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Text of Bill Clinton's convention speech

The text of former President Clinton's speech Monday at the Democratic National Convention, as transcribed by e-Media, Inc.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to be here with you.

I am honored to share this podium with my senator, Hillary Rodham Clinton. And I want to thank the people of New York for giving the best public servant in my family a chance to continue serving the public. Thank you. I am also - I'm going to say that again, in case you didn't hear it.

I'm honored to be here tonight. And I want to thank the people of New York for giving Hillary the chance to continue to serve in public life.

I am very proud of her. And we are both very grateful to all of you, especially my good friends from Arkansas, for giving me the chance to serve in the White House for eight years.

I am honored to share this night with President Carter, for whom I worked in 1976 and who has inspired the world with his work for peace, democracy and human rights.

I am honored to share it with Al Gore, my friend and my partner for eight years, who played such a large role in building the prosperity and peace that we left America in 2000.

And Al Gore, as he showed again tonight, demonstrated incredible patriotism and grace under pressure. He is the living embodiment of the principle that every vote counts.

And this year, we're going to make sure they're all counted in every state in America. My friends, after three conventions as a candidate or a president, tonight I come to you as a citizen, returning to the role that I have played for most of my life, as a foot soldier in our fight for the future, as we nominate in Boston a true New England Patriot for president.

Now this state, who gave us in other times of challenge John Adams and John Kennedy, has given us John Kerry, a good man, a great senator, a visionary leader. And we are all here to do what we can to make him the next president of the United States.

My friends, we are constantly being told that America is deeply divided. But all Americans value freedom and faith and family. We all honor the service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform, in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the world.

We all want good jobs, good schools, health care, safe streets, a clean environment. We all want our children to grow up in a secure America leading the world toward a peaceful and prosperous future.

Our differences are in how we can best achieve these things in a time of unprecedented change. Therefore, we Democrats will bring to the American people this year a positive campaign, arguing not who is a good or a bad person, but what is the best way to build a safe and prosperous world our children deserve.

The 21st century is marked by serious security threats, serious economic challenges and serious problems, from AIDS to global warming to the continuing turmoil in the Middle East.

But it is also full of amazing opportunities to create millions of new jobs and clean energy and biotechnology, to restore our manufacturing base and reap the benefits of the global economy, through our diversity and our commitment to decent labor and environmental standards for people all across the world and to create a world where we can celebrate our religious, our racial, our ethnic, our tribal differences because our common humanity matters most of all.

To build that kind of world, we must make the right choices. And we must have a president who will lead the way. Democrats and Republicans have very different and deeply felt ideas about what choices we should make. They're rooted in fundamentally different views of how we should meet our common challenges at home, and how we should play our role in the world.

We Democrats want to build a world and an America of shared responsibilities and shared benefits. We want a world with more global cooperation where we act alone only when we absolutely have to.

We think the role of government should be to give people the tools to create the conditions to make the most of their own lives. And we think everybody should have that chance.

On the other hand, the Republicans in Washington believe that America should be run by the right people - their people - in a world in which America acts unilaterally when we can and cooperates when we have to.

They believe the role of government is to concentrate wealth and power in the hands of those who embrace their economic, political and social views, leaving ordinary citizens to fend for themselves on important matters like health care and retirement security.

Now, since most Americans aren't that far to the right, our friends have to portray us Democrats as simply unacceptable, lacking in strength and values. In other words, they need a divided America.

But we don't.

Americans long to be united. After 9/11, we all just wanted to be one nation. Not a single American on September the 12th, 2001, cared who won the next presidential election.

All we wanted to do was to be one country, strong in the fight against terror, helping to heal those who were wounded and the families of those who lost their loved ones, reaching out to the rest of the world so we could meet these new challenges and go on with our democratic way of life.

The president had an amazing opportunity to bring the country together under his slogan of compassionate conservatism and to unite the world in the struggle against terror.

Instead, he and his congressional allies made a very different choice. They chose to use that moment of unity to try to push the country too far to the right and to walk away from our allies, not only in attacking Iraq before the weapons inspectors had finished their work, but in withdrawing American support for the climate change treaty and for the international court on war criminals and for the anti-ballistic missile treaty and from the nuclear test ban treaty.

Now, now at a time when we're trying to get other people to give up nuclear and biological and chemical weapons, they are trying to develop two new nuclear weapons which they say we might use first.

At home, the president and the Republican Congress have made equally fateful choices, which they also deeply believe in.

For the first time when America was in a war footing in our whole history, they gave two huge tax cuts, nearly half of which went to the top 1 percent of us.

Now, I'm in that group for the first time in my life.

And you might remember that when I was in office, on occasion, the Republicans were kind of mean to me.

But as soon as I got out and made money, I became part of the most important group in the world to them. It was amazing. I never thought I'd be so well cared for by the president and the Republicans in Congress. I almost sent them a thank you note for my tax cuts until I realized that the rest of you were paying the bill for it. And then I thought better of it.

Now look at the choices they made, choices they believed in. They chose to protect my tax cut at all costs while withholding promised funding to the Leave No Child Behind Act, leaving 2.1 million children behind.

They chose to protect my tax cut, while cutting 140,000 unemployed workers out of their job training programs, 100,000 working families out of their child care assistance, and worst of all, while cutting 300,000 poor children out of their after-school programs when we know it keeps them off the streets, out of trouble, in school, learning, going to college and having a good life.

They chose - they chose to protect my tax cuts while dramatically raising the out-of-pocket costs of health care to our veterans and while weakening or reversing very important environmental measures that Al Gore and I put into place, everything from clean air to the protection of our forests.

Now, in this time, everyone in America had to sacrifice except the wealthiest Americans. And most of us, almost all of us, from Republicans to independents and Democrats, we wanted to be asked to do our part, too. But all they asked us to do was to expend the energy necessary to open the envelopes containing our tax cuts. Now, if you like these choices and you agree with them, you should vote to return them to the White House and the Congress. If not, take a look at John

Kerry, John Edwards and the Democrats. We've got a different economic policy.

In this year's budget, the White House this year wants to cut off all the federal funding for 88,000 uniformed police officers under the COPS program we've had for 10 years. Among those 88,000 police are more than 700 members of the New York Police Department who put their lives on the line on 9/11.

With gang violence rising, and with all of us looking for terrorists in our midst and hoping they're not too well armed or too dangerous, the president and the Congress are about to allow the 10- year-old ban on deadly assault weapons to lapse.

Now, they believe it's the right thing to do. But our policy was to put more police on the street and to take assault weapons off the street. And it gave you eight years of declining crime and eight years of declining violence. Their policy is the reverse. They're taking police off the streets while they put assault weapons back on the street.

Now, if you agree with that choice, by all means, vote to keep them in office. But if you don't, join John Kerry, John Edwards and the Democrats in making America safer, smarter and stronger again.

On homeland security, Democrats tried to double the number of containers at ports and airports checked for weapons of mass destruction. It cost $1 billion. It would have been paid for under our bill by asking the 200,000 millionaires in America to cut their tax cut by $5,000. Almost all 200,000 of us would like to have done that, to spend $5,000 to make all 300 million Americans safer.

The measure failed. Why? Because the White House and the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives opposed it. They thought our $5,000 was more important than doubling the container checks at our ports and airports.

If you agree with that, by all means, re-elect them. If not, John Kerry and John Edwards are your team for the future.

These policies have turned a projected $5.8 trillion surplus that we left, enough to pay for the baby boomer retirement, into a projected debt of almost $5 trillion, with over $400 billion in deficit this year and for years to come.

Now, how do they pay for that deficit? First, by taking the Social Security surplus that comes in every month and endorsing the checks of working people over to me to pay for the tax cuts. But it's not enough.

So then they have to go borrow money. Most of it they borrow from the Chinese and the Japanese government.

Sure, these countries are competing with us for good jobs, but how can we enforce our trade laws against our bankers? I mean, come on.

So if you think - if you believe it is good policy - if you believe it is good policy to pay for my tax cuts with the Social Security checks of working men and women and borrowed money from China and Japan, you should vote for them. If not, John Kerry's your man.

We Americans must choose for president...

... we've got to choose for president between two strong men who both love their countries, but who have very different world views: our nominee, John Kerry, who favors shared responsibility, shared opportunity and more global cooperation; and their president and their party in Congress who favor concentrated wealth and power, leaving people to fend for themselves and more unilateral action.

I think we're right for two reasons.

First of all, America just works better when more people have a chance to live their dreams.

And, secondly, we live in an interdependent world in which we cannot possibly kill, jail or occupy all of our potential adversaries. So we have to both fight terror and build a world with more partners and fewer terrorists.

Now, we tried it their way for 12 years. We tried it their way for 12 years. We tried it our way for eight years. Then we tried it their way for four more. But the only test that matters is whether people were better off when we finished than when we started. Our way works better.

It produced over 22 million good jobs, rising incomes for the middle class, over 100 times as many people moved from poverty into the middle class, more health care, the largest increase in college aid in 50 years, record home ownership, a cleaner environment, three surpluses in a row, a modernized defense force, strong efforts against terror and a respected America in the world. More importantly, more importantly we have great new champions in John Kerry and John Edwards, two good men, with wonderful wives: Teresa, a generous and wise woman, who understands the world we're trying to shape; and Elizabeth, a lawyer and mother, who understands the lives we're trying to live.

Now, let me tell you know what I know about John Kerry. I've been seeing all of the Republican ads about him. Let me tell you what I know about him.

During the Vietnam War, many young men, including the current president, the vice president and me, could have gone to Vietnam and didn't. John Kerry came from a privileged background. He could have avoided going too, but instead, he said: Send me.

When they sent those swiftboats up the river in Vietnam and they told them their job was to draw hostile fire, to wave the American flag and bate the enemy to come out and fight, John Kerry said: Send me.

And then, on my watch, when it was time to heal the wounds of war and normalize relations with Vietnam and to demand an accounting of the POWs and MIAs we lost there, John Kerry said: Send me.

Then when we needed someone to push the cause of inner-city children struggling to avoid a life of crime or to bring the benefits of high technology to ordinary Americans or to clean the environment in a way that created new jobs, or to give small businesses a better chance to make it, John Kerry said: Send me.

So tonight, my friends, I ask you to join me for the next 100 days in telling John Kerry's story and promoting his ideas. Let every person in this hall and like-minded people all across our land say to him what he has always said to America: Send me.

The bravery that men who fought by his side in battle, that bravery they saw in battle, I have seen in politics. When I was president, John Kerry showed courage and conviction on crime, on welfare reform, on balancing the budget, at a time when those priorities were not exactly the way to win a popularity contest in our party.

John Kerry took tough positions on tough problems. He knows who he is and where he's going. He has the experience, the character, the ideas, the values to be a great president.

And in a time of change, he has two other very important qualities: an insatiable curiosity to understand the world around him, and a willingness to hear other views, even those who disagree with him. Therefore...

Therefore, John Kerry will make choices that reflect both conviction and common sense. He proved that when he picked John Edwards to be his partner.

Now, everybody talks about John Edwards' energy and intellect and charisma. You know, I kind of resent him.

But the important thing is not what talents he has, but how he has used them. He chose - he chose to use his talents to improve the lives of people like him who had to work for everything they've got and to help people too often left out and left behind. And that's what he'll do as our vice president.

Now their opponents will tell you...

Their opponents will tell you we should be afraid of John Kerry and John Edwards, because they won't stand up to the terrorists. Don't you believe it. Strength and wisdom are not opposing values.

They go hand in hand.

They go hand in hand, and John Kerry has both. His first priority will be to keep America safe.

Remember the scripture: Be not afraid.

John Kerry and John Edwards are good people with good ideas, ideas to make the economy work again for middle-class Americans, to restore fiscal responsibility, to save Social Security, to make health care more affordable, college more available, to free us from dependence on foreign oil and create new jobs with clean energy and a cleaner environment...

... to rally the world to our side in the war against terror and to make a world with more friends and less terror.

My friends, at every turning point in our history, we, the people, have chosen unity over division, heeding our founders' call to America's eternal mission to form a more perfect union, to widen the circle of opportunity deep in the reach of freedom and strengthen the bonds of our community. It happened every time, because we made the right choices.

In the early days of the republic, America was divided and at a crossroads, much as it is today, deeply divided over whether or not to build a real nation with a national economy and a national legal system. We chose to build a more perfect union.

In the Civil War, America was at another crossroads, deeply divided over whether to save the union and end slavery. We chose a more perfect union.

In the 1960s, when I was a young man, we were divided again over civil rights and women's rights. And again we chose to form a more perfect union.

As I said in 1992, I say again tonight, we are all in this together. We have an obligation, both to work hard and to help our fellow citizens, an obligation both to fight terror and to build a world with more cooperation and less terror.

Now, again, it is time to choose. Since we're all in the same boat, we should choose a captain of our ship who is a brave good man, who knows how to steer a vessel through troubled waters, to the calm seas and the clear sides of our more perfect union. That is our mission.

So let us go in tonight and say to America in a loud, clear voice: Send John Kerry.

God bless you.