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Remarks by John McCain on South Carolina Primary Victory

January 19, 2008

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Thank you, my friends, and thank you, South Carolina, for bringing us across the finish line first in the first in the south primary. It took us a while, but what's eight years among friends. It just gave us the opportunity to spend more time in this beautiful state; to talk with you and listen to you; and to come to admire all the more the deep patriotism of South Carolinians, who have sacrificed so much to defend our country from its enemies. It is a great privilege to have come to know so many of you, and I am very grateful for and humbled by the support you have given our campaign. Thank you especially, for braving the very un-South Carolina like weather today to exercise the first responsibility of an American; not just those South Carolinians who voted for us, but all of you who voted today for the candidate you believe is best suited to lead the country you love. I think I can speak for all of the Republican candidates, when I say, South Carolinians are never just fair weather friends.

And, of course, I am deeply grateful to our South Carolina team, and to the many dedicated volunteers who gave so generously of their time and labor and kept us competitive in some pretty challenging times. I hope you know how much your friendship means to me. The debt I owe you is a privilege and an obligation, which I promise you, I will faithfully discharge.

I want to thank my wife, Cindy, the best campaigner in the family, and my daughters Meghan and Sidney, who are with us tonight, as well as my son, Doug, and our children who could not be here, and of course, my dear mother, Roberta McCain. It is obvious to me, and to all who know me, that we would not be where we are tonight, but for your love, encouragement and faith in me.

In the course of this campaign, I have tried as best I could, to tell people the truth about the challenges facing our country, and how I intend to address them. As I have said before, I know that before I can win your vote, I must earn your respect. And the only way I know how to do that is by being honest with you. I have tried to do that throughout this campaign, and to put my trust in your willingness to give me your fair consideration. So far, it seems to be working out just fine.

I am aware that for the last 28 years, the winner of the South Carolina primary has been the nominee of our party. We have a ways to go, of course. There are some tough contests ahead, starting tomorrow in the state of Florida. But, my friends, we are well on our way tonight. And I feel very good about our chances.

As pleased as we are that we have a reason to celebrate tonight, I know that I must keep foremost in my mind that I am not running for President to be somebody, but to do something. I am running to keep America safe, prosperous and proud. I am running to restore the trust of the American people in their government. I am running so that our children and their children will have even greater opportunities than the ones we were blessed with. I am running so that every person in this country, now and in generations to come, will know the same, sublime honor that has been the treasure of my life: to be proud to be an American.

I seek the nomination of our Party, because I am as confident today as I was when I first entered public life as a foot soldier in the Reagan Revolution that the principles of the Republican Party -- our confidence in the good sense and resourcefulness of free people -- are always in America's best interests. In war and peace, in good times and challenging ones, we have always known that the first responsibility of government is to keep this country safe from its enemies, and the American people free of a heavy handed government that spends too much of their money, and tries to do for them what they are better able to do for themselves. We want government to do its job, not your job; to do it better and to do it with less of your money; to defend our nation's security wisely and effectively, because the cost of our defense is so dear to us; to respect our values because they are the true source of our strength; to enforce the rule of law that is first defense of freedom; to keep the promises it makes to us and not make promises it will not keep. We believe government should do only those things we cannot do individually, and then get out of the way so that the most industrious, ingenious, and enterprising people in the world can do what they have always done, build an even greater country than the one they inherited.

My friends, I know we are facing challenging economic times, and we must be responsive to the concerns of Americans who fear they are being left behind in the global economy. But nothing is inevitable in our country. We are the captains of our fate. We can overcome any challenge as long as we keep our courage, and stand by our defense of free markets, low taxes, and small government that have made America the greatest land of opportunity in the world.

I have served our country all my adult life, and I am prepared for the high office I seek. I asked South Carolinians to help give me the opportunity to serve the country I love a little while longer. You have done that, and I will never forget it. I promise you I will always put America -- her strength, her ideals, her future -- before every other consideration. Thank you, South Carolina, for your trust. I will not let you down, so help me God. Good night and God bless you as you have blessed me.

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