

Chris Dodd for President



REMARKS AS PREPARED OF SENATOR CHRISTOPHER J. DODD
"REKINDLING THE FLAME – A CALL FOR A NEW AMERICAN PATRIOTISM"
NASHUA CITY HALL PLAZA
SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 2007

Thank you, Mike, for that generous introduction, for your support and for your quarter century of service to this community. I know of no more tireless advocate for firefighters, first responders and public safety.

Let me also thank Matt Wilhelm for his service and remarks, all the elected officials with us today, as well as Bernie and Alice Boutin.

Bernie coordinated John F. Kennedy's New Hampshire campaign in 1960 – and I understand Alice had the honor of escorting Mrs. Kennedy from Manchester for the Senator's historic appearance here. So, it's an honor to have two Granite State legends with us so many years later in this special place.

And I would be remiss on a day we were discussing service and sacrifice if I did not take a moment to recognize the nine firefighters who gave their lives for the people of Charleston, South Carolina this week.

Their families are in the prayers of all Americans right now, recognizing as I know we all do the common bond we have with those who keep our communities safe everyday.

Forty-seven years ago, a Senator from a neighboring state stood at these steps on a January morning for the first time as a Democratic candidate for the presidency of the United States. Almost a year to the day later, that New England Senator took the oath of office as the 35th President of the United States.

Seated in the East Front of the United States Capitol with my family, I listened as this new President in the bright winter cold called to action a new generation in service of our national cause.

Like thousands of others, I heard President Kennedy's words, and decided a short time later to join the Peace Corps, where I served for two years in the rural hills and villages of the Dominican Republic.

Inspired by an American President, I took to the tasks before me and built schools, a

maternity clinic and centers of community.

I learned about another culture.

I learned another language.

I acquired a deeper appreciation of the land of my birth. And when I returned home, I served in our National Guard and Army Reserves.

It is with that same sense of purpose that four-and-a-half decades later, now a New England Senator and Democratic candidate for the presidency myself, I stand before you in Nashua, New Hampshire to renew that call to service – to rekindle the flame lit in this place with an American Community Initiative that calls once again upon every American to be a part of something larger than themselves.

An initiative that invokes the very best of the American character in common purpose and noble cause, and creates nothing less than a New American Patriotism.

September 11th showed us that our world had changed – but it was September 12th that reminded us: Americans had not.

The day after one of the worst tragedies our nation has ever known, we came together as an American Community—in all our great diversity—united in purpose, united in resolve – and ready to serve.

The community blood drives, the heroism of our firefighters and solidarity felt by every citizen was a powerful testament to the ties that bind us together as Americans.

We had seen before, this enduring part of the American character and the legacy of American leadership.

Throughout our history, whether it was raising an army to make the world safe for democracy, the six million women who joined the war effort and helped our factories build more than 300,000 planes in World War II, or sending a man to the moon within a decade, we have always risen to the occasion as one American Community.

Indeed, we see it every day in Iraq and Afghanistan with the brave men and women who serve in our all volunteer military.

Each of these endeavors has only been possible because at times when our nation needed it most, we have had the leadership calling our nation to service – leadership that understood that when we are united there is no challenge beyond our collective grasp.

The days after September 11th left us a powerful moment in American history – but unfortunately, President Bush missed the opportunity to harness that sense of community.

Instead of calling on America—instead of asking all of us to step up, sacrifice and rise to the occasion—our President advised us—asked us—to go shopping.

Five-and-a-half-years and yet another tragedy later—Hurricane Katrina—that unity that called Americans to action has been replaced with divisiveness and partisanship.

Five-and-a-half-years later, some fear the loss of our national identity – of who we are and the common values that bind us together as Americans.

Others wonder if America in this new century has lost touch with the ideals that she led with in the last.

I couldn't disagree more.

Travel across this country of ours, and you find Americans not divided in comfort, but united in their restlessness for a deeper sense of community required of a free society.

Not simply occupied with their own day-to-day struggles, but hungry to be awakened to a renewed sense of national purpose, shared experience and sacrifice.

Today, more than anytime in recent memory, we need to rekindle our American Community and call upon our collective imaginations, ideas, energy, and resolve.

I know the American people stand at the ready – and not just in times of crisis, but everyday.

My friends, as it was on that cold winter morning four decades ago, Americans today are merely waiting to be asked.

For six years, this President has not – in the first hour on the first day of my Presidency, I will.

All Americans should serve our country. Endowed as we are with so many gifts – is it too much to ask that we each give something back to this remarkable place?

As President, I will ask all Americans to share in the responsibility of bringing our nation together again, and I will provide the ways for all Americans to participate.

Today I am announcing my American Community Initiative to create the first generation in history in which every American serves their country.

Through this kind of universal service, all Americans will have the opportunity to do their part in strengthening America.

Making service a priority in this country starts with making sure in a Dodd Administration the Executive Director of the Corporation for National and Community Service will sit at the Cabinet table.

By building on successful service initiatives and finding new ways for Americans to serve, I believe we can connect all generations to our most timeless ideals.

Never again will this country have to wait for a national crisis to bring us together with national purpose.

With a New American Patriotism that steels our country everyday and in every

community, every American from every corner of society will have served where it is needed most by the end of the century – in elementary schools, in the military, in retirement homes, in libraries and soup kitchens operating out of local churches, in centers of community at home and abroad.

We will leave future generations a stronger, safer America where children are more invested in their communities, more seniors will retire with dignity in communities that are clean, safe and vibrant, and more people across the globe will once again look to America not with anger or wistfulness for an earlier time, but with optimism and hope for the future.

Those doing humanitarian work abroad can help repair America's moral standing, leaving a world to our children and grandchildren more secure than the one in which we live and more faithful to our ideals.

Fulfilling this vision for an American Community in our lifetimes is in our hands – but only with national leadership that asks Americans to be a part of something larger than themselves once again.

As with so many of our national endeavors, this one starts with our children.

As the father of two young daughters, every day I see the boundless energy, enthusiasm and imagination children bring to everything they do.

If the chat rooms and online communities of today show us anything, it is that young people yearn for shared experiences.

All they are missing is leadership from us to redirect that interest toward community service.

Marshalling America's youth begins at home and then in our schools. As President, I will require every student in America to serve in their communities prior to graduating from high school, to instill a lifelong sense of civic responsibility and sacrifice in our young people and strengthen the American Community.

As the state of Maryland has shown, mandatory service in high school is not only feasible, but remarkably successful, giving every student the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills by meeting the needs of their communities.

They can help tutor elementary-school students and provide activities for the more than 14 million children that have no supervised place to go after school.

They can visit those living in our veterans' hospitals and in hospice.

Or they can help clean up neighborhoods and the environment.

In a 21st Century world of abundant choice, young people will have unprecedented opportunities to serve, give, and learn.

As we help our kids learn the value of shared experience, we can give them the tools

they need to achieve a college education.

As President, I will also call for a dramatic expansion of the successful AmeriCorps program by increasing its ranks to a million people by the end of my presidency and ensuring its education award keeps pace with the skyrocketing cost of college.

At the same time we marshal America's youth to service, we should remember that we can pass on no greater gift to future generations than the lessons of the past. Yet, too often, we fail to draw upon the experience, knowledge and ideas of previous generations – who today live longer, healthier lives than any in history.

A Senior Heroes Program would harness the power of experience by encouraging retired Americans to volunteer in our nation's schools.

National service can strengthen our schools and retirement communities – but also our security and safety.

One of the greatest tragedies of Hurricane Katrina was that while families were stranded on rooftops and in nursing homes desperate for help, a third of Louisiana's National Guard was in Iraq, slowing relief efforts with tragic consequences.

Indeed, I will never forget the Mayor of Pass Christian Mississippi telling about an elderly Connecticut couple who drove to the Gulf Coast in the wake of Katrina for no other reason than to help their fellow countrymen and women.

By mobilizing service corps alumni as well as retired military people in a Rapid Response Reserve Corps that is ready to supplement the good work of firefighters, police officers, health professionals, and other first responders at a moment's notice, America will always be prepared to respond to emergencies and natural disasters wherever and whenever they may be.

But if the last six years have taught us anything, it's that security is not simply about the example of our force – but the force of our example.

You cannot hate America if you know Americans.

That was but one of the lessons I learned from the people of the Dominican Republic who embraced a 22-year-old American and taught him a language – taught him to look at his the world differently, taught him to appreciate our leadership more, and, thus, I returned a more enriched American.

As Emerson wrote – “It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.”

That is why I intend to double the size of the Peace Corps by 2011 and again by mid-century. The Peace Corps offers a remarkable opportunity to send a strong message to the world that the American people stand ready to turn back disease and poverty not only with our checkbooks but also with the sweat and heart of a good and decent people.

I cannot imagine a time when the mission of the Peace Corps—supporting the development of other peoples, fostering a greater understanding of American values and culture abroad, and a deeper appreciation of other cultures and languages here at home—was more urgently needed.

My friends, there is only one element missing from creating a New American Patriotism and a stronger American Community – leadership that is optimistic, confident and bold.

With that kind of leadership from the next occupant of the White House that asks all Americans to sacrifice and take responsibility for the future of our country and our world, I believe our best days can be ahead of us – not in the memories of the past, but in the world of our children.

With a New American Patriotism that calls all Americans to service, the American Community can move forward in this new century in common cause and with muscular purpose. America will lead again.

PAID FOR BY CHRIS DODD FOR PRESIDENT, INC.