

Doris Speech on conflict of interest

Thank you

We don't know what the future holds for our dear nation or for the world. Certainly the challenges are like no other time. If you think of the physical challenges before us: the earth's climate, its food supply, its fresh water resources, its energy resources, we might as well be in some science fiction disaster movie. But so be it. We will move ahead and do what we can do to survive.

We Americans will be coming at the future with a new president and perhaps a new kind of politics. This may give us some enthusiasm and hope, regardless of which candidate we are supporting. They are both decent men and strong leaders. I am an old Democrat, so I indeed will be voting for Mr. Obama with great joy, but Mr. McCain is someone I have had some dealings with, and I will not disparage my friends who choose to vote for him.

Whoever our next president may be, that person will face a fact more difficult than all the other difficult facts, and here it is: Congress is so

deadlocked by special interests that real reform on any front -- environmental, health, education or the general welfare of the people - will be difficult to impossible.

The next president will have to go directly to the American people and make the case for needed action, and this must be done with such moral force that the people will nearly rise up to demand action by their elected leaders in Congress and locally. Mr. Obama seems particularly suited to this high task, and that is the reason many people think he is a man of history. But Mr. McCain may rise to that moment also, if he is given the chance and if he will disentangle himself from the special interests that he rails against yet embraces. (That may not be the best word.)

This election will be crucial to our future, a fact we do not argue -any of us. Those of us who keep an eye over our shoulder for the darker intrigues of politics must keep working to assure that voting systems are open and not corrupted and that the right of the people to elect people who represent their dreams is not overthrown--this right is our primary freedom. When there are big shakeups at the Pentagon, as there have been recently, we who

see shadows look carefully indeed. We have lost too many of our greatest leaders already.

Besides our vigilance, what can we do to help our next President help us to move forward?

The stranglehold that the K Street lobbying culture has on our government, which is a cancer on our democracy, must be ended. I would urge the new President to lead the charge to outlaw lobbying by defense contractors and by industries that rely heavily on public money, such as the pharmaceutical and health insurance industries. Let their executives be heard in Congress, but let them do so in open hearings. Let them speak when they are spoken to. Let them answer questions when they are asked for their answers. But most of us will agree that their power has grown to great. Eisenhower, only three years before John Kennedy's death, warned us against the military-industrial complex. It is time to marginalize this dangerous and undemocratic force in our lives.

Clearly, we must tread carefully when we dare limit any person's free speech. But there is a vile difference between a defense executive making a presentation at the Pentagon or before a

Congressional committee and that same executive hosting parties and providing jets and companions to those same generals and elected leaders. We need to draw a very careful line, but draw a line we must.

Who would not stand behind any candidate or newly-elected President who proposed such a new law? We would camp in every street of Washington until it passed!

Further, we must draw another line. When an elected leader accepts money from some special interest whose issues are subject to that official's actions and votes, there is a conflict of interest. The present laws, local and federal, limit conflict of interest to the acceptance of private benefits, but a campaign donation or campaign assistance is less than a half step from a private gain for such officials. We must expand our conflict of interest laws so that no public official may vote on an issue that affects his or her major financial donors. If this law would encourage the otherwise slow advance of the new reforms that publicly finance election campaigns, all the better.

Until we free our elected leaders of the cancer of K Street and widespread conflict of interests among our elected leaders, no serious reforms will be possible.

As we move into the general election campaign, let us push these ideas with our candidates. The future of nature is at stake. The future of weather is at stake. The futures of our children and grandchildren are at stake. Let us not simply hope that a new leader, a better leader, will solve all our problems. America's closet is very old now and needs a big cleaning. Let's do it.

Thank you very much.