the students won't graduate. Minority 12th-graders read at the same level as white 9th-graders.

Our education system shortchanges the skills our children need for the future – math and science, creativity and critical thinking. Every day you can read reports about how we're falling behind in math and science – our 9th-graders are 18th in the world in science education. We need to fundamentally change the discussion about education in our country, to move beyond a focus on testing and get to the issue of educating our children for the challenges of the 21st century.

We need a serious, sustained effort to turn around failing schools. We should invest in our teachers – the most important part of any school. We need to do more to recruit them, train them, and pay them, particularly in math and science and other places where there are teacher shortages.

Finally, it has been more than a century since we made high school universal, but high school graduates from well-off families are five times more likely to enroll in college. Those who do go to college pick up larger and larger debts. I have a plan called College for Everyone that will pay for the first year of college for anyone willing to work part-time. And this is one of the hallmarks of the fundamental changes we need, we as Democrats. Work and personal responsibility are good things – and we should be encouraging both.

When we're serious about moral leadership at home, we have the standing to assert moral leadership in the world.

And I believe we can begin by leading in areas that – at first glance – might not seem directly related to our self-interest. I'm talking about global poverty, primary education. But I believe if you look closely, it's clear that these areas are in fact directly related to our present and future national security.

We know that terrorists thrive in failed states, and in states torn apart by internal conflict and poverty.

And we know that in many African and Muslim countries today, extreme poverty and civil wars have gutted government educational systems.

So what's taking their place? The answer is troubling – but filled with opportunity if we have the courage to seize it.

A great portion of a generation is being educated in madrassas run by militant extremists rather than in public schools. And as a result, thousands and thousands of young people who might once have aspired to be educated in America are being taught to hate America.

When you understand that, it suddenly becomes clear: global poverty is not just a moral

issue for the United States – it is a national security issue for the United States. If we tackle it, we will be doing a good and moral thing by helping to improve the lives of billions of people around the world who live on less than \$2 per day – but we will also begin to create a world in which the ideologies of radical terrorism are overwhelmed by the ideologies of education, democracy, and opportunity. If we tackle it, we have the chance to change a generation of potential enemies into a generation of friends. Now *that* would be transformational.

But the challenge is great – generational struggles require generational solutions – so we must meet the challenge with an audacious plan.

As President I would implement a four-point plan to tackle global poverty – and improve the national security of the United States:

First, we would launch a sweeping effort to support primary education in the developing world.

More than 100 million young children have no school at all, denied even a primary education to learn how to read and write. Education is particularly important for young girls; as just one example of the ripple effects, educated mothers have lower rates of infant mortality and are 50 percent more likely to have their children immunized.

As president, I will lead a worldwide effort to extend primary education to millions of children in the developing world by fully funding the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015. The U.S. will do its part by bringing education to 23 million children in poor countries, and we will ask our allies to step up and do the rest. It's not just good for our security; it's good for theirs.

Second, we will support preventive health care in the developing world.

Women and children bear the burden of poverty and disease in the developing world. Women in our poorest countries have a 10% chance of dying during childbirth. More than 10 million children die each year from preventable diseases. Many of these diseases are preventable with clean water and basic sanitation or affordable immunizations.

As president, I will convene a worldwide summit on low-cost investments in clean drinking water and sanitation. Under my plan, the U.S. will increase its investment in clean water six-fold.

Third, we can get to the root of global poverty by increasing opportunity, political opportunity and economic opportunity. Democratic rights allow poor citizens to force their countries to create more progressive laws, fight oppression and demand economic stability. Economic initiatives like microfinance and micro-insurance can spark entrepreneurship, allowing people to transform their own lives.

And fourth, I would appoint an individual in the White House, reporting directly to me, with the rank of a Cabinet member, to oversee all of our efforts to fight global poverty. Despite its importance to our national security, the United States still lacks a comprehensive strategy to fight global poverty. We need to embrace the vision of John F. Kennedy, who recognized that "the Nation's interest and the cause of political freedom require" American efforts to lift up the world's poor.

Our current effort has plenty of bureaucracy – over 50 separate U.S agencies are involved in the delivery of foreign assistance. What it lacks is efficiency and accountability. As President, I'll change that.

Accomplishing these goals – ending poverty in America and transforming our approach to poverty around the world, creating a new energy economy, bringing health care to every American, and building an educational system that helps to build and support the middle class of the 21st century– will not be easy.

And attempting them will require a change in our politics.

We can no longer accept having the course of our country dictated by a relatively few people who push onto the rest of us policies that suit their particular interests. We need leaders who insist that all voices are heard, leaders who will take the role Harry Truman defined so clearly: a president who is the lobbyist for all the people who don't have, don't want, and can't afford one.

But this is not just about the leaders. It is also about you taking responsibility for your own country, for your own government, for your own community, for your own family. I was only in the Senate for 6 years, but that was more than enough time to learn firsthand what I feared and what you know: if you see a problem, you can't wait for the government to fix it.

We are at one of those rare moments in history – a time when two paths are clear before us.

On one side is the path we have been on.

It is a path in which we argue over fuel standards while global warming gets worse; where the Senate passes non binding resolutions on the war in Iraq while the war escalates; where the middle class shrinks and disappears while tax cuts for the wealthiest set in; a path where the two Americas is still there and still wrong.

On the other side is that future which we have all long imagined - a future in which America's moral leadership once again makes us strong and secure.

A future in which the gulf between the haves and have-nots is fading because we are actively working to lift our fellow human beings up from poverty. Where every American has health care. Where America leads the world in creating a new global economy powered by clean energy. Where women around the world enjoy the same opportunities as men. A future in which we recognize that our security is not just measured by our military might, but by our ability and determination to build a more peaceful, more prosperous, more stable world.

I believe that future is ours for the taking. We can make it real. We know that. We - the American people - have changed the world before.

Nearly 70 years ago, another generation of Americans faced a world darkened by insecurity.

The storm clouds of fascism and totalitarianism were gathering over Europe and Asia. We were struggling to emerge from the depths of the Great Depression. And it was easy to think then that our problems at home were too big for us to try to tackle the problems mounting abroad.

Yet that generation of Americans saw in the challenges of their day not a cause for despair, but a call to greatness.

And they answered it. Not meekly, not uncertainly. But proudly, confidently, and with conviction. Because they had what we have - the idea of America. It's right here.

And in answering that call, not only secured freedom for the people of Europe and Asia - they laid the foundation for a new American economy that produced the greatest expansion of the middle class and the sharpest reduction of poverty in the history of the world.

They turned the 20th century into the American century.

Now it is our turn - to see the challenges we face with an unblinking eye and once again to answer the call.

Proudly, confidently, and with conviction.

It is our responsibility. As Abraham Lincoln once called us, we are still the "last best hope of earth." If America does not lead, who will?

I believe we are up to the task. I am certain of it.

After all, I am an optimist.

Fact Sheets Related To This Speech:

- **Ending Poverty In America Within A Generation**
- **Restoring America's Moral Leadership By Fighting Worldwide Poverty**
- **Universal Health Care through Shared Responsibility**

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