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Text of Max Cleland's introduction for John Kerry

The text of former Sen. Max Cleland's introduction of John Kerry, as prepared:

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to share with you my story of how I came to know and love John Kerry. In April of 1968, while I was being airlifted out of Vietnam on a stretcher, Ensign John Kerry was headed in a different direction.

He was on a Navy ship in the Pacific requesting to be transferred into Vietnam -- into the line of fire. He had graduated from college. There were a lot of other things he could have done with his life. But he went to serve because he had been raised to believe that service to one's country is honorable, noble, and good.

While John Kerry was earning a Silver Star, a Bronze Star, and three Purple Hearts, I was being treated at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington D.C. I was 25 years old. My body was broken and my faith was shattered. One day, on leave from the hospital, a friend was pushing me around the city, in my new wheelchair. In front of the White House, it hit a curb. I fell forward out of the wheelchair. There were cigarette butts and trash all around me. I remember trying to lift myself up off the street. I was angry at the war. Saddened that veterans weren't getting good care. And frustrated that people in power weren't listening. Those were difficult days for me.

But, I ultimately realized that although I had lost a lot, I still had a lot left, and I resolved to make something of my life. I decided to run for the State Senate in Georgia. I won, but when I got there, in 1971, I was a lone voice.

Then I heard this young veteran on TV speaking about the war. It was John Kerry. He put everything I was feeling into words.

Tonight, I'd like to let you know, that even before I met John Kerry, he was my brother. Even before I knew John Kerry, he was my friend. Even before I spoke with John Kerry, he gave me hope.

The Bible tells me that no greater love has a man than to lay down his life for his friends. John Kerry's fellow crewmates - the men I am honored to share the stage with - are living testimony to his leadership, his courage under fire, and his willingness to risk his life for his fellow Americans.

There is no greater act of patriotism than that.

As I look back over the last 36 years, I now realize John Kerry's service to his country didn't end in Vietnam. It began there. Since Vietnam, John Kerry's life has become an object lesson in what was once described as the true definition of patriotism - "the long and steady dedication of a lifetime."

When we make John Kerry our next president, he will put America back on the long and steady road toward the vision of the country we fought for - a vision of the country we can become once again. A country that doesn't alienate our allies, but works with them. A country that doesn't lose jobs, but creates them. A country that doesn't limit educational opportunity, but expands it. A country that doesn't make health care less available, but more affordable. A country that doesn't spoil our environment, but protects it. A country that is strong a country that is respected, a country that is worthy of generations of sacrifice, and our children's highest hopes.

That is the America John Kerry volunteered to fight for. That is the America John Kerry will lead.

When John Kerry declared he was a candidate for the presidency of the United States, on a hot, steamy day in Charleston, South Carolina, a little less than a year ago, I joined the band of brothers at his side. After the ceremony, I grabbed his arm and pressed a Bible into his hand. It was the Bible I once read from as a child. I knew that he would need its strength, its guidance and its comfort in the days ahead. At first, he said he was afraid he might lose it, he refused to take it. I insisted. I told him: "Hold on to this... You'll need it like your country needs you now." He took the Bible, and said softly, "I won't let you down."

My fellow Americans - John Kerry has never let me down. He'll never let you down. He is an authentic American hero. He is the next captain of our ship of state. And he will be the next president of the United States.

In every hour of challenge - in every hour of danger - American heroes have answered their country's call. Just blocks from where we are tonight, some 230 years ago, a group called the Sons of Liberty assembled to demand democracy, and a voice in their future. Mere steps from where we are, a former slave named Crispus Attucks gave his life for freedom. And around the corner from where we are, a beacon of light from the old North Church set Paul Revere on a mission to save this country's people from danger.

Those were fateful hours for our young nation. Tonight I am honored to introduce to you another son of liberty, a brother in arms, a man called by destiny at this fateful hour in our nation's history.

He is my brother. He is my friend. He is my hero. Ladies and gentlemen, tonight, John Kerry answers the call.