



[Home](#) | [Biography](#) | [Articles](#) | [Book Reviews](#) | [Books](#) | [Interviews](#) | [Lectures](#) | [Misc](#) | [Images](#)

William Jefferson Clinton

Democratic Presidential Nomination Acceptance Address delivered 16th July 1992, New York, NY

Governor Richards, Chairman Brown, Mayor Dinkins, our great host, my fellow delegates and my fellow Americans, I am so proud of Al Gore. He said he came here tonight because he always wanted to do the warm-up for Elvis. Well, I ran for President this year for one reason and one reason only: I wanted to come back to this convention and finish that speech I started four years ago.

Well, last night Mario Cuomo taught us how a real nominating speech should be given. He also made it clear why we have to steer our ship of state on a new course. Tonight I want to talk with you about my hope for the future, my faith in the American people, and my vision of the kind of country we can build together.

I salute the good men who were my companions on the campaign trail: Tom Harkin, Bob Kerrey, Doug Wilder, Jerry Brown, and Paul Tsongas!

One sentence in the Platform we built says it all: The most important family policy, urban policy, labor policy, minority policy, and foreign policy America can have is an expanding entrepreneurial economy of high-wage, high-skilled jobs.

And so, in the name of all those who do the work, pay the taxes, raise the kids, and play by the rules, in the name of the hardworking Americans who make up our forgotten middle class, I proudly accept your nomination for President of the United States. I am a product of that middle class, and when I am President, you will be forgotten no more.

We meet at a special moment in history, you and I. The Cold War is over. Soviet communism has collapsed and our values - freedom, democracy, individual rights, free enterprise - they have triumphed all around the world. And yet, just as we have won the Cold War abroad, we are losing the battles for economic opportunity and social justice here at home.

Now that we have changed the world, it's time to change America.

I have news for the forces of greed and the defenders of the status quo: Your time has come and gone. Its time for a change in America.

Tonight 10 million of our fellow Americans are out of work. Tens of millions more work harder for lower pay. The

incumbent President says unemployment always goes up a little before a recovery begins, but unemployment only has to go up by one more person before a real recovery can begin. And Mr. President, you are that man.

This election is about putting power back in your hands and putting the government back on your side. It's about putting people first. You know, I've said that all across the country. And whenever I do, someone always comes back at me, as a young man did just this week at a town meeting at the Henry Street Settlement on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He said, "That sounds good, Bill, but you're a politician. Why should I trust you?"

Tonight, as plainly as I can, I want to tell you who I am, what I believe, and where I want to lead America.

I never met my father. He was killed in a car wreck on a rainy road three months before I was born, driving from Chicago to Arkansas to see my mother. After that, my mother had to support us, so we lived with my grandparents while she went back to Louisiana to study nursing. I can still see her clearly tonight through the eyes of a three-year-old, kneeling at the railroad station and weeping as she put me back on the train to Arkansas with my grandmother.

She endured that pain because she knew her sacrifice was the only way she could support me and give me a better life. My mother taught me. She taught me about family and hard work and sacrifice. She held steady through tragedy after tragedy, and she held our family - my brother and I - together through tough times.

As a child, I watched her go off work each day at a time when it wasn't always easy to be a working mother.

As an adult, I've watched her fight off breast cancer, and again she has taught me a lesson in courage. And always, always, she taught me to fight.

That's why I'll fight to create high-paying jobs so that parents can afford to raise their children today.

That's why I'm so committed to make sure every American gets the health care that saved my mother's life and that women's health care gets the same attention as men's.

That's why I'll fight to make sure women in this country receive respect and dignity, whether they work in the home, out of the home, or both.

You want to know where I get my fighting spirit? It all started with my mother. Thank you, Mother. I love you.

When I think about opportunity for all Americans, I think about my grandfather. He ran a country store in our little town of Hope. There were no food stamps back then, so when his customers, whether they were white or black, who worked hard and did the best they could, came in with no money, well, he gave them food anyway. Just made a note of it. So did I. Before I was big enough to see over the counter, I learned from him to look up to people other folks looked down on.

My grandfather just had a high school education - a grade school education - but in that country store he taught me more about equality in the eyes of the Lord than all my professors at Georgetown, more about the intrinsic worth of every individual than all the philosophers at Oxford, more about the need for equal justice under the law than all the jurists at Yale Law School. If you want to know where I come by the passionate commitment I have to bringing people together without regard to race, it all started with my grandfather.

I learned a lot from another person, too, a person who for more than 20 years has worked hard to help our children, paying the price of time to make sure our schools don't fail them; someone who traveled our state for a year, studying, learning, listening, going to PTA meetings, school board meetings, town hall meetings, putting together a package of school reforms recognized around the nation - doing it all while building a distinguished legal career and being a wonderful, loving mother.

That person is my wife.

Hillary taught me. She taught me that all children can learn and that each of us has a duty to help them do it.

So if you want to know why I care so much about our children, and our future, it all started with Hillary.

I love you.

Frankly, I'm fed up with politicians in Washington lecturing the rest of us about family values. Our families have values. But our government doesn't.

I want an America where family values live in our actions, not just in our speeches, an America that includes every family, every traditional family and every extended family, every two parent family, every single-parent family and every foster family - every family.

I do want to say something to the fathers in this country who have chosen to abandon their children by neglecting their child support: Take responsibility for your children or we will force you to do so. Because governments don't raise children; parents do. And you should.

And I want to say something to every child in America tonight who is out there trying to grow up without a father or a mother: I know how you feel. You're special too.

You matter to America. And don't you ever let anybody tell you you can't become whatever you want to be. And, if other politicians make you feel like you are not part of their family, come on and be part of ours.

The thing that makes me angriest about what's gone wrong in the last 12 years is that our government has lost touch with our values, while our politicians continue to shout about them. I'm tired of it!

I was raised to believe the American Dream was built on rewarding hard work. But we have seen the folks of Washington turn the American ethic on its head.

For too long those who play by the rules and keep the faith have gotten the shaft, and those who cut corners and cut deals have been rewarded.

People are working harder than ever, spending less time with their children, working nights and weekends at their jobs instead of going to PTA and Little League or Scouts. And their incomes are still going down. Their taxes are still going up. And the costs of health care, housing, and education are going through the roof.

Meanwhile, more and more of our best people are falling into poverty even though they work 40 hours a week.

Our people are pleading for change, but government is in the way. It's been hijacked by privileged private interests. It's forgotten who really pays the bills around here. It's taken more of your money and given you less in return. We have got to go beyond the brain-dead politics in Washington and give our people the kind of government they deserve, a government that works for them.

A President ought to be a powerful force for progress. But right now I know how President Lincoln felt when General McClellan wouldn't attack in the Civil War. He asked him, "If you're not going to use your army, may I borrow it?"

And so I say: "George Bush, if you won't use your power to help America, step aside - I will.

Our country is falling behind. The President is caught in the grip of a failed economic theory. We have gone from 1st to 13th in the world in wages since Reagan and Bush have been in office.

Four years ago, candidate Bush said, "America is a special place, not just another pleasant country somewhere on the UN roll call between Albania and Zimbabwe." Now, under President Bush America has an unpleasant economy struck somewhere between Germany and Sri Lanka. And for most Americans, Mr. President, life's a lot less kind and a lot less gentle than it was before your administration took office.

Listen...yell it some more. [to audience chanting "No second term"]

Our country has fallen so far so fast that just a few months ago the Japanese Prime Minister actually said he felt sympathy for the United States. "Sympathy." When I am your President, the rest - the rest of the world will not look down on us with pity, but up to us with respect again.

What is George Bush doing about our economic problems?

Now, four years ago he promised 15 million new jobs by this time, and he's over 14 million short. Al Gore and I can do better.

He has raised taxes on the people driving pickup trucks and lowered taxes on the people riding in limousines. We can do better.

He promised to balance the budget, but he hasn't even tried. In fact, the budgets he has submitted to Congress nearly doubled the debt. Even worse, he wasted billions and reduced our investments in education and jobs. We can do better.

So, if you are sick and tired of a government that doesn't work to create jobs, if you're sick and tired of a tax system that's stacked against you, if you're sick and tired of exploding debt and reduced investments in our future, or if, like the great civil rights pioneer Fannie Lou Hamer, you're just plain old sick and tired of being sick and tired, then join us; work with us; win with us, and we can make our country the country it was meant to be.

Now, George Bush talks a good game, but he has no game plan to rebuild America, from the cities to the suburbs to the countryside, so that we can compete and win again in the global economy. I do.

He won't take on the big insurance companies and the bureaucracies to control health costs and give us affordable health care for all Americans, but I will.

He won't even implement the recommendations of his own commission on AIDS, but I will.

He won't streamline the federal government and change the way it works, cut 100,000 bureaucrats and put 100,000 new police officers on the streets of American cities, but I will.

He's never balanced a government budget, but I have 11 times.

He won't break the stranglehold the special interests have on our elections and the lobbyists have on our government, but I will.

He won't give mothers and fathers the simple chance to take some time off from work when a baby is born or a parent is sick, but I will.

We're losing our farms at a rapid rate, and he has no commitment to keep family farms in the family, but I do.

He's talked a lot about drugs, but he hasn't helped people on the front line to wage that war on drugs and crime. But I will.

He won't take the lead in protecting the environment and creating new jobs in environmental technologies for the 21st century, but I will. And you know what else? He doesn't have Al Gore, and I do.

Just in case - Just in case, you didn't notice, that's "Gore" with an "e" on the end.

And George Bush - George Bush won't guarantee a women's right to choose; I will.

Hear me, now: I am not pro-abortion; I am pro-choice, strongly. I believe this difficult and painful decision should be left to the women of America.

I hope the right to privacy can be protected and we will never again have to discuss this issue on political platforms. But I am old enough to remember what it was like before Roe v. Wade, and I do not want to return to the time when we made criminals of women and their doctors.

Jobs, education, health care - these are not just commitments from my lips; they are the work of my life.

Our priorities must be clear; we will put our people first again. But priorities without a clear plan of action are just empty words. To turn our rhetoric into reality we've got to change the way government does business, fundamentally. Until we do, we'll continue to pour billions of dollars down the drain.

The Republicans have campaigned against big government for a generation. But have you noticed, they've run this big government for a generation? And they haven't changed a thing. They don't want to fix government; they still want to campaign against it, and that's all.

But, my fellow Democrats, its time for us to realize that we've got some changing to do too. There is not a program in government for every problem, and if we want to use government to help people, we have got to make it work again.

Because we are committed in this convention and in this platform to making these changes, we are, as Democrats, in the words that Ross Perot himself spoke today, "a revitalized Democratic Party."

I am well aware that all those millions of people who rallied to Ross Perot's cause wanted to be in an army of patriots for change. Tonight, I say to them: "Join us, and together we will revitalize America."

Now, I don't have all the answers, but I do know the old ways don't work. Trickle down economics has sure failed. And big bureaucracies, both private and public, they've failed too.

That's why we need a new approach to government, a government that offers more empowerment and less entitlement, more choices for young people in the schools they attend - in the public schools they attend. And more choices for the elderly and for people with disabilities and the long-term care they receive. A government that is leaner, not meaner; a government that expands opportunity, not bureaucracy; a government that understands that jobs must come from growth in a vibrant and vital system of free enterprise.

I call this approach a "New Covenant," a solemn agreement between the people and their government based not simply on what each of us can take but what all of us must give to our nation.

We offer our people a new choice based on old values. We offer opportunity. We demand responsibility. We will build an American community again. The choice we offer is not conservative or liberal. In many ways, it's not even Republican or Democratic. It's different. It's new. And it will work. It will work because it is rooted in the vision and the values of the American people.

Of all the things George Bush has ever said that I disagree with, perhaps the thing that bothers me most, is how he derides and degrades the American tradition of seeing and seeking a better future. He mocks it as the "vision thing."

But just remember what the Scripture says: "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

I hope - I hope nobody in this great hall tonight, or in our beloved country has to go through tomorrow without a vision. I hope no one ever tries to raise a child without a vision. I hope nobody ever starts a business or plants a crop in the ground without a vision. For where there is no vision, the people perish.

One of the reasons we have so many children in so much trouble in so many places in this nation is because they have seen so little opportunity, so little responsibility, so little loving, caring community, that they literally cannot imagine the life we are calling them to lead.

And so I say again: Where there is no vision, America will perish. What is the vision of our New Covenant?

An America with millions of new jobs and dozens of new industries, moving confidently toward the 21st century.

An America that says to entrepreneurs and businesspeople: We will give you more incentives and more opportunity than ever before to develop the skills of your workers and to create American jobs and American wealth in the new global economy. But you must do your part; you must be responsible. American companies must act like American companies again, exporting products, not jobs.

That's what this New Covenant's all about.

An America in which the doors of colleges are thrown open once again to the sons and daughters of stenographers and steelworkers. We'll say: Everybody can borrow the money to go to college. But you must do your part. You must pay it back from your paychecks or, better yet, by going back home and serving your communities.

Just think of it. Think of it. Millions of energetic young men and women serving their country by policing the streets or teaching the children or caring for the sick; or working with the elderly and people with disabilities; or helping young people to stay off drugs and out of gangs, giving us all a sense of new hope and limitless possibilities.

That's what this New Covenant is all about.

An America in which health care is a right, not a privilege, in which we say to all of our people: "Your government has the courage finally to take on the health care profiteers and make health care affordable for every family." But, you must do your part - preventive care, prenatal care, childhood immunization, saving lives, saving money, saving families from heartbreak.

That's what the New Covenant is all about.

An America in which middle-class incomes, not middle-class taxes, are going up.

An America, yes, in which the wealthiest few, those making over \$200,000 a year, are asked to pay their fair share.

An America in which the rich are not soaked, but the middle class is not drowned, either.

Responsibility starts at the top.

That's what the New Covenant is all about.

An America where we end welfare as we know it. We will say to those on welfare: You will have and you deserve the opportunity through training and education, through child care and medical coverage, to liberate yourself. But then, when you can, you must work, because welfare should be a second chance, not a way of life.

That's what the New Covenant is all about.

An America with the world's strongest defense, ready and willing to use force when necessary.

An America at the forefront of the global effort to preserve and protect our common environment - and promoting global growth.

An America that will not coddle tyrants, from Baghdad to Beijing.

An America that champions the cause of freedom and democracy from Eastern Europe to Southern Africa - and in our own hemisphere, in Haiti and Cuba.

The end of the Cold War permits us to reduce defense spending while still maintaining the strongest defense in the world, but we must plow back every dollar of defense cuts into building American jobs right here at home. I know well

that the world needs a strong America, but we have learned that strength begins at home.

But the New Covenant is about more than opportunities and responsibilities for you and your families. It's also about our common community.

Tonight, every one of you knows deep in your heart that we are too divided. It is time to heal America.

And so we must say to every American: Look beyond the stereotypes that blind us. We need each other - all of us - we need each other. We don't have a person to waste, and yet for too long politicians have told the most of us that are doing all right that what's really wrong with America is the rest of us - "them."

Them - the minorities. Them - the liberals. Them - the poor. Them - the homeless. Them - the people with disabilities. Them - the gays.

We've gotten to where we've nearly "them'ed" ourselves to death: Them, and them, and them.

But, this is America. There is no "them." There is only "us."

One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

That - That, is our Pledge of Allegiance, and that's what the New Covenant is all about.

How do I know we can come together and make change happen? Because I have seen it in my own state. In Arkansas, we are working together, and we're making progress. No, there's no Arkansas miracle, but there are a lot of miraculous people. And because of them, our schools are better, our wages are higher, our factories are busier, our water is cleaner, and our budget is balanced. We're moving ahead.

I wish - I wish I could say the same thing about America under the incumbent President. He took the richest country in the world and brought it down.

We took on of the poorest states in America and lifted it up.

And so I say to all of those in this campaign season who would criticize Arkansas, come on down - especially - especially if you're from Washington, come on down.

Sure, you'll see us struggling against some of the problems we haven't solved yet, but you'll also see a lot of great people doing amazing things, and you might even learn a thing or two.

In the end, my fellow Americans, this New Covenant simply asks us all to be Americans again - old-fashioned Americans for a new time: Opportunity, responsibility, community.

When we pull together, America will pull ahead. Throughout the whole history of this country, we have seen time and time and time again, when we are united we are unstoppable.

We can seize this moment, make it exciting and energizing and heroic to be American again. We can renew our faith in each other and in ourselves. We can restore our sense of unity and community.

As the Scripture says, "our eyes have not yet seen, nor our ears heard, nor our minds imagined" what we can build.

But I can't do this alone - no President can. We must do it together. It won't be easy and it won't be quick. We didn't get into this mess overnight, and we won't get out of it overnight. But we can do it - with commitment, creativity, diversity, and drive!

We can do it!

We can do it! We can do it! We can do it! We can do it! We can do it!

I want every person in this hall and every person in this land to reach out and join us in a great new adventure, to chart a bold new future.

As a teenager, I heard John Kennedy's summons to citizenship. And then, as a student at Georgetown I heard that call clarified by a professor name Carroll Quigley, who said to us that America was the greatest nation in history because our people had always believed in two things: that tomorrow can be better than today and that every one of us has a personal moral responsibility to make it so.

That - That kind of future entered my life the night our daughter, Chelsea, was born. As I stood in the delivery room, I was overcome with the thought that God had given me a blessing my own father never knew - the chance to hold my child in my arms.

Somewhere at this very moment a child is being born in America. Let it be our cause to give that child a happy home, a healthy family, and a hopeful future. Let it be our cause to see that that child has a chance to live to the fullest of her God-given capacities.

Let it - Let it be our cause to see that child grow up strong and secure, braced by her challenges but never struggling alone, with family and friends and a faith that, in America, no one is left out; no one is left behind.

Let it be our cause that when this child is able, she gives something back to her children, her community, and her country.

Let it be our cause that we give this child a country that is coming together, not coming apart, a country of boundless hopes and endless dreams, a country once again lifts its people and inspires the world. Let that be our cause our commitment and our New Covenant.

My fellow Americans, I end tonight where it all began for me. I still believe in a place called Hope.

God bless you, and God Bless America.

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