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Ted Kennedy

Democratic National Convention Address



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Thanks very much, Barbara Mikulski, for your very eloquent, your eloquent introduction. Distinguished legislator, great spokeswoman for economic democracy and social justice in this country, I thank you for your eloquent introduction.

Well, things worked out a little different from the way I thought, but let me tell you, I still love New York.

My fellow Democrats and my fellow Americans, I have come here tonight not to argue as a candidate but to affirm a cause.

I am asking you to renew the commitment of the Democratic Party to economic justice.

I am asking you to renew our commitment to a fair and lasting prosperity that can put America back to work.

This is the cause that brought me into the campaign and that sustained me for nine months across a 100,000 miles in 40 different states. We had our losses, but the pain of our defeats is far, far less than the pain of the people that I have met.

We have learned that it is important to take issues seriously, but never to take ourselves too seriously.



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The serious issue before us tonight is the cause for which the Democratic Party has stood in its finest hours, the cause that keeps our Party young and makes it, in the second century of its age, the largest political Party in this republic and the longest lasting political Party on this planet.

Our cause has been, since the days of Thomas Jefferson, the cause of the common man and the common woman.

Our commitment has been, since the days of Andrew Jackson, to all those he called "the humble members of society -- the farmers, mechanics, and laborers." On this foundation we have defined our values, refined our policies, and refreshed our faith.

Now I take the unusual step of carrying the cause and the commitment of my campaign personally to our national convention. I speak out of a deep sense of urgency about the anguish and anxiety I have seen across America.

I speak out of a deep belief in the ideals of the Democratic Party, and in the potential of that Party and of a President to make a difference. And I speak out of a deep trust in our capacity to proceed with boldness and a common vision that will feel and heal the suffering of our time and the divisions of our Party.

The economic plank of this platform on its face concerns only material things, but it is also a moral issue that I raise tonight. It has taken many forms over many years. In this campaign and in this country that we seek to lead, the challenge in 1980 is to give our voice and our vote for these fundamental democratic principles.

Let us pledge that we will never misuse unemployment, high interest rates, and human misery as false weapons against inflation.

Let us pledge that employment will be the first priority of our economic policy.

Let us pledge that there will be security for all those who are now at work, and let us pledge that there will be jobs for all who are out of work; and we will not compromise on the issues of jobs.

These are not simplistic pledges. Simply put, they are the heart of our tradition, and they have been the soul of our Party across the generations. It is the glory and the greatness of our tradition to speak for those who have no voice, to remember those who are forgotten, to respond to the frustrations and fulfill the aspirations of all Americans seeking a better life in a better land.

We dare not forsake that tradition.

We cannot let the great purposes of the Democratic Party become the bygone passages of history.



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We must not permit the Republicans to seize and run on the slogans of prosperity. We heard the orators at their convention all trying to talk like Democrats. They proved that even Republican nominees can quote Franklin Roosevelt to their own purpose.

The Grand Old Party thinks it has found a great new trick, but 40 years ago an earlier generation of Republicans attempted the same trick. And Franklin Roosevelt himself replied, "Most Republican leaders have bitterly fought and blocked the forward surge of average men and women in their pursuit of happiness. Let us not be deluded that overnight those leaders have suddenly become the friends of average men and women."

"You know," he continued, "very few of us are that gullible." And four years later when the Republicans tried that trick again, Franklin Roosevelt asked, "Can the Old Guard pass itself off as the New Deal? I think not. We have all seen many marvelous stunts in the circus, but no performing elephant could turn a handspring without falling flat on its back."

The 1980 Republican convention was awash with crocodile tears for our economic distress, but it is by their long record and not their recent words that you shall know them.

The same Republicans who are talking about the crisis of unemployment have nominated a man who once said, and I quote, "Unemployment insurance is a prepaid vacation plan for freeloaders." And that nominee is no friend of labor.

The same Republicans who are talking about the problems of the inner cities have nominated a man who said, and I quote, "I have included in my morning and evening prayers every day the prayer that the Federal Government not bail out New York." And that nominee is no friend of this city and our great urban centers across this nation.

The same Republicans who are talking about security for the elderly have nominated a man who said just four years ago that "Participation in social security should be made voluntary." And that nominee is no friend of the senior citizens of this nation.

The same Republicans who are talking about preserving the environment have nominated a man who last year made the preposterous statement, and I quote, "Eighty percent of our air pollution comes from plants and trees." And that nominee is no friend of the environment.

And the same Republicans who are invoking Franklin Roosevelt have nominated a man who said in 1976, and these are his exact words, "Fascism was really the basis of the New Deal." And that nominee whose name is Ronald Reagan has no right to quote Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The great adventures which our opponents offer is a voyage into the past. Progress is our heritage, not theirs. What is right for us as Democrats is also the right way for Democrats to win.



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The commitment I seek is not to outworn views but to old values that will never wear out. Programs may sometimes become obsolete, but the ideal of fairness always endures. Circumstances may change, but the work of compassion must continue. It is surely correct that we cannot solve problems by throwing money at them, but it is also correct that we dare not throw out our national problems onto a scrap heap of inattention and indifference. The poor may be out of political fashion, but they are not without human needs. The middle class may be angry, but they have not lost the dream that all Americans can advance together.

The demand of our people in 1980 is not for smaller government or bigger government but for better government. Some say that government is always bad and that spending for basic social programs is the root of our economic evils. But we reply: The present inflation and recession cost our economy 200 billion dollars a year. We reply: Inflation and unemployment are the biggest spenders of all.

The task of leadership in 1980 is not to parade scapegoats or to seek refuge in reaction, but to match our power to the possibilities of progress. While others talked of free enterprise, it was the Democratic Party that acted and we ended excessive regulation in the airline and trucking industry, and we restored competition to the marketplace. And I take some satisfaction that this deregulation legislation that I sponsored and passed in the Congress of the United States.

As Democrats we recognize that each generation of Americans has a rendezvous with a different reality. The answers of one generation become the questions of the next generation. But there is a guiding star in the American firmament. It is as old as the revolutionary belief that all people are created equal, and as clear as the contemporary condition of Liberty City and the South Bronx. Again and again Democratic leaders have followed that star and they have given new meaning to the old values of liberty and justice for all.

We are the Party of the New Freedom, the New Deal, and the New Frontier. We have always been the Party of hope. So this year let us offer new hope, new hope to an America uncertain about the present, but unsurpassed in its potential for the future.

To all those who are idle in the cities and industries of America let us provide new hope for the dignity of useful work. Democrats have always believed that a basic civil right of all Americans is that their right to earn their own way. The Party of the people must always be the Party of full employment.

To all those who doubt the future of our economy, let us provide new hope for the reindustrialization of America. And let our vision reach beyond the next election or the next year to a new generation of prosperity. If we could rebuild Germany and Japan after World War II, then surely we can reindustrialize our own nation and revive our inner cities in the 1980's.

To all those who work hard for a living wage let us provide new hope that their price of their employment shall not be an unsafe workplace and a death at an earlier age.



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To all those who inhabit our land from California to the New York Island, from the Redwood Forest to the Gulf stream waters, let us provide new hope that prosperity shall not be purchased by poisoning the air, the rivers, and the natural resources that are the greatest gift of this continent. We must insist that our children and our grandchildren shall inherit a land which they can truly call America the beautiful.

To all those who see the worth of their work and their savings taken by inflation, let us offer new hope for a stable economy. We must meet the pressures of the present by invoking the full power of government to master increasing prices. In candor, we must say that the Federal budget can be balanced only by policies that bring us to a balanced prosperity of full employment and price restraint.

And to all those overburdened by an unfair tax structure, let us provide new hope for real tax reform. Instead of shutting down classrooms, let us shut off tax shelters. Instead of cutting out school lunches, let us cut off tax subsidies for expensive business lunches that are nothing more than food stamps for the rich.

The tax cut of our Republican opponents takes the name of tax reform in vain. It is a wonderfully Republican idea that would redistribute income in the wrong direction. It's good news for any of you with incomes over 200,000 dollars a year. For the few of you, it offers a pot of gold worth 14,000 dollars. But the Republican tax cut is bad news for the middle income families. For the many of you, they plan a pittance of 200 dollars a year, and that is not what the Democratic Party means when we say tax reform.

The vast majority of Americans cannot afford this panacea from a Republican nominee who has denounced the progressive income tax as the invention of Karl Marx. I am afraid he has confused Karl Marx with Theodore Roosevelt -- that obscure Republican President who sought and fought for a tax system based on ability to pay. Theodore Roosevelt was not Karl Marx, and the Republican tax scheme is not tax reform.

Finally, we cannot have a fair prosperity in isolation from a fair society. So I will continue to stand for a national health insurance. We must not surrender to the relentless medical inflation that can bankrupt almost anyone and that may soon break the budgets of government at every level. Let us insist on real controls over what doctors and hospitals can charge, and let us resolve that the state of a family's health shall never depend on the size of a family's wealth.

The President, the Vice President, the members of Congress have a medical plan that meets their needs in full, and whenever senators and representatives catch a little cold, the Capitol physician will see them immediately, treat them promptly, fill a prescription on the spot. We do not get a bill even if we ask for it, and when do you think was the last time a member of Congress asked for a bill from the Federal Government? And I say again, as I have before, if health insurance is good enough for the President, the Vice President, the Congress of the United States, then it's good enough for you and every family in America.



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There were some who said we should be silent about our differences on issues during this convention, but the heritage of the Democratic Party has been a history of democracy. We fight hard because we care deeply about our principles and purposes. We did not flee this struggle. We welcome the contrast with the empty and expedient spectacle last month in Detroit where no nomination was contested, no question was debated, and no one dared to raise any doubt or dissent.

Democrats can be proud that we chose a different course and a different platform.

We can be proud that our Party stands for investment in safe energy, instead of a nuclear future that may threaten the future itself. We must not permit the neighborhoods of America to be permanently shadowed by the fear of another Three Mile Island.

We can be proud that our Party stands for a fair housing law to unlock the doors of discrimination once and for all. The American house will be divided against itself so long as there is prejudice against any American buying or renting a home.

And we can be proud that our Party stands plainly and publicly and persistently for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Women hold their rightful place at our convention, and women must have their rightful place in the Constitution of the United States. On this issue we will not yield; we will not equivocate; we will not rationalize, explain, or excuse. We will stand for E.R.A. and for the recognition at long last that our nation was made up of founding mothers as well as founding fathers.

A fair prosperity and a just society are within our vision and our grasp, and we do not have every answer. There are questions not yet asked, waiting for us in the recesses of the future. But of this much we can be certain because it is the lesson of all of our history: Together a President and the people can make a difference. I have found that faith still alive wherever I have traveled across this land. So let us reject the counsel of retreat and the call to reaction. Let us go forward in the knowledge that history only helps those who help themselves.

There will be setbacks and sacrifices in the years ahead; but I am convinced that we as a people are ready to give something back to our country in return for all it has given to us.

Let this be our commitment: Whatever sacrifices must be made will be shared and shared fairly. And let this be our confidence: At the end of our journey and always before us shines that ideal of liberty and justice for all.

In closing, let me say a few words to all those that I have met and to all those who have supported me at this convention and across the country. There were hard hours on our journey, and often we sailed against the wind. But always we kept our rudder true, and there were so many of you who stayed the course and shared our hope. You gave your help; but even more, you gave your hearts.



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And because of you, this has been a happy campaign. You welcomed Joan, me, and our family into your homes and neighborhoods, your churches, your campuses, your union halls. And when I think back of all the miles and all the months and all the memories, I think of you. And I recall the poet's words, and I say: "What golden friends I had."

Among you, my golden friends across this land, I have listened and learned.

I have listened to Kenny Dubois, a glassblower in Charleston, West Virginia, who has ten children to support but has lost his job after 35 years, just three years short of qualifying for his pension.

I have listened to the Trachta family who farm in Iowa and who wonder whether they can pass the good life and the good earth on to their children.

I have listened to the grandmother in East Oakland who no longer has a phone to call her grandchildren because she gave it up to pay the rent on her small apartment.

I have listened to young workers out of work, to students without the tuition for college, and to families without the chance to own a home.

I have seen the closed factories and the stalled assembly lines of Anderson, Indiana and South Gate, California, and I have seen too many, far too many idle men and women desperate to work.

I have seen too many, far too many working families desperate to protect the value of their wages from the ravages of inflation.

Yet I have also sensed a yearning for a new hope among the people in every state where I have been.

And I have felt it in their handshakes, I saw it in their faces, and I shall never forget the mothers who carried children to our rallies.

I shall always remember the elderly who have lived in an America of high purpose and who believe that it can all happen again.

Tonight, in their name, I have come here to speak for them. And for their sake, I ask you to stand with them. On their behalf I ask you to restate and reaffirm the timeless truth of our Party.

I congratulate President Carter on his victory here.

I am confident that the Democratic Party will reunite on the basis of Democratic principles, and that together we will march towards a Democratic victory in 1980.



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And someday, long after this convention, long after the signs come down and the crowds stop cheering, and the bands stop playing, may it be said of our campaign that we kept the faith.

May it be said of our Party in 1980 that we found our faith again.

And may it be said of us, both in dark passages and in bright days, in the words of Tennyson that my brothers quoted and loved, and that have special meaning for me now:

*I am a part of all that I have met
To [Tho] much is taken, much abides
That which we are, we are --
One equal temper of heroic hearts
Strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.*

For me, a few hours ago, this campaign came to an end.

For all those whose cares have been our concern, the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die.