
Remarks to the 2004 House of Delegates Saturday, June 26, 2004

Senator John Kerry, U.S. Congress U.S. Presidential Candidate (D)

I am really thrilled to be with you and the answer is: Yes, I do get it. I do get it and I'm fed up, as you are, with a bunch of politicians who keep throwing words at the American people that are becoming more and more meaningless and who are making life more and more difficult for people all across the country.

Let me tell you something, thanks to your coming together and supporting me early, earliest in the history of the ANA, and I'm appreciative for that, and thanks to your effort out in the heartland and in the grassroots movement here; we're not just one step closer to building a stronger America that works for everybody and not just one step closer to regaining our respect and our influence in the world, but we are one step closer to achieving that by bringing about the end of the Bush administration. That's the key and we have four months to do it in.

Four critical months, here, to make a real difference in people's lives. And when I say, "real difference," look, all of your neighbors, your friends, you yourselves are working harder than ever before in order to make ends meet. Life is getting more complicated, not less, for most Americans. Health care costs we know have gone up 50% the last few years, gasoline prices are up 41%, the tuitions to college are up an average of 35%. I was in Ohio the other day, they're up about 55% there, and so people are really squeezed. I mean the middle class of America is increasingly squeezed and they're looking for help and they deserve help.

But the only people George Bush has been helping, in real terms, are the people at the top end of the economic platter. The wealthiest people have gotten wealthier, not just because wealthy people invest money and get wealthier, but because his policies have transferred money, transferred money from the average person to the wealthy people. It's the most reverse Robin Hood we've ever seen.

And what's happening is the wages of average Americans are going down by about \$1600. People work two to three jobs, they can't get ahead. You can't even get the minimum wage increased with these people, so the minimum wage in America is the lowest it's been since Harry Truman was President of the United States.

In my book, in my sense of America, that is unacceptable. And so, we deserve a president who is going to fight for the middle class folks and for people who are trying to get into the middle class. A catalyst for numbers of people who are struggling at the lower end of the income scale and want to break out, but every time they try to, the prices go up around them.

There are a number of things we can do: number one, I have a plan to put America back to work. I have a plan for manufacturing jobs. I will be a president who believes in science.

We're going to end this incredible disrespect that this administration has shown for scientific research and facts. We are going to do stem cell research in my administration. We're going to push the cause of the discovery of cures to diabetes to Parkinson's to Alzheimer's and other diseases. And we're going to make certain that the American citizen has affordable and accessible health care available to them.

And those aren't just words. I've laid out a plan, a very specific plan, as to how I'm going to relieve the pressure of the cost of the health care system, how we bring even the insurance companies and the HMOs to the table in a responsible way. Mine is not a punitive plan, it's not a government bureaucracy, it's not a Washington driven one size fits all. It's a plan built on economic incentives, but it's going to relieve the pressure for nurses on the floors.

It's going to relieve the pressure in the Medicare reimbursement system. It's going to relieve the pressure on the Medicaid system. We're going to take over Medicaid for children from the states, enroll them at the federal level, immediate health care for all children. And within three years of the passage of my plan, 96% of all Americans will be covered with affordable health insurance. And then we'll look at that other three to four percent and we'll figure out who they are, where they are, and how to get them into the system. It's practical and it works.

I'm also, I think Barbara probably told you this but, or maybe you know it, I've long been involved with the issues facing nurses. I offered the Nurse Reinvestment Act because we need to try and hold on to the nurses we have and attract new ones to the profession. And, needless to say, we've got to fix the reimbursement problem because what's happening in hospitals is they're taking it out of the hides of the personnel. And some of the first personnel they take it out of are nurses. So the floor duties have become much more extensive, much more difficult to perform and it puts the whole system at risk and I understand that.

So I can promise you that when I'm in the White House I will continue to fight to end mandatory overtime. We're going to make sure that there are adequate nursing staffing levels and we will provide the respect that your profession deserves.

In addition, we just had a decision by the Supreme Court, the other day where, in which George Bush attacked his own plan that he put together in Texas, for HMOs and patient's bill of rights. And, now, we find that, nationally, the patient's bill of rights can't be enforced state by state. We need a national bill. We've passed one in the Senate. And when I'm president, we're going to get a national patient's bill of rights so that people have a right to know what their options are and who can provide them. And we're not going to leave bureaucrats, in far off states, whose only interest is the bottom line to make those decisions about people.

In addition, I have a plan to provide prescription drugs to seniors that is not going to force people off of Medicare and into HMOs. We're going to have an ability to bulk purchase for Medicare that will drive costs down. And we're also going to have the ability to be able to import from Canada. So you don't have this incredibly ridiculous surge of what I call prescription drug tourism, where people are just crossing the border to buy their drugs and bring them back or get

them sent in and risk becoming criminals as a consequence of those actions. So there's a lot of work ahead of us.

Let me also say beyond the things that I've just talked about that I know are critical to you all, as nurses, as people who are professionals within the health care delivery system or people who care about it, you also care about a lot of things beyond that. You know this administration has broken its promises on education. They've refused to fund "No Child Left Behind" and millions of children are put at risk. And you see that in the health care system too.

We've seen them walk away from environmental responsibility, going backwards on air quality, backwards on water quality, putting at risk the long-term health and welfare of our nation. And most importantly we've seen them be absolutely blind to the possibilities of technology liberating Americans from our oil dependence and moving to a new source of energy as rapidly as possible. I want to explore those frontiers and I intend to explore them.

And not only that, I'm going to restore America's reputation in the world. I read the newspapers this morning and every article wrote about how Bush is trying to save face at the meeting in Ireland, or Bush is trying to salvage something out of NATO, how he is having to repair the relationship with Turkey, repair the relationship with Germany, repair the relationship with France. And the question should appropriately be asked by all Americans: why do we have a president who four years into his term is in a state of repair and disrepair? I believe we need a president who knows how to get it right in the beginning.

The United States of America should never go to war because we want to; we should only go to war because we have to. And we deserve a president who knows how to do the diplomacy and make America stronger. The world is far more tattered and volatile than it was when this president came to office. And I believe one of the reasons is the ill advised way at which he went about Iraq.

So we need a change, profoundly. And you have four months in which to not complain, not be content to go home and just say well there's nothing I can do about it, not to feel dismayed. But believe that if we will do what generations have done in front of us, and go out and knock on doors and talk to people and persuade our neighbors and fight for common sense and mainstream American values, we're going to make the United States of America safer and stronger here at home. And we're going to make us respected again in the world.

That's what this race is about. This is the most important election of our lifetime. And I ask every single one of you to enlist in this cause, help us with house parties, help us on the telephones, help us with canvassing. Don't leave a day go by that you don't commit someone else to go out and find 20, 50, 100 people who are willing to make a change.

And I tell you it's happening all across the country. Last Saturday; I did a series of house parties across the nation. I spoke to 2,000 house parties, over 1,100 meetings, over 20,000 people in one phone call. So that's what you can help do.

Thank you again for your support. It means all the world to me and I pledge to be there. I won't let you down. Thank you and God bless.