



EN ESPAÑOL

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It is an honor to be introduced by Harris Wofford - one of America's greatest advocates for public service. Starting with the civil rights movement and the Peace Corps, Harris and a generation of Americans answered a call to service. At a pivotal moment in our history, they stood up; they changed America; and they changed the world.

Today, it's easy for us to get caught thinking that there are two different stories at work in our lives. There is the story of our day to day cares and responsibilities. And there is the story of what's happening in the wider world - a story viewed through headlines and websites, a destiny to be shaped by forces beyond our control.

I am here today to ask you to reject this notion, and to invite you to take hold of the future of your country. Because your own story and the American story are not separate - they are shared. And they will both be enriched if we stand up together, and answer a new call to service to meet the challenges of our new century.

I say this to you as someone whose presence on this stage is unlikely. My father came from thousands of miles away, in Kenya, and went back there soon after I was born. I spent a childhood adrift. I was raised in Hawaii and Indonesia. I lived with my single mom and with my grandparents from Kansas. Growing up, I wasn't always sure who I was, or where I was going.

Then, when I was about your age, I decided to become a community organizer. I wrote letters to every organization in the country that I could think of. And for a while, I got no response. Finally, this small group of churches on the south side of Chicago wrote back and offered me a job to come help neighborhoods devastated by steel-plant closings. My mother and grandparents wanted me to go to law school. My friends were applying to jobs on Wall Street. I didn't know a soul in Chicago, and the salary was about \$12,000 a year, plus \$2,000 to buy an old, beat-up car.

I still remember a conversation I had with an older man before I left. He looked and said, "Barack, I'll give you a bit of advice. Forget this community organizing business and do something that's gonna make you some money. You can't change the world, and people won't appreciate you trying. You've got a nice voice. What you should do is go into television broadcasting. I'm telling you, you've got a future."

Now, he may have had a point about the TV thing. And to tell you the truth, I didn't have a clear answer about what I was doing. I wanted to step into the currents of history and help people fight for their dreams, but didn't know what my role would be. I was inspired by what people like Harris did in the civil rights movement, but when I got to Chicago, there were no marches, no soaring speeches. In the shadow of an empty steel plant, there were just a lot of folks struggling. Day after day, I heard 'no' a lot more than I heard 'yes.' I saw plenty of empty chairs in those meetings we put together.

But even as I discovered that you can't bend history to your will, I found that you could do your part to see that - in the words of Dr. King - it "bends toward justice." In church basements and around kitchen tables, block by block, we brought the community together, registered new voters, fought for new jobs, and helped people live lives with some measure of dignity.

Eventually, I realized I wasn't just helping other people. Through service, I found a community that embraced me; a church to belong to; citizenship that was meaningful; the direction I'd been seeking. Through service, I found that my own improbable story fit into a larger American story.

In America, each of us seeks our own dreams, but the sum of those dreams must be greater than ourselves. Because the America we inherited is the legacy of those who struggled, and those who served in so many ways, before us.

It's the legacy of a band of unlikely patriots who overthrew the tyranny of a King.

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It's the legacy of abolitionists who stood up, and soldiers who fought for a more perfect union.

It's the legacy of those who started to teach in our schools and tend to the sick in our cities; who laid the rails and volunteered to uphold the law as America moved west.

It's the legacy of men who faced the Depression by putting on the uniform of the Civilian Conservation Corps; of women who worked on that Arsenal of Democracy and built the tanks and ships and bomber aircraft to fight fascism.

It's the legacy of those women's suffragists and freedom riders who stood up for justice; and young people who answered President Kennedy's call to go forth in a Peace Corps.

The sacrifices made by previous generations have never been easy. But America is a great nation precisely because Americans have been willing to stand up when it was hard; to serve on stages both great and small; to rise above moments of great challenge and terrible trial.

One of those moments took place on September 11, 2001. Whether you lived in Manhattan or here in Mount Vernon, you felt the pain and loss of that day not just as an individual, but as an American. That's why we lined up to give blood. That's why we held vigils and flew flags. That's why we rallied behind our President. We had a chance to step into the currents of history. We were ready to answer a new call for our country. But the call never came. Instead, we were asked to go shopping, and to prove our patriotism by supporting a war in Iraq that should never have been authorized, and never been waged.

We have lost precious time. Our nation is less secure and less respected in the world. Our energy dependence has risen, and so has the specter of climate change. More of our children have been left behind. Instead of a call to unity, we got a political strategy of division. The burden of service has fallen, more and more, on the brave men and women of our military who heroically serve tour after tour of duty in a war without end.

When I was thinking about whether or not to seek the presidency, there were some voices who counseled me to wait. You seem like a gifted young man, they said - why not wait around Washington a few more years? Or when I started talking about a politics of hope, some just rolled their eyes and echoed the words of that man from my younger days: you can't change the world, and people won't appreciate you trying.

Well I am running for President - right now - because I refuse to let this moment pass. The decisions we make today will shape the century that my daughters - and your children - grow up in. I have not served the cause of America for over two decades to stay on the sidelines at a time when that cause is being challenged at home and abroad. If we don't rise up to seize this moment, then we may not get another.

I have no doubt that in the face of impossible odds people who love their country can change it. But I hold no illusions that one man or woman can do this alone. That's why my campaign has called nearly 400,000 Americans to a common purpose. That's why I'm reaching out to Democrats, and also to Independents and Republicans. And that is why I won't just ask for your vote as a candidate; I will ask for your service and your active citizenship when I am President of the United States. This will not be a call issued in one speech or program; this will be a cause of my presidency.

First, we will create new opportunities for all Americans to serve, and to direct that service to our most pressing national challenges.

Americans have shown they want to step up. I see it everywhere I go: the brave young men and women who have signed up to defend our country; the volunteers fighting poverty in rural America and to rebuild New Orleans; students getting their colleges to divest to stop the genocide in Darfur; the thousands of young Americans who have flooded the applicant pool for Teach for America; retirees who are devoting their time to serve.

But we're not keeping pace with the demand of those who want to serve, and we're not leveraging that commitment to meet national challenges. FDR not only enlisted Americans to create employment, he targeted that service to build our infrastructure and conserve our environment. JFK not only called on a new generation, he made their service a bridge to the developing world, and a bright light of American values in the darkest days of the Cold War.

Today, AmeriCorps - our nation's network of local, state and national service programs - has 75,000 slots. As President, I will increase that to 250,000, and make that increased service a vehicle to meet national goals like providing health care and education, saving our planet and restoring our standing in the world, so that citizens see their efforts connected to a common purpose. People of all ages, stations, and skills will be asked to serve. Because when it comes to the challenges we face, the American people are not the problem - they are the answer.

To help every American receive a world-class education, we will create a new Classroom Corps. We'll have college students, recent graduates and retirees mentor young people; engineers and scientists will help make sure the next generation of innovators is educated here in America; civic, business and faith leaders will develop new after school programs for our kids.

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To free ourselves from energy dependence and to confront climate change, we will create a new Energy Corps. We'll ask you to work on renewable energy projects, to teach folks about conservation, and to help clean up polluted areas. And we'll send talented American engineers and scientists abroad to help developing countries promote low-carbon energy development.

To restore America's standing, I will call on our greatest resource - not our bombs, guns, or dollars - I will call upon our people. We will grow the Foreign Service to renew our commitment to diplomacy. We will double the size of the Peace Corps by its 50th anniversary in 2011. And we'll reach out to other nations to engage their young people in similar programs, so that we work side by side to take on the common challenges that confront all humanity.

I will expand our military, while offering those who serve the promise that they will get the training, equipment, and care they deserve - and that they can trust we will never, ever, send them to fight in a misguided war. And we'll enlist veterans to help other veterans find jobs; to counsel vets who are confronting homelessness, mental health and substance abuse problems; and to pitch in at VA hospitals and nursing homes.

Some of these programs will be full-time; some will be part time opportunities for those who are working. And we'll expand and improve Senior Corps programs to attract new retirees with substantive service opportunities, so that service becomes a core part of active retirement.

And we'll use technology to connect people to service more extensively and effectively. We turn to websites like craigslist to find apartments and jobs. So we'll expand USA Freedom Corps to create an online network where Americans can browse opportunities to volunteer. You'll be able to search by category, time commitment, and skill sets; you'll be able to rate service opportunities, build service networks, and create your own service pages to track your hours and activities. This will empower more Americans to craft their own service agenda, and make their own change from the bottom up.

The second thing I'll do is invest in ideas that can help us meet our common challenges, because more often than not the next great social innovation won't be generated by the government.

The non-profit sector employs 1 in 12 Americans and 115 nonprofits are launched every day. Yet while the federal government invests \$7 billion in research and development for the private sector, there is no similar effort to support non-profit innovation. Meanwhile, there are ideas across America - in our inner cities and small towns; from college graduates to folks making a career change - that could benefit millions of Americans if they're given the chance to grow.

As President, I will launch a new Social Investment Fund Network. It's time to get the grass roots, the foundations, the private sector and the government at the table. We'll invest in ideas that work; leverage private sector dollars to encourage innovation; and expand successful programs to scale. Take a program like the Harlem Children's Zone, which helps thousands of kids in New York through after-school activities, mentoring, and family support. We need to make that model work in different cities around the country. And I'll start a new Social Entrepreneur Agency to make sure that small non-profits have the same kind of support that we give small businesses.

The third part of my plan will be integrating service into education, so that young Americans are called upon and prepared to be active citizens.

Just as we teach math and writing, arts and athletics, we need to teach young Americans to take citizenship seriously. Study after study shows that students who serve do better in school, are more likely to go to college, and more likely to maintain that service as adults. So when I'm President, I will set a goal for all American middle and high school students to perform 50 hours of service a year, and for all college students to perform 100 hours of service a year. This means that by the time you graduate college, you'll have done 17 weeks of service.

We'll reach this goal in several ways. At the middle and high school level, we'll make federal assistance conditional on school districts developing service programs, and give schools resources to offer new service opportunities. At the community level, we'll develop public-private partnerships so students can serve more outside the classroom.

For college students, I have proposed an annual American Opportunity Tax Credit of \$4,000 to make tuition affordable. To receive this credit, we'll require 100 hours of public service. And we'll amend the Federal Work-Study program, so that nearly \$250 million will help more than 200,000 college students work in part-time public service jobs each year.

And we will not leave out the nearly 2 million young Americans who are out of school and out of work. Instead, we'll use service to tighten their bond to the American family, and to put them on a pathway to success. We'll enlist them in a Green Job Corps, so that disadvantaged young people can find useful work and gain skills in a growing industry. And we'll expand the YouthBuild Program, which puts young Americans to work building affordable housing in America's poorest communities, giving them valuable skills and a chance to complete a high school education. Today, there are 8,000 YouthBuild slots - we'll expand that to 50,000.

Now I know what the cynics will say. I've heard from them all my life.

These are the voices that will tell you - not just what you can't do - but what you won't do. Americans won't come together - our allegiance doesn't go beyond our political party, region, or congregation. Young Americans won't serve their country - they're too selfish, or too lazy. This is the soft sell of the status quo, the voice that tells you to settle because settling isn't that bad.

Let me ask you to stop and consider this meeting that we're having. You go to the first school in the United States west of the Mississippi to grant women the same rights and privileges as men. You go to a school that resolved in 1870 that race would not be a factor in admission. These may be small changes on the vast canvas of history, but the America we live in is the sum total of that kind of courage, that spirit of progress. If it weren't for that kind of change, it wouldn't be possible for someone like me to stand here today to talk to you about the future of this country. You and I are at a place where somebody, at some point, decided that loving their community and their country meant doing something to change it.

Renewing that spirit starts with service. Make no mistake: our destiny as Americans is tied up with one another. If we are less respected in the world, then you will be less safe. If we keep paying dictators to fill up our gas tanks, then those oceans are going to rise. If we can't give our kids a world-class education, then our economy is going to fall behind.

And that's how it should be. It is time to recapture that sense of a common purpose: I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper. I'm tired of hearing about how America is on the wrong track - I want us to come together to put it on the right track. I'm tired of hearing about red America and blue America - I want to lead a United States of America. I'm tired of talking about what we can't do, or won't do, or won't even try - I want all of us to stand up and to start reaching for what is possible.

That's what history calls us to do. Because loving your country shouldn't just mean watching fireworks on the 4th of July; loving your country must mean accepting your responsibility to do your part to change it. And if you do stand up, I promise you that your life will be richer, and our country will be stronger.

We need your service, right now, in this moment - our moment - in history. I'm not going to tell you what your role should be; that's for you to discover. But I am going to ask you to play your part; ask you to stand up; ask you to put your foot firmly into the current of history. I am asking you to change history's course. And if I have the fortune to be your President, decades from now - when the memory of this or that policy has faded, and when the words that we will speak in the next few years are long forgotten - I hope you remember this as a moment when your own story and the American story came together, and history bent once more in the direction of justice.

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