



William Jefferson Clinton

2008 Democratic National Convention Address



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I am here, first, to support Barack Obama. And second, I'm here to warm up the crowd for Joe Biden, though as you will soon see, he doesn't need any help from me. I love Joe Biden, and America will too.

What a year we Democrats have had. The primary began with an all-star line up and it came down to two remarkable Americans locked in a hard fought contest right to the very end. That campaign generated so much heat it increased global warming.

Now, in the end, my candidate didn't win. But I'm really proud of the campaign she ran. I am proud that she never quit on the people she stood up for, on the changes she pushed for, on the future she wanted for all our children. And I'm grateful for the chance Chelsea and I had to go all over America to tell people about the person we know and love. Now, I am not so grateful for the chance to speak in the wake of Hillary's magnificent speech last night. But I'll do the best I can.

Last night, Hillary told us in no uncertain terms that she is going to do everything she can to elect Barack Obama. That makes two of us. Actually, that makes 18 million of us -- because, like Hillary, I want all of you who supported her to vote for Barack Obama in November. And here's why. And I have the privilege of speaking here, thanks to you, from a perspective that no other American Democrat, except President Carter, can offer.

Our nation is in trouble on two fronts. The American dream is under siege at home, and America's leadership in the world has been weakened. Middle-class and low-income Americans are hurting, with incomes declining, job losses, poverty, and inequality rising, mortgage foreclosures and credit card debt increasing, health care coverage disappearing, and a very big spike in the cost of food, utilities, and gasoline.



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And our position in the world has been weakened by too much unilateralism and too little cooperation by a perilous dependence on imported oil, by a refusal to lead on global warming, by a growing indebtedness and a dependence on foreign lenders, by a severely burdened military, by a backsliding on global nonproliferation and arms control agreements, and by a failure to consistently use the power of diplomacy, from the Middle East to Africa to Latin America to Central and Eastern Europe.

Clearly, the job of the next President is to rebuild the American dream and to restore American leadership in the world. And here's what I have to say about that: Everything I learned in my eight years as President, and in the work I have done since in America and across the globe, has convinced me that Barack Obama is the man for this job.

Now, he has a remarkable ability to inspire people, to raise our hopes and rally us to high purpose. He has the intelligence and curiosity every successful President needs. His policies on the economy, on taxes, on health care, on energy are far superior to the Republican alternatives. He has shown a clear grasp of foreign policy and national security challenges and a firm commitment to rebuild our badly strained military. His family heritage and his life experiences have given him a unique capacity to lead our increasingly diverse nation in an ever more interdependent world. The long, hard primary tested and strengthened him. And in his first presidential decision, the selection of a running mate, he hit it out of the park. With Joe Biden's experience and wisdom, supporting Barack Obama's proven understanding, instincts, and insight, America will have the national security leadership we need.

And so, my fellow Democrats, I say to you: Barack Obama is ready to lead America and to restore American leadership in the world. Barack Obama is ready to honor the oath, to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. Barack Obama is ready to be President of the United States.

As President, he will work for an America with more partners and fewer adversaries. He will rebuild our frayed alliances and revitalize the international institutions which helped to share the cost of the world's problems and to leverage the power of our influence. He will put us back in the forefront of the world's fight against global warming and the fight to reduce nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. He will continue and enhance our nation's commendable global leadership in an area in which I am deeply involved: the fight against AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, including -- and this is very important -- a renewal of the battle against HIV and AIDS here at home.

A President Obama will choose diplomacy first and military force as a last resort. But, in a world troubled by terror, by trafficking in weapons, drugs and people, by human rights abuses of the most awful kind, by other threats to our security, our interests, and our values, when he cannot convert adversaries into partners, he will stand up to them.

Barack Obama also will not allow the world's problems to obscure its opportunities. Everywhere, in rich and poor countries alike, hard-working people need good jobs, secure, affordable health care, food and energy, quality education for their children and economically beneficial ways to fight global warming.



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These challenges cry out for American ideas and American innovation. When Barack Obama unleashes them, America will save lives, win new allies, open new markets, and create wonderful new jobs for our own people.

Most important of all, Barack Obama knows that America cannot be strong abroad unless we are first strong at home. People the world over have always been more impressed by the power of our example than by the example of our power.

Look at the example the Republicans have set. In this decade, American workers have consistently given us rising productivity. That means, year after year, they work harder and produce more. Now, what did they get in return? Declining wages, less than one-fourth as many new jobs as in the previous eight years, smaller health care and pension benefits, rising poverty, and the biggest increase in income inequality since the 1920s.

American families by the millions are struggling with soaring health care costs and declining coverage. I will never forget the parents of children with autism and other serious conditions who told me on the campaign trail that they couldn't afford health care and couldn't qualify their children for Medicaid unless they quit work and starved or got a divorce.

Are these the family values the Republicans are so proud of?

What about the military families pushed to the breaking point by multiple, multiple deployments? What about the assault on science and the defense of torture? What about the war on unions and the unlimited favors for the well-connected? And what about Katrina and cronyism?

My fellow Democrats, America can do better than that. And Barack Obama will do better than that. But, first, we have to elect him.

The choice is clear. The Republicans in a few days will nominate a good man who has served our country heroically and who suffered terribly in a Vietnamese prison camp. He loves his country every bit as much as we do. As a senator, he has shown his independence of right-wing orthodoxy on some very important issues. But on the two great questions of this election -- how to rebuild the American dream and how to restore America's leadership in the world -- he still embraces the extreme philosophy that has defined his Party for more than 25 years.

And it is, to be fair to all the Americans who aren't as hard-core Democrats as we, it's a philosophy the American people never actually had a chance to see in action fully until 2001, when the Republicans finally gained control of both the White House and the Congress. Then we saw what would happen to America if the policies they had talked about for decades actually were implemented. And look what happened. They took us from record surpluses to an exploding debt; from over 22 million new jobs to just 5 million; from increasing working families' incomes to nearly 7500 dollars a year to a decline of more than 2,000 dollars a year; from almost 8 million Americans lifted out of poverty to more than 5 and a half million driven into poverty; and millions more losing their health insurance.



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Now, in spite of all this evidence, their candidate is actually promising more of the same. Think about it: more tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans that will swell the deficit, increase inequality, and weaken the economy; more Band-Aids for health care that will enrich insurance companies, impoverish families, and increase the number of uninsured; more going it alone in the world, instead of building the shared responsibilities and shared opportunities necessary to advance our security and restore our influence. They actually want us to reward them for the last eight years by giving them four more.

Now, let's send them a message that will echo from the Rockies all across America, a simple message: Thanks, but no thanks. In this case, the third time is not the charm.

My -- My fellow Democrats, 16 years ago, you gave me the profound honor to lead our Party to victory and to lead our nation to a new era of peace and broadly shared prosperity. Together, we prevailed in a hard campaign in which the Republicans said I was too young and too inexperienced to be Commander-in-Chief. Sound familiar? It didn't work in 1992, because we were on the right side of history. And it will not work in 2008, because Barack Obama is on the right side of history.

Now, Senator Obama's life is a 21st-century incarnation of the old-fashioned American Dream. His achievements are proof of our continuing progress toward the more perfect union of our founders' dreams. The values of freedom and equal opportunity, which have given him his historic chance, will drive him as President to give all Americans -- regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability -- their chance to build a decent life and to show our humanity, as well as our strengths, to the world.

We see that humanity, that strength, and our nation's future in Barack and Michelle Obama and their beautiful children.

We see them reinforced by the partnership with Joe Biden, his fabulous wife, Jill, a wonderful teacher, and their family.

Barack Obama will lead us away from the division and fear of the last eight years back to unity and hope.

So if, like me, you believe America must always be a place called Hope, then join Hillary and Chelsea and me in making Barack Obama the next President of the United States.

Thank you, and God bless you.