

FREE DEMOCRACY SUMMIT AND THE ART OF PEACE

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I am thrilled to be here with you. You have been seriously examining Democracy and the Art of Peace, and I know you have learned a lot. I know you are inspired and, even more than that, I know YOU can MAKE THE DIFFERENCE. If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't be here with you today.

I have been asked to talk about activism and the importance of standing firm in ones convictions. I have also been asked to touch on the importance of local agriculture and to touch on the issues of homelessness and poverty.

Activism is what you are doing at this very moment. Learning, opening your mind to the truths around you – and there are different truths to different people, aren't there. That is what makes this whole endeavor of learning, and then listening to other opinions, so exciting.

I was lucky to have been raised in a cohesive and dedicated family setting, one that taught equal opportunity. A family that celebrated the differences in humans, the differences in skin color, in religion, in attitudes. I also knew that I was fortunate to have enough to eat, a clean and cozy home to live in, clothes that fit me perfectly – because my mother sewed them herself. I would look at the magazines for teens in those days and say, "Mother, I want that; I need that outfit." She would examine it, and then buy the fabric and make it for me. Finally, when I was heading off to college, she said, "OK, you can go and buy something ready made from the store." Well, you can imagine, I was thrilled until I was alone in the dressing room and realized that the ready made clothing was too big for my waist if it fit my hips, and too narrow for my hips if it fit my waist. Not only did I owe my mother an apology, I happily gave it to her.

So, I was telling you I knew I was lucky. I had a solid family to fall back on. I knew that life was unfair, not just reading about the depths of poverty in African countries (in the 50s growing up, we were always told to eat our food because the children in Africa were starving), but I knew I was lucky because I had opportunity ahead of me. I didn't get picked on in school, I wasn't made fun of in school, I wasn't bullied – yes, I knew life wasn't fair, and that I had better do something about it.

That is what you are doing here at this Art of Peace and Free Democracy Summit.

I want to make it clear that we should never feel we are not doing enough – we must not get discouraged because we are doing all we can, and still an administration like this one takes us into an unjustified, unilateral war. We must not give in, but we must continue to debate, to write, to dialogue with one another. We must continue to point out whenever and wherever we can that treating one another with dignity, with fairness, with honest motives of equal opportunity leads to cohesive societies. We must understand that community life is not just important, it is necessary for all in a community to thrive.

Let me stress once again that wherever you find yourself, work for the common good, speak out, think in broader terms. Don't narrow yourself to only picking bodies out of the river, go upstream to where the bodies are being thrown in and do the preventive work that is so necessary. Let me tell you that my plan was to become Minnesota's Governor and to have a large impact on reform, a new direction, exciting Minnesotans about universal health care coverage and passing it into law. I don't get to do that, darn – but I still have a voice and it is my responsibility to lift it from the place I am. A friend of mine, as I moved through this life's transition in work, told me that one must never give up and stand still. If one does that, then when hit, one falls over. But if one keeps active, moving, caring, working, then when hit, one doesn't fall over but keeps moving when shoved even though there is a twist, a shift in the path. I experimented, and it was true. It is something I have taken to heart.

I'm here today to tell you thank you for keeping your voices raised. I think it is making a difference; times are changing. Maybe not fast enough, but better than not starting to search for collective good. It is so hard to move away from what money dictates and take action necessary for the greater good to occur – the welfare of the many rather than the few. And what is so ironic about this approach, is that acting upon the welfare of the many actually benefits the few who would prefer to hoard their own riches.

Yes, things are changing:

Elections: the people spoke; they said they wanted to change course, not only in this war, but in access to affordable health care, and education, and global warming, OK, OK, I know, not perfect, but progress.

Pawlenty at first announced only renewable energy GOALS, but upon passage by the new legislature of renewable energy STANDARDS, he signed it. The highest standards in the country – 25% by 2025.

Bush has a tough decision to make; he is faced with signing a bill that calls for a timeline for withdrawal of our troops from Iraq, or vetoing a bill that contains funding. Both measures are in the same bill, but the timeline for withdrawal signifies progress as a result of the people speaking out at the last election and establishing a new Congress.

And maybe even more exciting are the latest events that show change blowing in: CBS followed MSNBC and fired talk-radio show host, Don Imus.

It has been interesting listening to all the various philosophies put forth as to why now after years of offensive, negative and insulting comments to many minority groups whether insulting race, religion, or belief by radio talk shows – I called them the “angry-men” voices. (And I must admit that I loved going on those shows more than going on shows where people agreed with me – I truly enjoyed the debate, especially when a host would agree with a point I made – I argued soda pop machines be turned off during the instructional hours of the school day, immigration reform, tax policy – what fun it was!)

So why now? Is it your voices? It could be. It could be that your voices have been raised enough that the interests that made money on these shows of disrespect – these shows which, by the way, help fuel the inequities of opportunity – now see that people will not buy their products. Hooray for you! Hooray for the targets of verbal abuse.

And then, in the same vein of what is or isn't on radio or TV talk shows, chat show host Jimmy Kimmel fought hard to allow Pink to sing her controversial song, “*Dear Mr. President*”. This song had been unofficially banned from radio stations in the United States. Pink said that many radio hosts had told her that they were not allowed to mention the song to her if she were a guest on their show. This is progress when you consider what happened to the Dixie Chick's career after they aired their questioning voices about the devastating direction this country has taken. Pink's words in the chorus are powerful, “How do you sleep while the rest of us cry? How do you dream when a mother has no chance to say goodbye?”

And third, what about Lee Iacocca's book with its “9 Cs of Leadership”? He says that while some of us voted for George W. Bush, we didn't vote to suspend the Constitution. Let me read you an excerpt:

“Someone has to speak. I hardly recognize my country anymore. The President is given a free pass to ignore the constitution, tap our phones, and lead us to war on a pack of lies. Congress responds to record deficits by passing a huge tax cut for the wealthy (thanks, but I don't need it). The most famous business leaders are not the innovators but the guys in handcuffs. While we're fiddling in Iraq, the Middle East is burning and nobody seems to know what to do. And the press is waving pom-poms instead of asking the hard questions. That's not the promise of America my parents and yours traveled across the ocean for. I've had enough. How about you?”

I'll admit, when someone told me about these words, I didn't believe them – these written words were so right on, so direct, I thought for sure somebody made it up that he said them. So I researched and they are true – in more ways than one. He did write them and they are true. Interestingly, he is saying the same thing (only in a different way) that Cindy Sheehan is saying. Cindy asks simply, “Mr. President, for what noble cause did my son die?” Lee Iacocca states, “... (Bush) shows little regard for the grievous consequences. He has sent our troops (not to mention hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi citizens) to their deaths for what? To build our oil reserves? To avenge his daddy because Saddam Hussein once tried to have him killed? To show his daddy he's tougher? The motivations behind the war in Iraq are questionable, and the execution of the war has been a disaster. A man of character does not ask a single soldier to die for a failed policy.”

So, look at these successes! If we pick it up, the next elections will result in even more responses to the people coming alive and responding to a reality dawning on them, a reality that is starting to affect them in ways that even the most influentially spent money can no longer obscure.

Was it money that kept the truth about this Administration's lies for going to war buried on the back pages of the New York Times?

Was is money that kept the truth about global warming on the back pages of the New York Times while the front pages carried the stories questioning the science?

I want to tell you a story about why I admire my husband so much. When we were dating – many of you here remember the late 50s, early 60s - cars were big and gas was cheap; we drove and talked and talked for hours. We talked about social justice, we talked about national politics, we talked about making the world a better, fairer place. We shared a vision; it was very exciting. In 1968, the company Gene worked for in McLean, Virginia, offered him a vice-presidency. It was a lot of money, we were young and I started writing home to Minnesota the “young man does well” story. He was the 30th hired and did great work trouble shooting for the company, solving their problems like no one else could. The company had grown to 300 and now they were offering him a huge raise. One day he came home and said to me, “Becky, I just can't take that promotion. I'll be making money for people that don't need it, and we won't be making a difference.” Instead of a raise, he took a \$6,500.00 cut in pay to work for the American Rehabilitation Foundation and make a difference in real people's lives. Yes, I'll admit that I was already spending that raise in my dreams, what with three little boys, but think of it, a man who remembered his dreams and was true to his commitment of using his brains for a better world rather than personal riches.

AHHH! You live in such exciting times, such challenging times because there is so much work to be done.

Your focus this year is on Homelessness and Poverty. Thank you – it is extremely important work. We are living in a plutocracy – government for and by the wealthy. We were living in a plutocracy twice before in this country: in the last two decades of the 1800s, the Gilded Age, and in 1920. We recovered then and we can again – but not until the people demand that change.

I remember when studying economics that Aristotle wrote that no society could survive a wage gap of more than 1 to 5. J.P.Morgan, the financier, wrote that he agreed with Aristotle, that no society could survive a wage gap. But Morgan said that it was OK for the gap to be 1 to 20. Well, today it is around 1 to 500, and that is why you have to focus on poverty and homelessness. I didn't understand how that worked when I was young and studying, not experiencing. But I understand it now.

During the gilded age, it was simply said that they were rich because they had all of the money and they deserved it. Today, the argument is that the poor are unworthy; I've watched hate radio fuel that sentiment making us resent others who have less.

I remember when I was first elected to office that I attended a forum with AFDC eligibility workers. Back then AFDC stood for Aid to Families with Dependent Children and eligibility workers signed people up for the program if they met the eligibility requirements. (Today, assistance is called MFIP – Minnesota Family Investment Program). I was new to office, it makes me wonder what I was doing on a panel since I was in my learning stage, but learn that day is exactly what I did do. I was amazed how much the workers didn't like the clients and I didn't understand it. From my seat at the table on the stage, I listened to the questions and statements from the audience and couldn't figure out what they were telling me, why they disliked the clients so much. I said that we shouldn't take any more time from the agenda and that I would stay after the program to meet with them to better understand if they wished. They did and the staff from the hotel announced that a room had been made available for us to meet. What I learned in that subsequent meeting is that the AFDC grant was about as much money as the low paid workers salary was, but that along with the AFDC grant came Medical Assistance – health care – and the county eligibility workers had NO health care with their jobs. This is a perfect example of how inequities tear a society apart. When MinnesotaCare became law that next year, all of the eligibility workers and their families obtained health care, and the anger the workers had felt toward the clients diminished.

When Gov. Pawlenty calls MinnesotaCare “welfare healthcare”, he is calling people - people with jobs that don't provide health care - unworthy.

Every policy we enact has an impact on equal opportunity:

- The way we collect taxes
- The way we fund education
- Access to quality, affordable health care
- Our investments in early education and care for our littlest as their parents work

One of Pink's lines in her song talks about the reality of the minimum wage.

I'll read it to you: "Let me tell you 'bout hard work: Minimum wage with a baby on the way. Let me tell you 'bout hard work: Rebuilding your house after the bombs took them away. Let me tell you 'bout hard work: Building a bed out of a cardboard box. Let me tell you 'bout hard work! Hard work! Hard work!"

Money and who has it plays such a large role in all of this. When President Eisenhower signed the minimum wage law, he said that the minimum wage and Social Security should never be taken away from the American people and that if a politician tried, that politician would lose office – he added, however, that oil millionaires would try to take it away. There is an interesting concept put forth in the Cato Journal, volume 3, no. 2, (Fall 1983) explaining how social security can be taken away from the American people (note: Social security is seen by those who want to take it away as a redistribution of wealth which they oppose).

The Cato Journal article used the divide and conquer tactic. They advised to pay the seniors who would soon retire thereby "taking care of them" so they wouldn't care about those coming after them. Then they recommended a campaign to tell the younger people that there would be no benefits for them when they retire. I quote, "First we must recognize that there is a firm coalition behind the present Social Security system, and that this coalition has been very effective in winning political concessions for many years. Before Social Security can be reformed, we must begin to divide this coalition and cast doubt on the picture of reality it presents to the general public." (For the record, I know we need to make some adjustments based on demographics, but never dismantle it.)

So, how do we get people to care about one another. In Lee Iacocca's list of 9 "Cs", he addressed communication. Real dialogue is so important. Really listening is important. There are times that listening and understanding can change your mind. There are times listening and having a discussion can help each side understand the other. Then there are times that you just have to make a statement, and hopefully you get to explain why you can't change your position. To illustrate the last two, I will tell you a story for each:

During my second year in the House of Representatives, we voted whether or not to change the US Constitution to include incarceration for a person who burned the US flag during a protest. Earlier, the US Supreme Court had ruled that the action was exercise of freedom of speech and therefore demonstrators could not be jailed for that activity. The US Congress passed a Constitutional Amendment that had to be ratified by a percentage of states to become part of our Constitution. I voted with the Supreme Court, and incurred the wrath of many Pine County Veterans.

Before the election that fall they held a forum on this very issue; they told me that they were mad at me and that this forum was precisely for the purpose of letting me know. It was a long meeting in a large room packed to the rafters with disappointed and angry people. My opponents stood beside me at the podium and said, "Vote for me, I will represent you!" One man standing up against the wall in the back on the left called me an "f----- b----!" Another on the right called out, "Well, I think she is, but I don't think we can use that kind of language in here." I explained my vote over and over in response to questions: I said, "Don't take the flag away from me, my son is in Bosnia." I said, "Look, we have capitalism as our economic system; compare our citizens standard of living and freedoms to Russia's with socialism and communism – which is freer? Russia's is intended to be, but they don't have freedom of speech, therefore, even in a capitalistic society our citizens fare better because we can rally people to enact changes." (At least most of this was true in those days; now we are living in a plutocracy). I said, "People haven't burned the flag since Vietnam; don't make it a crime because you will have more flags burned by more martyrs." They said, "Now that you know how we feel, will you vote differently when it comes back before you?" I said, "No, I'm sorry, I can't – for all the reasons I have just given you. You will have to vote against me in the next election."

As people filed out of that meeting, most of the men refused to shake hands with me, but the women bent over my hand as they shook it and whispered, "How can you stand this job?" I thought, "Well, at least I haven't lost the vote of these women." And then, the most spectacular thing happened; an event that I treasure as two of the most emotional events of my political career. In the back hallway, all alone, I turned around to see the veteran who had called me a f.b., coming toward me, crying. He said that he needed to apologize and then he began to cry again. I waited only a moment, and then said, "Listen, you don't have to apologize to me for calling me that name; I raised 12 children and I have been called much worse." He said that wasn't it and began to cry again. This time I waited just a little longer, put my hand on his shoulder, and said, "Really, please don't apologize. This is very emotional for you because you feel so strongly about this issue. I am your representative and I am not representing you; **YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO BE THIS UPSET WITH ME!**" Again, he sobbed harder. This time I did wait; I silently counted, "1 Mississippi, 2 Mississippi, etc." and reached over two minutes, at which point he took a deep breath and said – I remember it so clearly, word for word – "You don't understand. I fought in that war; I was drafted and I fought in that war. And this is the first time I have ever understood that what I fought for was for you to stand in that room and say what you were saying and for me to say what I was saying!"

This was so powerful for me; I still get shivers.

The second story is one that shows how important listening to each other is. I was invited to a local snowmobile club to receive an award for legislation I worked on that prevents local landowners from being sued when a snowmobiler gets injured on a trail in the back 40 that the landowner/farmer allowed the snowmobile club to build for winter use. I left home at 7:30 AM that Saturday and told my husband that the last event of the day was at 5:00 PM with this club, so I should be home by 7:00 PM and I would make us a romantic

dinner. I got home at 11:30 PM. I was correct about the award presentation not taking very much time. But they were angry at me for legislation I was carrying funding early childhood education, childcare, and opportunities for people to get off of assistance. I tried to explain about the people still on assistance (many had gotten off because of the new work requirements and most of those left on had undiagnosed learning disabilities or were suffering from mental illness). None of these explanations made any sense to my constituents. They were hardworking people who had done a great job raising their children and their children were doing a great job raising their children. They told me that they didn't make much money and they resented their tax dollars going to the losers, the lazy people, who lived among them. For hours I listened and I understood their frustrations. I said to them, "I know you were great parents because I know your children, and I know your children are great parents because I see your grandchildren in the school plays, on the ball fields and in the band. Let me ask you this:" at which point I held my right hand up in a fist position with my fist representing the head of their grandchild. "This is your grandchild sitting in a classroom." Then I brought my other arm up and made another fist and said, nodding the fist back and forth, "And this is a child of your neighbor who does not parent sitting beside your grandchild in that classroom, Now maybe that parent never learned to parent, or maybe that parent is working three part time jobs and doesn't have time to read to their child, but at any rate, that child is coming to school not ready to learn. Which child is going to get more attention from the teacher? Your grandchild?" (nodding my right fist back and forth), "Or your neighbor's child?" (nodding my left fist back and forth). They stared at my fists, thought, and answered, "Not our grandchild." We had found some mutual ground. At the next two county fairs the following summers, people from that gathering came by my fair booth, smiling, holding up their fists and nodding them back and forth, saying, "I remember that story."

Whether people decide to agree because it is good for others, or because it is actually good for themselves, the agreement is good. And the truth is, we need every child, every citizen to build our communities, we can't lose a single person. Think if every person got the education they needed and was able to get up every day to do work they loved, in a work environment that was supportive. Every person learning, exploring, able to meet challenges – what a world that would be,

A world where there is hope, a way to contribute your talents, to provide for your children. If every person had hope, would fewer people turn to drugs, because hope is what is needed in the world you are inheriting – the first time a previous generation left the next generation less well off. In a time when issues of world population growth, limited resources (particularly water), and global warming are on our doorstep.

But we have more help in the area of global warming, another area of progress is well, let me read you from E.J.Dionne's March 15th, 2007 column in the Washington Post: "Evangelical Protestantism in the United States is going through a New Reformation that is disentangling a great religious movement from a partisan political machine. This historic change will require liberals and conservatives alike to abandon their sometimes narrow views of who evangelicals are." He is referring to the Reverend

Richard Cizik, the National Association of Evangelicals' Vice President for Governmental Affairs. Reverend Cizik takes the position that when people agree on an issue, they should work together on that issue even when they don't agree on other issues. Reverend Cizik believes that global warming is a moral issue, and he is working to protect our planet. He is also working with Muslims to stop torture, and to stop the trafficking of women. I do believe that Reverend Richard Cizik is my new hero.

These issues of resources, energy independence, global warming demand that we start to do things differently. Energy independence and food self-sufficiency - throughout the world - are not only exciting concepts, they will make us both safer and healthier in the long run.

- We'll start knowing what is in our food – the pet food scandal has caused more people to sit up and take notice
- We can move away from toxic fertilizers and pesticides, - maybe we will even get rid of the threats to the honey-bee
- We'll have more work locally
- We'll fund more research in our local colleges
- We'll move away from dangerous monocultures (history informs us here and we should take heed)
- Transportation costs will be greatly reduced
- Threats of terrorism will also be reduced

Yes, you have a lot of work to do, so I should quit talking so we can continue our mission, our dedication to the well being of our planet and to the living things that depend upon it.

