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April 15, 2008

Hillary's Remarks to the Newspaper Association of America's Annual Conference in Washington DC

Hillary Clinton delivered the following remarks to the Newspaper Association of America's Annual Conference earlier today in Washington, D.C.:

I know that in this audience there are members of the media from New York, including Margaret Sullivan from the Buffalo News and Arthur Sulzberger from the New York Times and others who I don't have on this card, but I am very pleased to be here with all of you.

First, I want to say that this speech is entirely off the record. Well, you know that those days are long gone. And I am delighted to be back here once again. I was listening to Gilbert introduce me and talk about what I said back in 2004 and how times have certainly changed.

But I want to thank newspaper publishers collectively for one of my favorite headlines of all time, which has given me great strength and encouragement over the last months, "Dewey Beats Truman. And I often recall it as I'm travelling from place to place around our country.

I also want to thank you for those of you who have invested in the coverage of this historic campaign. Your hard-working reporters and columnists are there with us every step of the way. Some have literally been on my campaign from the very first days. And they are working extraordinarily hard, given the hours we keep and the miles that we log.

And I appreciate your continuing attention to these important issues, just as I do more generally what you do every day to convey to your readership the scope and scale of the challenges and opportunities confronting our nation and our world.

I know this is your mission. It's a mission that predates our country but was certainly inscribed into our First Amendment. And it is essential that we have you to inform an active citizenry who are the owners and operators of this democracy.

I'm also well aware that there are many who are worried, even as we speak, about those who work with you, journalists imprisoned, Americans as well as those from other countries, journalists who have been murdered and kidnapped in the course of their work.

I was recently at an event held by Vital Voices honoring Mariane Pearl whose husband Daniel's murder is a horrific and tragic reminder of the dangers that journalists increasingly face in the complex and dangerous globe.

So thank you. Thank you for what you're doing. Thank you also for what you do here at home. There are many stories that have really made a difference. One in particular that I paid a lot of attention to was The Washington Post's Pulitzer Prize-winning series on the disturbing conditions at Walter Reed. What was going on there at the outpatient facility was a national disgrace. What was happening took place outside of public scrutiny, and it took a lot of effort to piece the story together.

And once that story broke into public consciousness, the public and the public officials began to respond. Now, that episode is instructive to me in two ways. It was a lesson about the still very profound power of the traditional press to both serve and shape the public interest. But it was also a reminder of the consequences of presidential power misapplied, misdirected or missing in action.

And that's what I would like to discuss with you today: the power and promise of the presidency. And I'd like to begin at the beginning. Our Constitution instructs the president to take care that the laws be faithfully executed and calls upon the president to swear to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

The presidency is not royalty. Our Constitution is crafted carefully to prevent by election what our founders overthrew by revolution. The president is the one elected representative of the whole American people. Our president is balanced by the Congress, which speaks for regions and states, and by the courts, which defend the individual and other important rights against assaults on our liberties.

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Statement from the Clinton Campaign
6/3/2008

HUBdate: Election Day in South Dakota
and Montana
6/3/2008

Wyoming Automatic Delegate Backs
Hillary
6/3/2008

Response to VP Inquiry
6/3/2008

Louisiana Democratic Party Chair and
Automatic Delegate Chris Whittington
Endorses Hillary
6/2/2008

Statement from Hillary Clinton On Gay
Pride Month
6/2/2008

New York Automatic Delegate Endorses
Hillary
6/2/2008

The president is the only constitutional office holder with the power to speak for all of us and with the potential to unify us in the service of our national interest.

Unfortunately, our current president does not seem to understand the basic character of the office he holds. Rather than faithfully execute the laws, he has rewritten them through signing statements, ignored them through secret legal opinions, undermined them by elevating ideology over facts. Rather than defending the Constitution, he has defied its principles and traditions. He has abused his power while failing to understand its purpose.

This administration's unbridled ambition to transform the executive into an imperial presidency in an attempt to strengthen the office has weakened our nation. It has corrupted and corroded our moral authority and brought our prestige and reputation to its lowest ebb. The president has failed to use the power of the presidency, the power he sought to inflate, to expand opportunity and make a real difference in people's lives.

This president seems to believe it's a good day in the White House when the government does little for ordinary Americans. That is how this administration defines the presidency: limited government, but unlimited power.

Well, I have a different view.

I believe in the power of the presidency to set big goals for America and to solve the problems of Americans, to ensure that our people have the tools they need to turn challenges into opportunities, to fulfill their God-given potential, and to build better lives for themselves and their children. That's the kind of president I will be every day in the White House, whether the issue is health care or child care, foreign policy, or the future of our economy.

I am running for president because I believe in the promise of America and I believe in the power of the presidency to help fulfill that promise. Now, that's not a sound bite. It's what I have learned, experienced and intended, as best I could, throughout my life. I've had many opportunities. I've been blessed. And I understand that those blessings came from the hard work of my parents, my teachers, others in the village that surrounded and helped to nurture and raise me; my church, which helped to guide me; and, of course, the positive actions of my government that directly affected my life.

As a young girl, I could not go to certain colleges, compete for certain scholarships, participate, if I'd had the sporting ability, in certain sports, or obtain some kind of financial aid for playing them. There were certain jobs that were closed to me and other young women. And the horizons were not quite as broad as those for my brothers. I grew up in a middle-class family, at a time when our nation was investing in the middle class.

After World War II, my father started a small business, saved up enough money to purchase a home. He, like so many veterans coming back from World War II, were anxious to get on with their lives. He moved us to a suburb where he paid taxes for better schools, and where our nation made unprecedented investments in public education.

I was able to go to college and then to law school because the federal government wanted to make investments in young people. And so, when I went to law school, unable to get any financial help from my family, I worked, I had a small scholarship, and I borrowed money from the federal government at about 2% interest. And I and so many others had a chance to pursue our academic dreams because our government wanted us to.

As I have seen over the last years in public life as a Senator from New York and now as a candidate for the presidency how many families and how many young people don't have any confidence or any reason to believe that their government cares about their future. I believe that we have to change that. The magnitude of the problems before us present a unique challenge and chance to bring this generation of Americans together, to fulfill our common purpose. And finding the nation to do so is the responsibility of our president.

Nine months from now, a few days, we will have a new president taking the oath of office from the steps of the Capitol. That new president will inherit the job at a time of unprecedented challenges and stress. Our economy is at risk of a deep and painful recession threatening the opportunities for millions of Americans to find and keep jobs that are satisfying and well paid, to buy their own homes or keep the ones they have, send their children to college, to save for retirement, even to afford their health care premiums, their gas bills, their utility bills, and so much else that makes up a middle class lifestyle here in our country.

Our health care system is in crisis. It threatens not only the health of our families but the opportunities for our businesses as they compete in the global marketplace. Our security is threatened by the interconnected dangers of extremism, terrorism, rogue regimes, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and certainly by the ongoing war in Iraq and the climate crisis that does threaten our way of life. That's why it is so important that in this election we restore balance and purpose to the presidency as the first step to restore opportunity and moral authority in America.

I believe I bring a unique set of experiences to this mission; one, of my lifetime of work going back 35 years, and my incredible opportunities now on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. I have seen what happens when a president tries and succeeds on some fronts, but fails on others. I certainly witnessed and was part of the consequences of a process to create universal health care that was viewed as too insulated from people and their representatives in Congress. But I also participated in and helped to bring about successes, like the Children's Health Insurance Program which was a bipartisan accomplishment. I watched as my husband made other important progressive steps on behalf of America.

As a Senator, I've seen how working with Congress as a president makes a real difference, and the absence of presidential involvement leaves a vacuum. Congress's role in deliberating on legislation may not always bring people together who do not agree, but it is essential that the process be recognized and respected. I have worked hard to hold this administration accountable because all too often the president has failed to share information with the Congress, to be willing to recognize the checks and balances that have certainly been a blessing to our system of government for so many years.

I will bring most of my time in the White House and now my time in the Senate, some critical lessons to the presidency. First, I will restore faith in our government by resorting integrity to our government. For seven years, this administration has exhibited ideological disdain for government. And because they view government with contempt, they treat it with contempt. They don't believe government can or should be a source for the public interest, so they treat it as a source of favors for private interests.

As president I will restore an old-fashioned idea - appointing qualified people to positions in government again. I will immediately begin implementing an agenda of reform to end no-bid contracts, to close the revolving door between public sector work and private sector lobbying, to restore fiscal responsibility, to modernize our government, and to open its books to greater scrutiny.

Second, I will restore openness in government. When I am president, the era of Bush/Cheney secrecy will be over. On April 27th, 1961, President Kennedy addressed one of the predecessors of this association, the American Newspaper Publishers Association. The failed invasion of Cuba known as the Bay of Pigs had taken place just one week before. President Kennedy spoke of the threat threatening the United States. He wrestled publicly with the basic tension that exists whenever our security is threatened between the government's responsibility to keep some secrets and the public's right to know. But he understood the importance of openness to the integrity and vitality of government even in the aftermath of his own failures. He said, "There is little value in opposing the threat of a closed society by imitating its arbitrary restrictions." Just days after an embarrassing failure, the president of the United States came before your predecessors, begged for scrutiny, and challenged the nation to mobilize without compromising democratic values.

That kind of open leadership has been sorely lacking these past seven years. In fact the Bush administration has dramatically widened the definition of classified information to shield more and more materials from public scrutiny, has widened the scope of the states secrets privilege to shield this program from judicial review, and has widened the reach of executive privilege to shield its activities from Congress. From warrantless wiretaps at home to secret prisons overseas, the Bush administration has conducted illegal activities and stonewalled efforts of the people and the Congress to discover them and to hold the administration accountable.

When I am president I will empower the federal government to operate from a presumption of openness, not secrecy. That's why I am a co-sponsor of the Free Flow of Information Act, allowing reporters to protect sources, help insure that whistle blowers can blow the whistle, and you can keep the public informed and keep office holders accountable.

I will direct my administration to prevent needless classification of information that ought to be shared with the public. We will adopt a presumption of openness and Freedom of Information Act requests and urge agencies to release information quickly if disclosure will do no harm. It was Attorney General Janet Reno's approach, and it will be my Attorney General's approach, as well.

Third, because solving problems starts by recognizing facts, I will restore evidence based decision making to our government. A free and open society depends upon evidence based inquiry. Shortly after I arrived in the Senate, it became abundantly clear to me that the White House had very little interest in facts or evidence and I started saying in speeches on the floor and in other settings that they wanted to turn Washington into an evidence-free zone. Unfortunately, they have succeeded all too well and we will have to reverse that.

This administration has also waged a war on science; rewriting scientific reports, allowing politicians to overrule and silence government researchers, politicizing important decisions affecting our environment and our public health. I will stop political appointees from manipulating the government's scientific conclusions and prevent the suppression of public statements from government scientists. I will put in place new whistleblower protections for scientists who step forward to protest political interference. Our government will once again value and encourage scientific discovery and open inquiry, and we will regain our place as the world's leading innovation

nation.

Fourth, because government abuse is checked by the separation of powers, I will restore respect for our co-equal branches of government. I'll start by limiting the excessive executive powers this president has accumulated, like the unilateral power to wiretap, or detain try people, even American citizens. I will work with Congress again as a partner to solve problems. I'll end the use of signing statements to rewrite the laws that Congress has passed. I'll shut down Guantanamo, disavow torture and restore the right of Habeas Corpus.

I will end the practice of using executive privilege as a shield against the public's right to know and congress' duty to oversee the president.

Finally I will make crystal clear that the president and the executive branch will comply with the laws of our nation. My Department of Justice will interpret those laws fairly accurately honestly and publically. We'll release Justice Department interpretations so that you know exactly what our understanding is and how laws are being executed. The President is not above the law in our system of government and we need to make that absolutely clear starting next year. These changes both represent and drive the transformation I believe is needed in our government starting on day one of my administration. I do not believe that power is an end in itself but a means. A means limited in scope of serving the interest and protecting the safety of our nation, while creating opportunity for our people.

But the question before us is deeper than how the next president will restore our government and our Constitution. The question is how the next president will employ our government. I am here and I am running for president because I have seen the promise of America and I do understand the promise of the presidency and on day one I will bring my hard won experience, whatever strength and knowledge I possess to fulfill that promise. I will start by trying to live up to the model described by teddy Roosevelt - "All that in me lies to do will be done to make my work a success." And I plan to hit the ground running starting on day one and throughout my first 100 days.

During that time I will call on congress to send to my desk the bills the president vetoed, from supporting stem cell research to expanding Children's Health Care and I will sign them, allowing scientists to better explore the promise of new cures for disease- diseases like Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, diabetes and so much else. And we will provide health insurance for millions more of our children as a down payment on achieving health care for all Americans with no exceptions.

My administration will call together meeting of mortgage lenders, banks, community organizations and regulators to negotiate an immediate freeze on foreclosures, because so many Americans are hurting and the projection is that more than 2 million families will be foreclosed on this year. I will call for a timeout on new trade agreements and review all existing trade agreements and I will call on Canada and Mexico to work with me to renegotiate NAFTA.

My budget to congress will restore fiscal sanity while cutting taxes for middle class families to the tune of 100 billion dollars a year, ending tax breaks for oil companies, drug companies, insurance companies, Wall Street and others to the tune of 55 billion dollars a year.

I will work with Congress to introduce a comprehensive immigration bill.

My administration convene a summit within 100 days to negotiate a new climate change treaty to replace Kyoto and one that includes China, India and other rapidly developing and very big green house gas emitting nations. I will work with the Congress to submit a comprehensive energy bill that will move us toward ending our dependence on foreign oil and increasing the percentage of renewable fuels we use to produce electricity.

I will overturn the global gag rule to allow nongovernmental organizations to practice free speech and use other funding sources to provide women with access to the full range of reproductive health care around the world.

I will call a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and demand that the Pentagon draw up plans to begin withdrawing troops from Iraq responsibly and carefully starting within 60 days of my inauguration. I will reach out to the rest of the world and ask distinguished Americans of both parties to be emissaries on our behalf traveling across the globe telling both governments and people that the united states is willing once again to work with you to try to find common ground on our problems from global warming to global terrorism to global epidemics.

I will sign executive orders ending the war on science, ordering the closure of Guantanamo, reversing many of the anti-labor provisions that President Bush adopted and looking very clearly at what we have to do to rebuild a strong and prosperous middle class in our country.

In short, starting from day one, the Bush-Cheney era will be over in name and in practice. We are fortunate in our country that we get to overturn our government peacefully and thoroughly. The question is the path we select at such an important juncture. I know this campaign has gone on a long time, but elections do end and when the campaigns conclude and the banners are town down and the speeches are finally finished, all that's left is the choice we have made.

We have seen the power of the presidency placed in hands unready or unwilling to address the paths that lie ahead. Just think of the days after September 11th. Imagine if President Bush had tapped into the wellspring of American energy, initiative and goodwill. The president could've launched a Manhattan project for renewable energy, the president could have called on our young people to serve in the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps help to start what I've advocated, a Green Corps. The president could've said we need to reach out to the rest of the world because clearly the world needs to be as committed to ending acts of horrific terrorism as we are.

The president could have responded to our health challenges by investing in public health here and around the world. The president could've said we need to be smarter about how we engage with the rest of the world so let us lead in trying to make education more universally available to the 77 million children who are shut out, including in countries like Pakistan where too often the young boys are then turned over for indoctrination to the Madrassas because there are no alternative. The president literally could have access to do anything, called on our patriotism and our unity. But he only asked us to draw on our wallets and go shopping.

We have also seen throughout our history the power of the presidency placed in hands ready to transform our nation for the better, to call upon those better angels of our nature, to summon the unique and wonderful spirit that sets America apart and carries forward, constantly believing that tomorrow can be better than today. We've overcome tyranny, we've ended the injustice of slavery, we've expanded civil rights and women's rights, we've endured and grown stronger through the Depression and World Wars, and yes, we have become a much better and fairer country for all that we have done on behalf of those who were initially left out of our constitution or who lacked even the basic power to organize for themselves.

Throughout our history we have achieved in those moments improbable and even impossible triumphs. And each time we have rediscovered the boundless forces of American strengths and character. That is what we must do again.

In a message to congress from the citizens of America at the onset of the Civil War, President Lincoln called upon our nation to save itself. "It is a struggle," he said, "for maintaining in the world that form and substance of government whose leading object is to elevate the condition of men, to lift artificial weights from all shoulders, to clear the path of laudable pursuit for all, to afford all an unfettered start and a fair chance in the race of life."

Those are the stakes. In your hands rest an awesome responsibility - to inform us and educate us. And to help us be committed to that race that lies ahead. We must not turn away from the urgency of our times and the immediacy of the tasks before us. I know that we are fully up to it; I have no doubt. No matter how daunting it may seem, there is no one who can count us out if we are willing and able to rise and meet the challenges and seize the opportunities before us. It would be a grave abdication of our birthright, of our history as Americans were we to do any less. Thank you all very much."