

Bill Richardson for President

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Speech to Take Back America 2007

06/19/2007

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I appreciate the opportunity to speak here today. I think this conference is one of the most important events that all of us, as candidates, will attend this year. And I'd like to tell you why it's important to me personally.

I first got involved in public service after meeting Hubert Humphrey in 1971, while I was in graduate school. Despite his narrow defeat in the 1968 presidential election, he hadn't lost his idealism. He challenged me and the other students I was with to try and make a difference with our lives -- to look at the world around us and seek out the inequality that's sometimes plain to see ... and other times hidden from view ... and to give our best effort to heal our nation.

This is a hauntingly similar time. Like 1968, we are a nation deep into an unwanted war, the president has lost the country, there is hurt and sorrow among our people, and there is a sense that no matter who is elected, we have a long road in front of us.

But there is great risk in taking only this view. When you listen to some who are running for president, you can hear it in their voices. There is weight to their words. But they are in danger of being weighed down by it all.

I am optimistic about our country. I am optimistic about the Democratic Party. We have the majority in Congress ... the American people agree with us on the issues ... we have the best field of candidates for president ... and we're going to put a Democrat into the White House.

Yes, there is too much that is wrong with America. But we can also celebrate what's finally going right.

The first step was taking back the Congress. The next step is taking back the White House. That's how we take back America.

I am going to focus my remarks today on repairing the damage from the two worst mistakes of the Bush administration -- failing to address climate change and failing to change our policies in Iraq.

Some people poke fun at how I like to talk about what I've done as a Governor. But I'm proud of New Mexico ... and I'm proud of making New Mexico the clean energy state. In fact, we're doing more to clean up the environment and fight global warming than any other state in the country.

Mark Twain said "Everybody complains about the weather but nobody ever does anything about it." Well, we're doing something about global warming in New Mexico.

We're requiring utility companies to produce energy from renewable sources ... we've invested directly in energy efficiency ... we're promoting renewable energy with tax credits for using wind, solar, and biofuels ... we've eliminated taxes on hybrid cars ... and I set tough standards to reduce greenhouse emissions.

Maybe the country and President Bush don't follow the Kyoto treaty, but my state does.

Of course, in his typical fashion, after six and a half years of refusing to admit that global warming exists, President Bush has started lecturing developing nations and telling them to clean up their act.

I'm not sure what's more insulting to the rest of the world. Telling them they're wrong for six and a half years. Or changing your mind and telling them they're still wrong.

Mr. President, we don't need half-hearted half-way measures like the European agreement that just came out of the G-8 Summit. The Kyoto Treaty has been sitting on your desk for six and a half years. You might as well sign it

now, because in a year and a half, if you haven't, I will.

I'm proud to have the most aggressive plan of anyone running for president. Within twelve years, my plan would reduce global warming pollution by 20 percent, lower demand for oil by fifty percent, and push fuel economy standards to 50 miles per gallon.

By the year 2040, my plan would require that 50 percent of our electricity be generated from renewable sources and would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent.

You can read the plan for yourself at my campaign website or you can listen to the League of Conservation Voters. They rated it the most aggressive plan with the highest goals of any other candidate. These aren't pie in the sky proposals, but they are ambitious.

If we can spend billions waging war in a country that never had weapons of mass destruction ... then we can certainly find the will to stop the mass destruction of our planet.

It's time that we as a nation chose the collective good over the desire to collect goods. And frankly, buying carbon offsets isn't enough. Just like paying somebody else to go to church doesn't make you religious ... paying somebody else to conserve doesn't make you a conservationist.

My wife Barbara and I use both a hybrid and a flex-fuel vehicle, and we've made the New Mexico Governor's Mansion a lot more energy efficient, including compact fluorescent lighting, low water-use irrigation, and ceiling fans to cut down on air conditioning -- and lemme tell you, on a 95 degree day in New Mexico, that's a sacrifice!

But I know we can do more, and I'll bet that a lot of you could, too. We all have to sacrifice for the common good ... and we have to end our dependence on Middle Eastern oil.

Which brings us to Iraq ...

Some will tell you that we only have two options: either stay in Iraq and try to referee a civil war ... or leave and watch the Middle East collapse into a regional war. When a president decides that he or she only has two bad options, guess what happens? Something bad.

I have a different view ... a more optimistic view grounded in what I call a New Realism for foreign policy.

I applaud my fellow Democratic candidates for taking on President Bush in the Congress.

But there is a fundamental difference in this campaign -- and that's how many troops each of us would leave behind.

Other than the customary marine contingent at the embassy, I would leave zero troops. Not a single one. And if the embassy and our embassy personnel aren't safe, then they're all coming home too.

No airbases. No troops in the Green Zone. No embedded soldiers training Iraqi forces, because we all know what that means. It means our troops would still be out on patrol with targets on their backs.

A regional crisis is worthy of military intervention. A true threat to our country's security is worthy of war.

But a struggle between a country's warring factions, where both sides hate the United States, is not worthy of one more lost American life.

With all due respect to my Democratic colleagues ... Senators Clinton, Obama, Dodd, and Biden all voted for timeline legislation that had deliberate loopholes. Those loopholes allow this president, or any president, to leave an undetermined number of troops in Iraq indefinitely.¹

And this is the same legislation that former Senator Edwards says we should send back to President Bush over and over again until he signs it.

The language in the legislation was clear. It would allow the president to leave American troops behind for quote "training and equipping members of the Iraqi Security Forces" ... and to protect, among other things, quote "other U.S. forces."²

Troops protecting troops ... potentially thousands of troops, year after year. I don't know about the other folks running, but troops protecting troops training other troops doesn't sound any different to me.

Clearly, my Democratic colleagues in this campaign think it's responsible to have an ongoing military role in Iraq. They voted not once but twice to leave troops behind.

Senator Clinton has told her military advisor that if she were elected, there might still be troops in Iraq at end of

her second term.

Senator Obama's written plan calls for leaving non-combat troops in Iraq. And Senator Edwards says he's for withdrawing all troops except those at the embassy. But that's not what the bill says that he wants to pass again and again.

The responsible thing to do is to look at the problem from another perspective. At the rate we're losing American lives, over one thousand American troops will be killed this year alone. The surge has led to nothing but a surge in Americans dying.

Over 70 percent of Iraqis want us out of their country. Over 60 percent think it's okay to kill Americans.

Think about that for a second. Over 60 percent were willing to tell a pollster they'd never met before that it's okay to kill Americans ... which means that percentage is probably even higher. That's not the case in Japan, Germany, South Korea or anywhere else American troops are stationed.

I have great respect for my fellow Democratic candidates, but for those who think we should leave a residual force, how long does that force need to be in place before we can leave? One year? Two years? Five? Ten?

There is not a single sign that Iraq is improving. To the contrary, every indication is that it's getting worse, and a smaller force will do nothing to change that.

How many more Americans must die before we leave an Iraq that will be no better off than it is today? And in a war where American troops are the number one target, who are the poor souls you're going to leave behind?

We need to bring them all home.

You can sign our petition at No Troops Left Behind dot com.

The way we help heal Iraq is to bring all of our troops home within six months. Only then can the hard diplomatic work really begin. That's how we avoid a regional war.

I would leave troops in neighboring countries that want us, like Kuwait, to help keep the peace. But we need to hand over security of Iraq to an all Muslim peacekeeping force.

We would then have a moral responsibility to do everything we can to bring the different factions together in a national reconciliation conference.

We also have a strategic interest in organizing a regional conference with all of Iraq's neighbors, including Syria and Iran, to help stabilize Iraq. No one in the region, including Iran, wants an Iraqi civil war ... and no one in the region, especially Iran, wants Iraqi refugees.

Some will tell you that once we leave Iraq, the country will become a hotbed of Al Qaeda activity. That's just not the case. There is an old Arab proverb -- "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Up until now, Al Qaeda was tolerated in Iraq because they were killing Americans.

Once we're gone, the Iraqis will have no further use for Al Qaeda and they will drive them out. We're seeing the beginnings of this already in Sunni attacks on Al Qaeda, but the process will accelerate once we're gone. Too many Iraqis have died at the hands of Al Qaeda and retaliation will be at hand.

Two months ago in North Korea, I was proud to help show how talking to your enemies can produce results, like reducing the North Korean nuclear threat and bringing home the remains of six American servicemen. The situation is similar in the Middle East. This president broke Iraq. The next president has to know how to use diplomacy to fix it.

I will tell you this -- my world view is different from my colleagues. In my career, I've been able to get results, not with harsh words, but hard work. You talk to your adversaries. You listen. You get to know them well if you want them to hear what you're saying. And with understanding comes resolve. And with clarity comes cooperation.

It's how I've approached foreign affairs. It's how I've approached governing. And it's how I'll serve as president of this great country.

More than anything else, we have a moral obligation to those American soldiers and citizens who've laid down their lives overseas.

Some say we cannot let their sacrifice be in vain. But you will never convince me that those slain patriots would have wanted a single additional life to be lost ... just to validate their own sacrifice.

Instead, the moral obligation is to honor their service by bringing their mission to a close. By ending the bloodshed

... and finally letting the Iraqi people and the American people to set a new course.

Those would be the principles of my presidency. And those would be the ideals I'd seek.

Thank you, God bless you, God bless our troops, God bless the Democratic Party, and God bless New Mexico.

1. H.R. 1591, SEC 1904 (e) (1-4) (supplemental appropriations bill); and Reid-Feingold, S. 1097.
2. H.R. 1591, SEC 1904 (e) (4) (supplemental appropriations bill)

