

An Applied Practice in Political Speechwriting
From Announcement to Inaugural

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Senior Honors Capstone: General Education Honors
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Spring 2009

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Introduction

Rhetoric is the “art of enchanting the soul.”¹ - Plato

A politician’s rhetoric is one of his most important tools. Like processed uranium in the hands of a nuclear physicist, political oratory has an awesome power that can be harnessed for great good—or exploited for evil.

On the one hand, political rhetoric can demagogue, obfuscate, and deceive. “The broad masses of a population are more amenable to the appeal of rhetoric than to any other force.”² So wrote Adolph Hitler in 1925. George Orwell, too, knew political rhetoric could be used “to make lies sound truthful” and “to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”³

But a politician’s words can also inform, inspire, and exhilarate. From Abraham Lincoln’s solemn dedication at Gettysburg to Ronald Reagan’s tribute to the Challenger’s fallen crew; from Franklin Roosevelt’s “nothing to fear but fear itself” to Lyndon Johnson’s “We shall overcome,” presidents and presidential candidates have, with the power of their words, evoked the rawest human emotions: grief, pride, courage, and hope.

Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign was successful, at least in part, because of his oratorical genius. His 2004 keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention launched a meteoric rise that culminated in his 2009 inaugural address. Along the way, Obama’s enrapturing rhetoric could, at least to his supporters, approach the sublime. “Yes we can,” was more than a catchy slogan—it distilled the very spirit of America into three defiant words.

To his detractors, Obama was pilloried as “just words,” a hollow sophist who traded eloquence for experience. But Obama’s rejoinder was ready: “Don’t tell me words don’t matter.

¹ Michael E. Eidenmuller. "Scholarly Definitions of Rhetoric." American Rhetoric. 16 Apr. 2009 <<http://americanrhetoric.com/rhetoricdefinitions.htm>>.

² Alan Bullock. Hitler A Study in Tyranny. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991. 38.

³ Daniel Gross. "The Bailout and the Peril of Financial Linguistics | Newsweek Voices - Daniel Gross | Newsweek.com." Newsweek. 28 Mar. 2009. 12 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.newsweek.com/id/191397>>.

‘I have a dream’—just words? ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal’—just words? ‘We have nothing to fear but fear itself’—just words? Just speeches? It's true that speeches don't solve all problems, but what is also true is if we cannot inspire the country to believe again then it doesn't matter how many policies and plans we have...Don't tell me words don't matter!’”⁴

This project, a study and application of political rhetoric, is motivated by the conviction that words do matter, and politicians should select them with care. I have composed six major speeches for a hypothetical presidential campaign. Imagining Sen. Russ Feingold (D-WI) as my candidate, I include an announcement speech, a policy speech, a convention speech, a crisis speech, a victory speech, and an inaugural address. Each speech is accompanied by a short analysis of the event, highlighting rhetorical devices applied and providing a brief history of similar speeches.

I chose to write for Russ Feingold because of his uniquely appealing background and personality. First elected to the United States Senate in 1992, he quickly established his iconoclast credentials. The new senator imposed uncompromisingly strict ethics requirements on his staff, and he teamed up with Republican Senator John McCain to craft legislation on his signature issue, campaign finance reform.

Like many of the causes Feingold advocates, campaign finance reform makes other politicians uncomfortable (“You’re not living in the real world,” then-Senator Hillary Clinton scolded him in 2002⁵). But it is deeply in tune with the progressive tradition to which Feingold plays heir, evoking legendary Wisconsin Senator “Fighting Bob” La Follette’s fierce battles against powerful corporate interests. Over the years Feingold has buttressed his reputation as a

⁴ Kim Chipman and Karen Leigh. "Clinton, Obama Trade Barbs in Wisconsin Over 'Hope'" Bloomberg. 17 Feb. 2008. 18 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601070&refer=home&sid=acDBcSSFNVB8>>.

⁵ Sanford D. Horwitt. Feingold: A New Democratic Party. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007. 1.

man of principle by providing the lone Senate vote against the Patriot Act in 2001, opposing the Iraq War in 2002, and calling for the censure of President Bush in 2006.

While these acts were derided by the Beltway punditry as foolish and naïve, they won Feingold growing admiration across the country as his early warnings about civil liberties abuses and the consequences of war in Iraq proved prescient. Encouraged by many liberal activists, Feingold considered running for president during the 2008 cycle. While he ultimately decided against it, this capstone ponders the campaign he would have run.

All speeches require a context to give them meaning, and so this project generally tracks the 2008 election. George W. Bush's second term is coming to a close. John McCain is the Republican candidate. The major campaign issues—particularly the troubled economy and unpopular war in Iraq—provide a substantive focus. Nonetheless, I have attempted to free these speeches as much as possible from the narrow constraints of particular times and events. My emphasis is on political rhetoric, and some of the best oratory (“Ask not what your country can do for you,” for example) is truly timeless. Ideally, many of these speeches will be just as suited for a 2016 campaign as a 2008 campaign.

The central themes of these speeches are courage, independence, and progress, underscoring the strengths of Feingold's biography, policy positions, and vision. In addition to developing a message to match the candidate, I also seek to channel Feingold's voice and style. Feingold speaks with what his biographer calls the “eloquence of authenticity,”⁶ moving audiences through his earnestness and evident conviction. The appeal of his rhetoric was demonstrated when he closed a speech on his opposition to the Patriot Act with these words:

We must prevent more children from losing their mothers, more wives from
losing their husbands, and more firefighters from losing their brave and heroic

⁶ Horwitt (2009). 247.

colleagues. But the Congress will fulfill its duty only when it protects *both* the American people and the freedoms at the foundation of American society. So let us preserve our heritage of basic rights. Let us practice that liberty. And let us fight to maintain that freedom that we call America.⁷

These emotions, these beliefs, these words constitute Russ Feingold, the man and politician. In the following pages, I seek to elevate them to one of the highest pedestals of political rhetoric: the campaign for President of the United States.

⁷ Russell D. Feingold. Address to the Associated Press Managing Editors Conference. Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI. 12 Oct 2001. <<http://www.archipelago.org/vol6-2/feingold.htm>>

Announcement Speech

Analysis

Announcement speeches provide candidates with their first national forum. While hardly definitive in the campaign's eventual outcome, first impressions are important—as, for example, Sen. Joe Biden well knows. On the day he was to announce his presidential campaign in 2007, Biden was on the defensive, deflecting criticism for calling rival candidate Barack Obama “the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean.”⁸ The announcement speech offers the candidate an important opportunity to set the tone and priorities of the campaign, and it should be staged with purpose and care.

The venue of the speech is itself symbolic. John Edwards announced his candidacy in New Orleans, without tie or suit jacket, after spending time rebuilding homes devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The backdrop matched his message: “We, as citizens and as a government, have a moral responsibility to each other, and what we do together matters.”⁹ Barack Obama declared his candidacy in front the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois, the former stomping grounds of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln’s call for unity in the face of turmoil would be consistently echoed by Obama’s campaign.

For this speech, I have Sen. Feingold return to his alma-mater, the University of Wisconsin-Madison. First, this underscores his Midwestern roots—an important message given the primacy of neighboring Iowa’s first-in-the-nation caucus. Also, for this campaign to succeed Feingold will need to rely on the grassroots energy and youthful idealism that is so often latent on college campuses.

⁸ Thai, Xuan, and Ted Barrett. "Biden's description of Obama draws scrutiny." 9 Feb. 2007. CNN. 08 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/01/31/biden.obama/>>.

⁹ "Remarks Of John Edwards Today In New Orleans." John Edwards for President. 30 Jan. 2008. 08 Feb. 2009 <<http://johnedwards.com/news/press-releases/20080130/>>.

Substantively, the announcement speech is focused on twin objectives: define the candidate, and define the national challenges the candidacy will address. Some presidential aspirants are already national celebrities well before they enter the race, but Sen. Feingold's national stature is sufficiently limited that an element of biography is important in this speech. Rhetorically, I recount Feingold's major accomplishments with a parallel introduction of the time elapsed since the event. The sequence crescendos with the declaration of candidacy "today," but not before a quick flashback to the Constitution's birth in 1789.

The Constitution, as a manifestation of patriotism and American democracy, is the symbolic hinge of this speech as it swings from biography to political platform. The Constitution provides a revered vehicle for conveying messages of justice and equality, liberty and the rule of law. Feingold's campaign will be rooted in these themes. (While combing the speech for literary allusions, the media will be encouraged to note the line about values "implicit in the term 'national defense'" references *United States v. Robel* (1967), a landmark Supreme Court case defending the First Amendment.)

Much of Feingold's platform is Democratic boilerplate, from improving health care to protecting the environment. These policy positions are secondary, though, to his strongest selling point, personal integrity. Specifically, his lone vote against the Patriot Act and his strict standard for political ethics makes him truly a unique American politician, and separates him in a crowded primary field.

The relevant audience for this speech is Democratic party activists—they are the people paying closest attention this early in the race (a full year before the first votes will be cast). The speech is thus structured around regular applause lines elicited with liberal red meat: close Guantanamo, bring our troops home, provide a clean break from the past eight years. The

themes of the speech, however—courage, independence, and integrity rooted in the Constitution—will also prove easily adapted to a general election audience.

Announcement Speech
Outdoor Rally, University of Wisconsin-Madison
January 2007

Good Morning! Thank you all for coming today.

In politics, as in much of life, we are always captivated by what is to come—what new ideas will be discovered, what problems will be solved, what unimagined progress will we make real? But before we look forward, I want to begin by looking back.

Fifty-three years ago, I was born in Janesville, Wisconsin: the grandson of Jewish immigrants lured by the enduring promise of America; the son of a hardworking couple that demonstrated and demanded honesty, integrity, and compassion in their household.

Thirty-two years ago, I graduated from this school, the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Growing up as a Badger—racing through the dairy barn at 4-H county fairs, catching football games at Camp Randall Stadium—I learned the small-town Midwestern values that, really, are American values: be good to your neighbors, be good to the cows, and root against the Minnesota Golden Gophers.

Twenty-six years ago, I was elected to the state senate by thirty-one votes, my first upset victory. In the state legislature I delivered respite care for Alzheimer's families. I stood up to well-heeled lobbyists to protect small bankers. And I fought for small dairy farmers and consumers against the big corporations.

Fifteen years ago, I was elected to the United States Senate—not because of my big-shot connections, and certainly not because of the size of my campaign's bank account. I won because of a few simple promises I painted on my garage: I would spend most of my time in Wisconsin, not in Washington. I would accept no pay raise during my six-year term in office.

And I would hold a listening session in each of Wisconsin's 72 counties every year. I am proud to have kept all of these promises.

Two-hundred and thirty-one years ago, a band of rebels declared their independence from a tyrannical country ruled by men. Two-hundred and twenty years ago, they signed a document creating a new country that would be ruled by law.

Today, I stand before you as one man who wants to return this country to the rule of law. Today I declare my candidacy for the presidency of the United States.

America: The time has come to return to our constitutional creed. Due process and equal protection means no more snooping through our library records without a warrant, no more wiretapping American citizens without judicial oversight.

It is time to end the shame of Guantanamo Bay, and to let the world know America does not torture. It is time to end racial profiling. Time to end discrimination based on age, gender, or sexual orientation. It is time for constitutional courage.

In October 2001, the United States Senate passed the USA Patriot Act by a vote of 99-1. While the United States Senate was busy writing a blank check to George Bush and Dick Cheney, I alone voted "No"—not because I take America's security lightly, and not because I was looking for trouble. I voted no because the demands of conscience have little use for political expediency. The dictates of the Constitution do not easily excuse political power grabs in times of crisis.

There are some who argue that, in these challenging times, our safety can only be secured at the price of our liberty. But we reject this false choice, because our constitution was born in crisis and it has endured crisis triumphantly. Because the values of our constitution have never been an obstacle, but rather they have served as the source of our strength. Because, as we

know, inherent in the term "national defense" is the very notion of defending those values and ideals which set this nation apart.

Voting against every single one of my colleagues wasn't easy. But principled leadership rarely is. I didn't vote against the Iraq War in 2002 because it was the popular thing to do, I did it because it was the right thing to do. I was the first senator to call for a troop withdrawal, and today I will be the first presidential candidate to repeat that call. The Iraq War was a mistake, it has made us less safe, and it has distracted us from the true focus: defeating Al Qaeda and the terrorists who would attack us. The war in Iraq has cost us too much credibility with our allies, too much money, too many lives.

For too long, we have suffered from a failure of leadership. On January 20th, 2009 we can bring a higher standard of leadership to the White House, one that recognizes that in America, those with power must always work to earn the respect of the governed, not the other way around.

You deserve better. Ethical leadership shouldn't be an optional add-on, like the DVD player you might get for your minivan. And winning your congressman's attention shouldn't be as expensive as a Lexus. As a senator, I haven't taken a single gift from lobbyists—they know better than to waste their time in my office. And I proudly worked with Sen. John McCain to ban unlimited, unregulated campaign contributions. When I am president, ethics will no longer be an optional election year promise for officials in Washington—transparency and accountability will be the law of the land.

We're going to strengthen our public financing system, so candidates don't spend all of their time fundraising and end up beholden to a few wealthy contributors. And once elected, that congressman won't be allowed to accept gifts from lobbyists, or get chauffeured around in their

corporate jets. And we're going to end the revolving door that turns public officials into lobbyists as soon as they're out of office. We, the people, are going to take back control of our government from the special interests.

Because maybe then we won't have oil companies writing our national energy policy. With global temperatures rising—and energy prices skyrocketing—our dependence on fossil fuels must be broken. It is time to clean our air, purify our water, and draw from America's bottomless reservoir of ingenuity to create green-collar jobs that strengthen our economy, end our reliance on hostile countries, and preserve this earth, our only home.

It is not only our planet's health that concerns us, however. Too many Americans today lack sufficient healthcare. We have an obligation to make sure all Americans have access to quality, affordable coverage. We can achieve universal healthcare, we will achieve universal healthcare, and it will be one of my first priorities as president.

But this isn't the only challenge facing American workers today. We need to end unfair trade deals that decimate our communities and send jobs overseas. And we need to get government spending under control—not by slashing the critical services it provides, but by trimming the waste that squanders our money.

When I first ran for U.S. Senate, I campaigned on an 82-point plan to reduce the federal deficit. During this campaign for president, I will provide an equally specific plan for how we can cut the deficit in half during my first term: No more automatic pay raises for members of Congress. No more wasteful earmarks. No more reckless programs that increase our debt to foreign lenders and force the next generation of taxpayers to foot the bill.

Reform isn't easy. It's not for the timid, or the faint of heart. But I didn't go to Washington to make friends with the city's big shots. I didn't enter politics, like too many

others, to make an easy buck or to go to exclusive cocktail parties. I entered this profession to serve you, the American people. And that's why I'm running for president.

During my first campaign for state senate, I drove door to door in an old, beat up Chevy—I had to use masking tape to hold down the broken trunk. Everyone said I was wasting my time. But I won that race the same way we're going to win this one: one vote at a time. With the courage to be honest; with the independence to be bold.

Sixty-seven years ago, in the throes of crises at home and abroad, Winston Churchill sent a telegram to Franklin Roosevelt. He observed, "Things are afoot which will be remembered as long as the English language is spoken in any quarter of the globe." Those challenges were met, those adversaries defeated. Today, "things are afoot" once more, at home and abroad. But none are challenges we have not faced down before. We will reinvigorate our economy, reform our foreign policy, and rebuild our trust in government.

This is history's charge: to overcome those who would frustrate justice. To join hands with those who continue the great project of making this a more perfect union. That is our task today, tomorrow, next week and next month. Thank you all for coming this morning. Now let's get to work!

Policy Speech

Analysis

A policy speech is different from most campaign speeches because it is not primarily intended for popular consumption. Instead of being tailored to the masses, the speech finds its principal audience among political elites, such as research organizations and single-issue activists. The speech is thus free to engage denser material and employ some of the technical jargon common to the issue. By referring to official bill titles, focusing on specific ratios and dollar amounts, and referencing terms like “matching funds” and “bundled contributions,” this speech assumes a general fluency of campaign finance issues among the audience.

But the candidate must also recognize the influence policy speeches can have on the general public. An effective policy speech conveys a certain competence and preparedness in the candidate, even if voters do not follow all of the specifics. The general theme of the speech may also contribute to the greater campaign narrative. A candidate can broadcast expertise on his favorite subject, or dispel doubts about his grasp of an issue beyond the regular stump speech slogans.

This speech focuses on Sen. Feingold’s signature issue, campaign finance reform. The setting is important. The speech will not attract a prime time audience, but by being delivered in the afternoon, highlights can still be picked up by the evening newscasts. The speech is held in Arizona, which happens to be one of the few states that has an impressive history of campaign finance reform and is also an electoral battleground.

I chose to set this speech in April, which generally represents a lull between the primary and general election campaigns. After effectively clinching the party’s nomination, Sen. Feingold can use this as an opportunity to define his candidacy for a wider audience and begin to set the terms of the coming debate. The first week of April also marks the period when

candidates file their first-quarter financial disclosure reports, allowing the speech to take advantage of an issue that will already be in the news.

While ostensibly focused on policy, this speech also reinforces the central themes of character and conviction that undergird the campaign. Instead of simply highlighting what Sen. Feingold will do as president, the speech also draws attention to all that he has already accomplished, both in terms of policies passed and political challenges weathered.

Rhetorically, I allude to Barry Goldwater's 1964 condemnation of "small men seeking great wealth,"¹⁰ Ted Kennedy's 1984 declaration that he came "not to argue as a candidate but to affirm a cause,"¹¹ and George H.W. Bush's 1988 recognition that "a government that remembers that the people are its master is a good and needed thing."¹²

¹⁰ William Safire. "Barry Goldwater Ignites the Conservative Movement." Lend Me Your Ears. Boston: W. W. Norton & Company, Incorporated, 2004. p. 979.

¹¹ William Safire. "Senator Edward M. Kennedy Exhorts Fellow Democrats to Hold Fast to Liberalism." Lend Me Your Ears. Boston: W. W. Norton & Company, Incorporated, 2004. p. 1011.

¹² George H.W. Bush. Acceptance Address. Republican National Convention. New Orleans, LA. 18 August 1988 <<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/georgehbush1988rnc.htm>>.

Policy Speech
High School Gymnasium, Phoenix, Arizona
April, 2008

Good afternoon, thank you all for coming. Your presence today underlines the importance of campaign finance reform, and ultimately your votes and your activism will be critical in making our democracy cleaner, more responsive, more ethical.

Too many politicians have tried for too long to ignore this subject. Indeed, many of them have profited nicely from the status quo. But our nation's founders didn't choose to make America a democracy because the system served the politicians well, but rather because it requires the politicians to serve the people well. Unfortunately this great promise has slowly eroded and at times seems only a cruel joke.

Today governors are in jail, congressmen are in jail, and lobbyists are in jail for fraud and corruption, for buying favors and for selling favors. They're the ones who broke the laws—and perhaps more important, they're the ones who got caught. But they are not the only ones who are taking advantage of a broken system at your expense. There is a cancer on our democracy, a fundamental problem that challenges our very civic identity.

This week, as you've likely heard or read, candidates across the country have filed financial disclosure reports for their campaigns. As we can all see, millions and millions of dollars have been raised. This money, to be clear, is not the cancer—all campaigns need money, and I wouldn't be here today without the generosity of thousands of people like you all across the country.

The problem is that money decides who runs for office, money decides who wins the election, and far too often, money decides who the winners listen to once they're elected. It is time to take our government back. It is time to redeem our democracy.

All across the country, I am proud to report, many states are leading the way. “Clean election” laws have been passed in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Vermont, New Mexico and New Jersey. Right here in Arizona, the Citizens Clean Elections Act provides public funding for all statewide races and state legislature races. Arizona was the first state to elect a governor under a public finance system, a great achievement.

These efforts represent an important start, but they are only a start. All states, and all federal elections must be clean, fair, and open to all. We can tolerate nothing less.

Your senator, John McCain, has been a great ally and leader in these efforts. In fact, thanks to the McCain-Feingold Act we passed together in 2002, many people still think my first name is McCain. Officially known as the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act, McCain-Feingold is one of my proudest accomplishments.

We banned national parties from raising and spending unlimited, unregulated soft money. We prohibited federal officeholders from soliciting soft money, and we prohibited state and local parties from spending soft money on behalf of federal candidates. But the law also made room for regular citizens to fund the candidates they support. We increased individual contribution limits, from \$1,000 to \$2,000 per cycle, and indexed that limit for inflation. All together, BCRA represented an historic achievement in shifting power from the hands of a few into the hands of the many.

But we need to go farther. We need a new Presidential Funding Act that closes the remaining loopholes. Here’s what this Act will do: For presidential primary campaigns, the first \$200 of an individual’s contribution will be matched 4:1 by the government instead of 1:1, to ensure that candidates who accept public financing will have the resources they need to compete effectively. It will eliminate state by state spending limits, and it will make public funds

available six months earlier than the current law allows. For the general election, the spending limit for candidates accepting public money will be raised from \$75 million to \$100 million and indexed for inflation. If a candidate relying on private money raises or spends at least 20 percent more than the limit for federal funded candidates, the public grant provided to participating candidates will be doubled. Finally, candidates will be required to disclose all bundled contributions, and political parties will be prohibited from spending any soft money on their national conventions.

Now reform can't end with finance issues. As president, I will work to improve lobbying disclosure laws, slow the revolving door between government jobs and lobbying firms, and I'll crack down on the gifts, privately funded travel, and elaborate parties special interests use to woo lawmakers to vote for their favorite bills.

But the best thing we can do to return political power to the people is to publicly fund all federal elections. Every politician who wants to be reelected works for the people who help get him reelected. Instead of working for lobbyists and special interests, let's make politicians work for you, the taxpayer.

For only six dollars per person per year, we can federally fund every house, senate, and presidential campaign in the country. Then, instead of spending one-third of their time fundraising and chatting up big donors, politicians will have more time to listen to you. Instead of shoveling pork and special contracts to big contributors, that money will be spent on services or tax cuts benefiting you. And instead of allowing special interests to block major progress on issues like health care, energy, education, and the environment, politicians will finally pass reforms that help people like you.

Few candidates are willing to talk about cleaning up government, and even fewer are willing to follow through on that talk. It's easy to get too comfortable in Washington, and to forget about the people who sent you there. But when I say I will lose an election before I compromise these principles, it's not just political rhetoric—it's my biography, and it was almost my political epitaph.

In my 1998 Senate campaign, I promised to limit my spending to \$3.8 million, one dollar for every citizen of Wisconsin, and I refused to allow outside interest groups to spend soft money on my behalf. My opponent outspent me—heavily—and with less than a month until the election I was behind in the polls. Pundits and commentators publicly said I was “toast,” and I knew they might be right. Everyone in Washington yelled and screamed and demanded that I allow the Democratic Party to come in and spend more money on my behalf.

But there's something they didn't understand. There were already enough slick TV ads running in that race, enough glossy brochures and plastic yard signs. Maybe I could have benefited from a few more, if all I cared about was winning. But more important than the candidacy of Russ Feingold is the cause of honesty, credibility, and conviction. And if that candidacy and that cause had come into conflict, I would have failed Wisconsin and failed myself.

In government today, we still have too many small men and small women seeking great wealth and great power. I want to offer you something different and something better: a government that remembers that the people are its master. A president who remembers that democracies wither behind closed doors. A leader who knows, like Thomas Jefferson did, that in America, “It is the people to whom all authority belongs.”

I ended up winning that Senate race in 1998, by 35,000 votes. They said I couldn't keep my promises and still prevail, but I did. They say we can't fix a broken system, end the current practice of legalized bribery, and return political power back to the people. But we will.

Thank you very much.

Convention Speech *Analysis*

Every four years, like-minded politicians swarm an urban convention center to do what politicians like to do best: speak. From small-town mayors to past presidents, party loyalists all angle for their turn on the dais. Luminaries seek to highlight their legacies and bathe in the crowd's adoration; lesser-known officials dream that their five minutes might launch a career and secure eternal fame.

Most convention speeches are ultimately as memorable as Federal Register notices. But then there are some that reverberate through history, energizing a political movement and crystallizing the stakes of the coming election. In 1964, Sen. Barry Goldwater claimed the Republican nomination in San Francisco after securing a significant victory over the party's moderates. Articulating the cause of individualism and anticommunism in memorable, evocative language ("extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice!"), Goldwater provided the ideological foundation for a nascent conservative movement.¹³

Twenty years later, the Democrats' convention came to San Francisco. In an attempt to arrest the growing momentum of Goldwater's cause, New York Governor Mario Cuomo delivered the convention's keynote address. By deftly deconstructing Republican slogans, Cuomo offered a stirring defense of the Democratic alternative. "Today our great Democratic Party," Cuomo declared, "which has saved this nation from depression, from fascism, from racism, from corruption—is called upon to do it again."¹⁴

As both Goldwater's and Cuomo's examples demonstrate, great convention speeches are not sufficient in themselves to win the year's presidential election. Two other powerful

¹³ William Safire. "Barry Goldwater Ignites the Conservative Movement." Lend Me Your Ears. Boston: W. W. Norton & Company, Incorporated, 2004. p. 977.

¹⁴ Mario Cuomo. Keynote Address. Democratic National Convention. San Francisco, CA. 16 July 1984 <<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mariocuomo1984dnc.htm>>.

convention addresses—Ted Kennedy’s in 1980 and Barack Obama’s in 2004—likewise gave way to the party’s defeat. But conventions provide a rare opportunity for parties and candidates to speak directly to a national audience, and often mark the period when general election voters are just beginning to turn their attention to politics. The nominee must exploit this opportunity to deliver his most convincing set of arguments.

In this speech for Sen. Feingold, I follow a familiar arc. First, I present the candidate as the gracious victor of the primary process. Second, I celebrate the legacy and tradition of the party, paying homage to past icons. Third, I detail policy promises and draw contrasts with the opposition. Finally, I conclude by framing the essential theme of the campaign in a way that logically and emotionally compels a vote for the speaker.

In Feingold’s case, this speech also requires an important balance. A key message of the campaign is independence—from lobbyists, from wealthy donors, but also from any political party. At the convention, he must embrace the party’s principles and heritage without compromising his independent brand. Toward this end, I recognize the contributions of many parties, as early progressive leaders like Theodore Roosevelt and Robert La Follette ran under the Republican, Bull Moose, and Progressive party lines. It is this tradition that Feingold is loyal to—a tradition that happens today to be most manifest in the Democratic Party.

A few lines in this speech also allude to Sen. Kennedy’s powerful defense of liberal virtues at the 1980 convention. Kennedy spoke of “the cause that keeps our party young”; I expand this to declare “Progress is the cause that keeps our nation young.” “Progress” is one of the key words (along with “independence” and “courage”) that this campaign seeks to make synonymous with Feingold’s name. Kennedy’s proclamation that “progress is our heritage” is thus echoed here.

Convention Speech
Pepsi Center, Denver, Colorado
August 2008

Good evening Democrats! Good evening America! Thank you Chairman Dean, thank you delegates, and thank you Denver. I am here tonight to talk about our party and to talk about our ideas—but first, I am here tonight to proudly accept the nomination for President of the United States!

To all of my opponents on this journey, your commitment and dedication made you not only worthy adversaries, but also valuable friends. Our national debate was richer because of your voices, and I grew to be a better candidate because of them.

To all of you who knocked on doors and made phone calls and haven't slept since January, you have my deepest, sincerest gratitude. To those of you who haven't volunteered yet...you still have three more months to join the movement! Thank you all again for being here or for watching this from home tonight.

It has been 100 years since Denver last hosted the Democratic Convention. One-hundred years. In 1908, Henry Ford produced the first Model T, Mother's Day was observed for the first time, and the Chicago Cubs won the World Series. One-hundred years later, much remains the same: American industry and ingenuity still lead the world; the American family is our most basic institution; and the Cubs...well, maybe next year.

But something else was stirring at the dawn of the 20th century. A new progressive movement was being born. In 1912 Theodore Roosevelt pledged "to dissolve the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics." In my home state of Wisconsin, "Fighting Bob" La Follette fought the party bosses, took on the big trusts and monopolies, and provided a strong voice for women's suffrage and racial equality.

This is the tradition I am steeped in. This is the cause I continue: justice for working men and for working women, uncompromised ethics for politicians and government officials, fairness and equality for all who call America home. Many parties have, at some point in history, recognized the truth of this basic creed. I am beholden to none of them. But I am proud to stand before you tonight as a member of the party that stands today the truest to these ideals and the most committed to their achievement—the Democratic Party!

We are the party of Jefferson, who sought an “Empire of Liberty,” and we are the party of Jackson, who sought to serve as a “steward” in “the People’s House.” We are the party of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who taught us not to fear, and we are the party of John F. Kennedy, who taught us how to dream. But most important, we are the party of the people and I will be the people’s president.

I will be the president of our nation’s children, recognizing education as a top national priority. More resources for quality teachers, less unfunded mandates. More financial aid for higher education, less reliance on high-stakes standardized testing. To compete in the global economy, we must invest in our schools, our students, and our teachers.

I will be the president of the working people, and of those struggling to find work. Our economy is hurting. Savings are shrinking, credit is drying up. Homes are being foreclosed and businesses face bankruptcy. The policies of the past eight years have clearly failed. We need to invest in 21st century jobs in alternative energy and in the next generation of technology. We need trade agreements that help, not hurt, American workers. And we need to finally make real the promise of universal healthcare.

I will be the president of the taxpayer, and bring responsibility back to Washington. Fiscal discipline is hard, but if you are required to balance your checkbook, the government must

strive to do the same. I will end wasteful subsidies and unauthorized earmarks, cut inefficient programs, and close unfair loopholes. George Bush has left us with the greatest deficits in history, and that damage must be reversed.

And I will be the president of our seniors. Protecting Medicare and Social Security is my top fiscal priority, and I will continue to work to reduce prescription drug costs.

I will be the president of all Americans. Prejudice based on race or gender, age or sexual orientation, religion or disability will not be tolerated. The days of discrimination are done.

And my commitment to the security of all Americans will never waver. We will end the policies that have undermined our values and made us less safe. We will close Guantanamo, and shut the door on torture. We will safely and responsibly bring our troops home from Iraq, and refocus resources on fighting Al Qaeda. We will improve our intelligence, and rebuild our alliances.

All of this we will do, affirming that our values and our security are not opposed; rather, they are inexorably tied. We cannot compromise one without jeopardizing the other. For this nation, unique in the world, was founded on an idea: that common citizens, united under law, could consecrate on earth God's greatest gifts—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. When we violate civil liberties, we offend the American spirit. If we become a timid people—surrendering rights and forfeiting political power—we become no longer citizens but subjects.

This election, we have a choice. A choice of policies, of vision, of leadership. A choice of parties, and a choice of candidates. My opponent, to be sure, is a decent man. I honor his service to our country, and I enjoyed working with him on many important issues in the Senate. Still today, I call him my friend. But friends have responsibilities to each other, and one is to be frank about disagreements. So let me be clear: when John McCain says we can balance the

budget while cutting taxes for millionaires, I disagree! When John McCain says we can keep our troops in Iraq for another hundred years, I disagree! And when John McCain says that he has “voted with the president over 90 percent of the time”—well, I agree. He has stood by George Bush on issue after issue, bad decision after bad decision.

This is the opposition that we face today. John McCain and the Republicans would have us continue the policies of the last eight years that so offend our Constitution and threaten our moral leadership. They promise more war, more extraordinary renditions, more “enhanced interrogation techniques.” They would divide us with wedge issues and exploit our fears.

America: Our cause is greater than this. Progress is our heritage; progress is our destiny. Progress is the cause that keeps our nation young. Idealism can be revived; hope can be resuscitated. As your president, we will be a strong nation that protects its weak. We will be bold nation that leads with humility.

We will be one America, dedicated to the rule of law. Equal justice. Equal responsibility. Equal opportunity. On these principles, we plant our flag. On these promises, I ask for your vote. Together, we can make this progress real. Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Crisis Speech *Analysis*

The timing of national crises is unpredictable, but their occurrence is sadly inevitable. Presidents and other leaders have been assassinated, space shuttles have exploded, federal buildings have been bombed, and natural disasters have struck. Every time, people turn to their leaders for comfort, guidance, and strength.

Much of the speaker's task is simply to articulate the obvious. Shaping the events and emotions into words is a form of catharsis; once the pain is directly addressed, it has already begun to be overcome. At the memorial prayer service for victims of the Oklahoma City bombing, President Clinton acknowledged, "To all the members of the families here present who have suffered loss, though we share your grief, your pain is unimaginable, and we know that. We cannot undo it."¹⁵ It is important to recognize the depth of despair.

But the most important role of the speaker is to offer hope and to provide a path for healing. Rhetorically, parallel sentence structure evokes the sense of tranquility and predictability that has been shattered by the tragedy. Addressing Congress and the nation after the September 11 attacks, President Bush practiced this simple repetition: "We have seen it in the courage of passengers...We have seen the state of our union in the endurance of rescuers...We've seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers...We have seen the decency of a loving and giving people...The entire world has seen for itself the state of our union, and it is strong."¹⁶

Substantively, these speeches make frequent references to Providence and the divine. When events in this world are incomprehensible, we search for answers from a higher realm.

¹⁵ Bill Clinton. Oklahoma Bombing Memorial Prayer Service Address. Oklahoma City, OK. 23 April 1995
<<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wjcoklahomabombingspeech.htm>>

¹⁶ "Transcript of President Bush's Address." CNN. 21 Sept. 2001. 07 Mar. 2009
<<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>>.

There are often references to the comforting wisdom of scripture. After the school shooting at Columbine High School, President Clinton turned to the words of St. Paul.¹⁷ After the Challenger space mission ended in death and destruction, President Reagan quoted from poetry to remember the astronauts who “waved good-bye and ‘slipped the surly bonds of earth’ to ‘touch the face of God.’”¹⁸

The context of this speech is slightly unusual in that it is being delivered not by the president, but by a political candidate during the peak of election season. Whereas leaders will often mention specific actions that the government is taking to address the issue, that is not the candidate’s focus. Instead of crafting a policy response to the crisis, the candidate can focus on providing a homily rooted in empathy and compassion.

While the speech must be studiously nonpartisan, it is naïve to assume that any candidate’s words or actions will be (or even can be) fully divorced from the realities of the campaign. In deciding which candidate to favor, voters seek more than a simple convergence of policy preferences. There must also be an emotional connection to the candidate’s ability to lead confidently during trying times.

Presidential candidates are often forced to speak on breaking national and world events. In the 2008 campaign, the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the confrontation between Russia and Georgia, and the domestic financial crisis all forced candidates to break from their familiar stump speeches.

The closest historical parallel to this speech, though, occurred in Indianapolis in 1968. On his way to an evening campaign rally, Robert F. Kennedy was informed of Martin Luther

¹⁷ "Terror in Littleton; President's Remarks on Shootings at Colorado School." *The New York Times*. 07 Mar. 2009 <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D04EEDD143AF932A15757C0A96F958260&n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/Subjects/E/Education%20and%20Schools>>.

¹⁸ "Address to the nation on the Challenger disaster." *Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Library*. 07 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.reaganlibrary.com/reagan/speeches/challenger.asp>>.

King's assassination. It fell to Kennedy to break this tragic news to the waiting crowd. Through personal reflection on the loss of his own brother, through the words of Greek poets and through his simple earnestness, Kennedy was able to calm and soothe a despondent audience.¹⁹

In this speech for Sen. Feingold, I seek to follow the model provided by leaders who were most successful in comforting a melancholy nation. I acknowledge the pain, honor the dead, and look to history for guidance. I anticipate a better future, reassert our enduring strength, and close with a supplication for God's continued guidance.

¹⁹ William Safire. "Senator Robert F. Kennedy Speaks after the Assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr." Lend Me Your Ears. Boston: W. W. Norton & Company, Incorporated, 2004. p. 229.

Crisis Speech
National Cathedral, Washington, D.C.
September 2008

As you know, this morning four men carrying automatic rifles opened fire at the National Museum of the American Indian, taking the lives of 37 tourists, security, and staff, and then ultimately their own. The FBI is still investigating the matter, and has not yet conclusively identified a motive. The killers may have been former employees, carrying out a specific vendetta. They may have belonged to a supremacist group, violently expressing their debased prejudice. Or the shooting spree may have been an empty shout of nihilism.

There will be many days ahead to answer these questions, to review policies for responding to and preventing this type of crisis. There will be other days for politics and campaigning. But that is not our purpose tonight. We gather here in anguish, in heartache, in suffocating sorrow. We gather to mourn together and to weep together, to sing together and to pray together. We are angry, we are troubled, and sometimes we feel nothing but despair. But we are not broken, and we are not defeated.

As a people, we are no strangers to tragedy. We have seen this senseless violence too many times before. Bullets have taken away our famous heroes—Martin Luther King, John and Bobby Kennedy—and our less famous heroes—people like Laura Robinson, Michael Taylor, and Sarah Jackson, who courageously gave their lives this morning.

But even if this pain is not new, neither is it altogether familiar. Senseless killing rips open raw wounds in ways that past experiences can never numb. Tonight, we all share this pain together.

These tragedies, however, do not grant grief the final word. In America, we are many colors, many faiths, gathered here from many walks of life. But we are one nation, one

community. In 1821, Chief Justice John Marshall declared, “In war we are one people. In making peace we are one people.” When the sun shines, we are one, and when the storm clouds gather, we are still one.

Tonight we pray for the victims of today’s tragedy, and for their families. And we pray for the first responders, the police, and the doctors who are working right now to save precious lives.

The four killers this morning represent all that we hate and all that we are against. Those who take innocent life challenge even the most righteous person’s capacity for forgiveness. But their families are also grieving tonight, and we ask God to hold them also in His loving hands, as we seek to share a common peace and participate in a common healing.

The Scriptures tell us of Nehemiah, who “examined the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.” “Come,” he said, “let us rebuild these walls.” Come, America. Let us start rebuilding.

Here in Washington, many will be called to help with the physical rebuilding. Bodies need to be cared for and a museum must be restored. But all across this land, we must each commit to rebuilding our own communities, and reassert that enduring source of our national strength.

In 1800, Gouverneur Morris, a signatory to our Constitution, sought to locate the basis for America’s greatness. “Does it consist in numbers, wealth, or extent of territory?” he asked. No. Neither is it found in our genius and excellence in the arts, nor even in our liberty. “A people may be numerous, powerful, wealthy, free, brave, and inured to war without being great,” he said.

Rather, Morris concluded, the true source and principle of national greatness is in the national spirit. We are great because our spirit is high, it is generous, it is noble. Our destiny depends on our will, and our will on our spirit. And our spirit, I tell you tonight, is not broken.

We will rebuild, we will heal, we will overcome this great loss. The anvil of grief weighing on each of our hearts tonight will be lifted.

I want to close with the words of Stanley Hauerwas, and submit this humble prayer: God of Light, shine in our darkness that we may see that this world, for all its distortions of sin, is still your world. Free us from hardness of heart, take from us all pride and pretension, strip us clean of all that makes us incapable of being witnesses of your gentle love. May we accept your joy as an alternative to the world's violence, so that the world might know that your truth is deeper than our violence. Amen.

Victory Speech *Analysis*

Victory speeches are sewn together by a few common themes: gratitude to those who made the election possible, a gracious acknowledgement of the defeated foe, an extended hand to the voters of other candidates, a request for unity, a simple recitation of campaign themes and promises, and an upbeat declaration of optimism.

Victory speeches after primary elections or non-presidential races can be rowdy and self-indulgent. Following these races, the candidate's message is generally tailored to an intimate crowd of supporters, where gaiety far outweighs gravitas. While Howard Dean's infamous 2004 "Iowa Scream" was the result of a defeat, it typified the boisterous atmosphere common to these post-election events.

Once a candidate is elected president, however, the setting changes in ways that are significant for the tone and substance of the victory speech. Instead of a hotel room packed with campaign volunteers, an entire nation is the audience. Instead of unrestrained glee, the president-elect must reflect the responsibility of his new office.

Often, this is demonstrated with historical allusions that celebrate one of a nation's most significant civic holidays. After George W. Bush was finally declared the winner of the controversial 2000 election, he reached back to the writings of Thomas Jefferson: "The steady character of our countrymen is a rock to which we may safely moor; unequivocal in principle, reasonable in manner."²⁰ In 1988, George H.W. Bush offered his own paean to free elections

²⁰ George W. Bush. Victory Speech. Austin, TX. 13 December 2000
<<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush2000victoryspeech.htm>>

when he declared, “We can now speak the most majestic words a democracy has to offer: the people have spoken.”²¹

Perhaps the most important goal of a victory speech is to balance a celebratory fervor with the need to unite a country that has just weathered the heated antagonisms fanned by any adversarial campaign. When the stakes are as grand as the Oval Office, divisions are likely to cut especially deep. In their respective victory and concession speeches, the one-time candidates must lead an effort aimed at healing and unity.

As George H.W. Bush recognized aloud, “A campaign is a disagreement, and disagreements divide, but an election is a decision, and decisions clear the way for harmony and peace. I mean to be a President of all the people, and I want to work for the hopes and interests not only of my supporters, but of the Governor’s and of those who didn’t vote at all.”²² In 2008, Barack Obama offered effusive praise for his opponent, Sen. John McCain, stating, “He has endured sacrifices for America that most of us cannot begin to imagine, and we are better off for the service rendered by this brave and selfless leader.”²³

Finally, victory speeches look forward, anticipating a term full of accomplishments. In 1996 Bill Clinton announced, “Just four years from now, we will enter a new century of great challenge and unlimited possibility. Now, we’ve got a bridge to build and I’m ready if you are.”²⁴ Sixteen years earlier, Ronald Reagan proclaimed that, “Together, we’re going to do what has to be done...I aim to try and tap that great American spirit that opened up this completely

²¹ George H.W. Bush. Victory Speech. Texas. 8 November 1988 <<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/11/09/us/the-1988-elections-bush-victory-talk-i-mean-to-be-a-president-of-all-the-people.html>>

²² George H.W. Bush. Victory Speech. Houston, Texas. 8 November 1988 <<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/11/09/us/the-1988-elections-bush-victory-talk-i-mean-to-be-a-president-of-all-the-people.html>>

²³ Barack Obama. Victory Speech. Grant Park. Chicago, IL. 4 November 2008 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/11/04/obama-victory-speech_n_141194.html>

²⁴ Bill Clinton. Victory Speech. Little Rock, AR. 5 November 1996 <<http://www.australianpolitics.com/usa/clinton/speeches/961105victoryspeech.shtml>>

undeveloped continent from coast to coast and made it a great nation, survived several wars, survived a Great Depression, and we'll survive the problems we face right now.”²⁵ For newly elected presidents, this is a recurring theme: Success is on the horizon, let's go get it!

In many ways, this is one of the most formulaic speeches a politician will deliver, and I stick closely to that script for Sen. Feingold. The principal participants are thanked and the nation's democratic heritage is affirmed. Rapprochement is offered with equanimity. And a new era of peace and prosperity is—with God's blessing—anxiously anticipated.

²⁵ Ronald Reagan. Victory Speech. Los Angeles, CA. 4 November 1980
<<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=76115>>

Victory Speech
Outdoor Rally, University of Wisconsin-Madison
November 2008

Thank you. Thank you all very much.

Tonight I am filled with gratitude. First, I owe a deep debt to the patience and support of my family, especially my two daughters Jessica and Ellen. You continue to amaze me and fill me with pride.

I want to thank a campaign staff that never doubted our ability to win, even when everyone else did. Your dedication to this movement has been remarkable, and the countless sacrifices you made are recognized and deeply appreciated.

And I want to thank my Vice President, who will be just as essential in the White House as he was on the campaign trail. I couldn't have done this without you.

I especially want to thank my opponent for his gracious concession tonight, and praise him for the honorable race he ran. He is a fine public servant, and I know he will continue to distinguish himself as a genuine leader on many important issues in the days to come.

And finally, I want to thank you, the American people in every state, in every precinct, in every polling booth who made this victory possible.

Today is a special day. For after 221 years, America continues to remind the world why she is so extraordinary. Ever since a handful of disparate colonies came together as a single union, joined by a remarkable faith in liberty, equality, and the rule of law, the guiding hand of destiny has been at work. This nation has endured the trials of war and recession, celebrated the blessings of peace and prosperity, and, slowly but persistently, emerged as the leader of the free world.

This was not by accident. It happened because of many days like today. Younger people and older people, richer people and poorer people, Southern people and Northern people, and all those in between came together to affirm in one profound gesture that here, the people rule. Over the years, after struggles that were emotional, trying, and sometimes bloody but always necessary, we have expanded what we mean by “the people,” to include all colors, all incomes and both genders.

Today, you “the people” came out in historic numbers—over 130 million—to affirm the wisdom of Dorothy Thompson: “It is not the fact of liberty,” she said, “but the way in which liberty is exercised that ultimately determines whether liberty itself survives.” In America, the greatest symbol of our liberty is the ballot, and the example of its place in free, fair, and competitive elections continues to be America’s greatest export.

To those of you who cast a ballot for someone else, or who didn’t vote at all, I will continue to work to earn your trust. I still believe that there is more that unites us than there is that divides us. And the challenges we face require that that we come together and address them not as members of various parties and factions, but as members of one United States.

We will work together to finally ensure that every American has adequate and affordable healthcare. We will work together to provide every child with an education that is the envy of the world. We will work together to end our dependence on foreign oil, invest in new energy technology, and care for the health of this planet.

Together, we will retool our economic engine, create 21st century jobs, and unleash the innovation and ingenuity that has been our signature boast. Together, we will do everything possible to keep our nation safe and secure. Together, we will restore America’s leadership in the world.

Tonight, the people have spoken. Tonight, you have reclaimed politics, reclaimed government, and your message and mandate are unmistakable: idealism still lives, hope is triumphant, and our optimism is undiminished.

On these steps, 22 months ago, I pledged to run a clean and issue-oriented campaign that relied on grassroots energy instead of the Washington consultants and fundraisers and endorsements that everyone said were necessary. Tonight we celebrate a victory that was achieved because of, not in spite of, these convictions. And so it will be as President. Our basic principles of honesty, courage, and independence will never compromise my agenda because these principles *are* my agenda.

You will not agree with all of my decisions, and I will make mistakes. But I will always seek to meet the standard provided by this country's first president. In 1778 George Washington humbly said, "I have no other view than to promote the public good, and am unambitious of honors not founded in the approbation of my country." It is his great legacy that I, like every other president since him, will seek to uphold.

Today, we expressed our differences and, together, made a decision. Tomorrow, the hard work continues as we begin to tackle the serious challenges that await us. But tonight, we celebrate our sacred freedom and unite again on common values and shared convictions. We rejoice in the simple blessings known by all who can say, "I am an American." And we pray that Fortune, Grace, and Wisdom will continue to smile on this land. Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America!

Inaugural Address *Analysis*

The inauguration of a new president is full of pageantry and formal symbolism, representing one of the nation's preeminent civic celebrations. Every fourth January, a dignified atmosphere of tradition and unity descends upon the capital city. The new president's address seeks to fulfill this spirit by offering a ringing encomium to America and its ideals.

Fifty-five inaugural addresses have been delivered since President Washington's first in 1789. Despite differences in ideology and temperament among the presidents, and despite vast contrasts in the political mood and context, these speeches have been united by several common themes. The president often seeks to define America's role in world affairs, and—especially in recent years—the government's function in the domestic economy. In addition, the president commonly exhorts the enduring primacy of timeless national values, trusting their resilience to overcome looming crises and challenges.

No longer merely a political candidate, the inaugurated president is now a global statesman. Perhaps for the first time, his words must contemplate an international audience. This speech provides an opportunity to speak not just to America, but for America.

George W. Bush's second inaugural was a full-throated defense of his aggressive foreign policy and the idealistic project of spreading freedom throughout the world. "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands," Bush announced, declaring "the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."²⁶ This pledge echoed President Kennedy's 1961 promise to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship,

²⁶ George W. Bush. Inaugural Address. Washington, D.C. 20 January 2005
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=58745>

support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”²⁷ The expansion of liberty has been a fixed touchstone in American political rhetoric since World War II, a virtue that I recognize in this speech.

In 1981, Ronald Reagan delivered a sharp rebuke to the institution he would soon lead. “Government is not the solution to our problem,” he intoned. “Government is the problem.”²⁸ Democrats and Republicans since have wrestled with the political consequences of defending federal power. In his 1996 State of the Union speech, Bill Clinton cemented the intellectual victory of Reagan’s avowal, acknowledging that “the era of big government is over.”²⁹ In this speech, I seek to pull the pendulum back towards a greater acceptance of government’s necessary role and influence, as Barack Obama did in his first inaugural. “The question we ask today is not whether our Government is too big or too small,” Obama said, “but whether it works.”³⁰

At the height of the Great Depression, the need for bold government action was severe. Franklin Roosevelt’s 1933 inaugural was one of several in American history delivered in the chaotic throes of national crisis. Roosevelt comforted a fearful nation, and prescribed action. And that action, he knew, must spring from America’s abiding character: “We face the arduous days that lie before us in the warm courage of national unity; with the clear consciousness of

²⁷ John F. Kennedy. Inaugural Address. Washington, D.C. 20 January 1961
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=8032>

²⁸ Ronald Reagan. Inaugural Address. Washington, D.C. 20 January 1981
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=43130>

²⁹ Bill Clinton. State of the Union. Washington, D.C. 23 January 1996
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=53091>

³⁰ Barack Obama. Inaugural Address. Washington, D.C. 20 January 2009
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=44>

seeking old and precious moral values; with the clean satisfaction that comes from the stern performance of duty by old and young alike,”³¹ he soothingly affirmed.

Abraham Lincoln was also inaugurated in tumultuous times of crisis, and he too looked to America’s values for guidance. “The mystic chords of memory,” he said, “stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”³²

It is this heritage that I seek to fulfill in President Feingold’s inaugural address. The economy is troubled, but our spirit is not. Our challenges are imposing, but not impossible. In 1789 President Washington beseeched that “His divine blessing may be equally conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which the success of this Government must depend.”³³ In this spirit I, too, supplicate God’s good will.

³¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt. Inaugural Address. Washington D.C. 4 March 1933
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14473>

³² Abraham Lincoln. Inaugural Address. Washington, D.C. 4 March 1961
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25818>

³³ George Washington. Inaugural Address. New York, NY. 30 April 1789
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25800>

Inaugural Address
The Capitol, Washington, D.C.
January 20, 2009

My fellow citizens:

I am grateful for the opportunity to stand before you today, honored by this occasion to affirm my dedication to our nation and its enduring Constitution. Some 38 words comprise the sacred oath, one sentence that embodies many responsibilities, many duties, and one supreme devotion. I ask God's blessing and your trust in this grand endeavor, as I continually strive to be worthy of both.

The United States, today, is a nation of unmatched power in a world of unprecedented interdependence. This combination presents unique challenges, but it also signifies a new opportunity for American leadership that is bold and brave.

Over two hundred years ago, this country was forged in an industrious spirit that prized hard work, independence, and an entrepreneurial drive. With these timeless values we weathered several wars and a Great Depression, and ultimately we achieved a prosperity that history had never dreamed of. From the agricultural genius of Eli Whitney to George Washington Carver, from Thomas Edison's light bulb to Henry Ford's Model T, from the first steps on the moon to the wonders of the Internet, America has served as the great maternity ward for bringing the greatest inventions and most promising innovations into reality.

Today, however, economic turmoil stalks the world once more, a daunting specter that spares no corner of the globe. Global recession has proven indifferent to national boundaries, systems of government, and levels of development. Together we confront this challenge, and together we will overcome it.

There are some who proclaim that capitalism has been discredited, that the invisible hand of the market too often pats greed on the back, applauds destabilizing speculation and unnecessary risk, and waves off charges of corporate malfeasance. Others highlight the unsustainable environmental costs and gaping income inequality that are so often side effects of unfettered enterprise.

These critiques are worthy of our consideration. No economic theory should be accepted on the basis of faith, tradition, or a well written treatise; all must be judged on their practical success in improving our lives, respecting our freedom, and harmonizing with our basic sense of equity. The verdict of the twentieth century was clear: the free market—and not all-powerful bureaucrats—most successfully achieves these aims. We are more wealthy, we are more free, and we have greater social mobility than ever before.

A new century, though, has delivered new challenges. Manufacturers are not loyal to any town or any country, moving plants to Mexico, then to China, then to Thailand in an endless pursuit of the cheapest labor market. Deeply integrated global trade allows all countries to prosper during good times, but the repercussions are equally shared during troubled times. And the skyrocketing costs of medical care, coupled with every company's drive for a competitive advantage, have left millions of Americans with inadequate healthcare.

These facts are sobering. But we will not answer with hopelessness, nor despair, nor a demagoguing populism that seeks solace in scapegoats and protectionism. Rather, we will replace anxiety with new aspirations, aimlessness with new ambition. And government will not be an overbearing obstacle, but neither will it be a passive observer. Government will only act when necessary, but when necessary, it must act with purpose and vigor.

We must ensure that every child has access to a first-rate education. For America to compete in the modern economy, our teachers must be excellent, our colleges must be affordable, and our expectations for every student must be high.

We must further guarantee that all Americans who contribute to this nation's wealth may share in its rewards. Economic rules must be clear, equitable, and strictly enforced. And, let it be known, these rules apply to everyone. Justice will pay little heed to claims of wealth, status, or power. Whether in corporate halls or government chambers, transparency and accountability must be sacrosanct.

Government must protect these values, and defend justice and the rule of law. And, indeed, it must protect and defend our very lives. America's enemies have been clear: they will make no distinction between combatant and noncombatant, Muslim and non-Muslim, Arab and non-Arab in their quest for bloody martyrdom. From New York to Washington, from London to Jakarta, we have witnessed their debased brutality.

Our response must not seek to match their anger, their hatred, or their violence. Rather, it must be coincident with our highest ideals. In this way, our message to the world will be unmistakable. Liberty, justice, and the rule of law are not simply American values or Western values, parochial eccentricities adopted for their occasional expediency or political utility. Instead, we know them as the mandates of morality to which all of mankind must answer. And America, we reaffirm today, will remain their proudest defender.

A constellation of heroes and leaders before us have preached these virtues, guiding us ever closer to their full realization. Some of those leaders have stood on these Capitol steps, or marched along this very Mall. Because of them, we know that progress is real, that we can make

our own destiny, that we can be the force for a good that is stronger than evil. Let us dedicate ourselves to that cause.

Even as we seek to do right in our world, in our nation, and in our communities, we know that the vicissitudes of history have spread fortune widely. Here in America, we have blisters to mark our economic toils, and solemn rows of crosses that mark our many battles. Still today, many are seeking new skills and new ways to save money as the recession extends its reach. Still today, American soldiers are risking their lives far away from home.

And yet, despite these trials and challenges, we stand here today deeply blessed. We can say with the scriptures that “God has given us all things richly.” May our riches be appropriate to our work. May our work honor our deepest creed, and may that creed be worthy of the enduring grace of Providence.

I ask God’s blessing for you, His wisdom for our country, and His peace for our world. Thank you.

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