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Remarks By John McCain On Day Three Of The It's Time For Action Tour

April 23, 2008



ARLINGTON, VA -- U.S. Senator John McCain will deliver the following remarks as prepared for delivery at a town hall meeting at the Old Martin County Courthouse, in Inez, KY, today at 11:15 a.m. EDT:

Thank you. I'm pleased to be here and appreciate the welcome. I've never had the pleasure before of coming to Martin County, Kentucky. I regret that I've been so long in coming to this naturally beautiful part of our country, and that my stay will be a brief one. But my purpose in coming is not to admire the Appalachian scenery or to proclaim my Scots-Irish kinship with so many of the hardworking people who settled here, and carved a rugged life from the wilderness, and whose descendents still live here: proud of your heritage; self-reliant despite challenges many places in America do not experience; faithful to the values that have passed from one generation to the next; and intent on making for better lives for yourselves and your children.

You've had presidential candidates come to eastern Kentucky before. You've even had a president come to Inez before, forty-four years ago, where he issued a declaration of war on Tom Fletcher's front porch. Like me, he brought a lot of reporters with him so the moment and the pictures could be broadcast throughout the country. I am running for president, and I am intent on winning that office. And I cannot claim that the circumstances of our lives are similar in every respect. I am not the son of a coal miner. I wasn't raised by a family that made its living from the land or toiled in a mill or worked in the local schools or health clinic. There isn't any place in America like Appalachia that I can claim has always been mine, which I often regret. I grew up in a lot of different places. I was raised in the United States Navy, and after my own naval career, I became a politician. My work isn't as hard as yours. I had an easier start in life and an easier time since than many folks in Martin County. And although I pride myself on being a pretty resilient man, I cannot say that I have half the strength and determination of people in Inez. But you are my compatriots; my fellow Americans. That shared distinction means more to me than almost any other association. And if I am elected president, I intend every day to prove myself worthy of the office, of our country and of your respect.

I have no doubt President Johnson was serious and had the very best of intentions when he declared the war on poverty in America. But the army he enlisted was mostly drawn from the ranks of government bureaucracies. Government has a role to play in helping people who through no fault of their own are having a hard time. But government can't create good and lasting jobs outside of government. It can't pay lost wages. It can't dig coal from the earth. It can't buy you a house or send all your kids to college. It can't do your work for you. And you've never asked it to.

You've never wanted government to make your living for you. You just expect us to show a decent concern for your hard work and initiative; and do what we can to help make sure you have opportunities to prosper from your labor. We all have choices to make in our lives, and you don't expect government to make yours for you. But you have a right to expect that the people you elect to office will help and not hinder your efforts to make a better future for your community and families. You have a right to expect us to show as much concern for helping you create more and better choices to make for yourselves as we show any other community in America or we show the special interests who claim so much of Washington's attention.

The modern economy offers new opportunities for communities like Inez. In particular, through access to high-speed Internet services that facilitate interstate commerce, drive innovation, and promote educational achievements, there is the potential to change lives. These kinds of transformations of our way of life require the infrastructure of modern communication, and government has a role to play in assuring every community in America can develop that infrastructure. This country has a long history of ensuring that rural areas have the same access to communication technology as other places. In 1934, Congress mandated that every American, regardless of where they lived, receive basic telephone service at approximately the same rate, and established the universal service fund to provide Americans with that service. Unfortunately, in a tale that is too familiar, the program became a breeding ground for waste, corruption, and a grossly inefficient spending.

We need to widely reform the way we do business in Washington; to end wasteful spending that does little if anything to meet government's obligations to the American people. Government should accurately identify areas where the market truly is not working and provide companies that are willing to build the information infrastructure to serve these areas incentives like tax reductions and more generous depreciation.

I think we should establish a "People Connect Program" that rewards companies that offer high-speed Internet access services to underserved, low-income customers by allowing these companies to write off the cost of this service. The government should enlist the help of private/public partnerships to devise creative and successful solutions to the lack of access to information technology. In many places, cities and towns are working with businesses that have experience providing high-speed Internet

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services to share the cost of building and improving this service. Where companies are unwilling to build information infrastructure, the federal government can support towns through government-backed loans or by issuing bonds with a low interest rate.

An aggressive effort to knit together all of the United States with 21st century information networks will make location less of a factor in the potential for economic success. Instead, the prime determinant will be the skills, energy, imagination, and persistence of Americans -- attributes that have traditionally been in great supply in America, and certainly exist here, where people have always prided themselves on hard work and self-reliance.

We can make sure necessary skills are acquired through more extensive use of our community colleges. Community colleges have a proven track record of tailoring training programs to the business climate in the local community. Big Sandy Community and Technical College has a unique partnership with local coal companies, and provides exceptional classroom instruction in areas like Mine Certification, Basic Computers, Safety and First Aid, Business and Personal Finance, Hydraulics and others. Community college training in the region and elsewhere in our country is one of the most convenient, cost efficient and effective things we can do to stimulate economic growth locally.

Everyone recognizes that educational opportunities are indispensable to greater prosperity for all Americans, whether they live in Los Angeles, California, Washington, D.C. or Martin County, Kentucky. And in a country as prosperous and as good and decent as ours, there is no excuse for accepting anything other than the highest quality public education.

Rural areas often struggle to attract young highly qualified and motivated new teachers. At the same time, we make it very difficult for Americans with exceptional skills for teaching to enter the field of education through non-traditional means. These are often people who would like nothing better than to take advantage of the quiet beauty and traditional values that are the foundation of rural America. But the path to teaching is often made up of more barriers than gateways. You can be a Nobel Laureate and not qualify to teach in most public schools today. The next president should aggressively support state and national initiatives that attract exceptionally qualified candidates into teaching and that provide certification based on the candidates' demonstrated knowledge of the subjects they will teach, as well as their knowledge of how to teach. Terrific organizations like Teach for America attract the very best young college graduates from all disciplines to enter the teaching profession. The Troops to Teachers program takes advantage of the sense of heightened responsibility and duty that military veterans were taught in the discipline of the armed forces, and which makes many of them excellent candidates to impart those virtues to our children, and help them see the value of learning as a means to self-improvement.

New education technologies offer great partners, and bring the best teachers and most advanced technologies into the classroom where students and teachers alike benefit. Technology allows teachers in the smallest school in America to team up with the greatest math, English, and science teachers in the country. Nobody has to be isolated in their teaching. And students can be constantly challenged by a class that offers a fantastic teacher on-line and a supportive, quality teacher in the classroom when the going gets rough. The measure of success should be individual student achievement, regardless of how it's achieved.

My purpose in coming to Inez isn't, however, to roll out a long list of policy initiatives I intend to launch if I am elected president or to make vague promises to you that I will forget making once in office. I came here to listen to and learn from you, about what you're doing to grow your economy and increase opportunities here, and to find out what government is doing and not doing to help your initiatives. I know some of the initiatives you have undertaken here. A good example of a successful public-private partnership is your own Bluegrass State Skills Corporation, which develops customized business training programs, offers funding through grants and credits, and provides administrative services to ensure that these programs have their maximum impact. That is an initiative designed locally by people who know and understand Martin County and the strengths, resourcefulness and needs of the people here better than any bureaucrat in Washington could ever hope to.

Before I take your questions and ask you a few of my own, which is why I came here today, I want to close by saying that if I am president, I will not forget that the decisions I make will affect, for good or ill, your ability to make decisions for your families. I will not forget my responsibilities to every American community. I will not offer talk as a substitute for action. I will not make promises I intend to forget. And I will not make this my last visit to Inez. If I'm elected, I will come back here in the course of my administration; hold another townhall meeting, and invite you to hold me accountable for the decisions I have made and the promises I have sworn to keep. Thank you.

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