

CLARION UNIVERSITY LONG VERSION

Thank you.

My recent campaign for the U. S. Senate in New Hampshire was a great adventure, and its eventual outcome was fairly well known even before we began. If you want to know if I would have done it if I had known in advance that I would not win, the answer is yes, I would have still done it.

For life itself has a predictable outcome. It is not in the final day that meaning comes to our lives, but in the days spent along the way.

As to the politics of my effort, I will tell you that I am an old Progressive Populist, and that tradition has crossed both the Republican and Democratic lines, and now the Reform and Green lines, too, but it is considered more of the left, now, than the right.

I understand that many of you hold far different political beliefs, and rather than bend my remarks to the agreement of all, let me instead help you to see inside the thinking of a particular kind of belief system that has been important in America since just after the Civil War, when farmers banded together to fight the railroad, banking and meat packing monopolies by forming their own political party.

That Party, the Populist Party, which was largely based in rural America, joined forces with the more urban based Progressive Party at the turn of the 20th Century. The leaders of the powerful new movement, which sprang for the most part out of Madison, Wisconsin, included Roger "Fighting Bob" LaFollette whose seat in the U. S. Senate is now held appropriately by Russ Feingold, a solid reformer whose campaign finance reform bill I walked across America to support. When La Follette raised the movement to great power in America, leaders like Theodore Roosevelt were quick to see the future and danced quickly in front of that parade.

Out of that movement we got the monopoly-busting anti-trust laws, which largely came undone in the Reagan Administration, the labor laws which gave America the strongest and most prosperous middle class the world had ever seen--also which came undone in the Reagan Administration, with later help in the Clinton Administration. And from the Progressive-Populist Movement we got environmental clean-up laws, worker safety laws, and the Social Security System, which ended the long era of elder destitution that had been a fact for as long as industrialization had overcome the more rural beginnings of our nation.

My father and mother were solid Lincoln Republicans, and they celebrated and participated in many of these reforms. Most Americans, through most of my

lifetime, have seen the federal government as a necessary tool for working Americans to provide the justice and its prosperity.

All those beliefs and accomplishments are now coming undone or are under attack. Social Security will be the next to fall, and we see it coming, an American becomes again what it was in the first days of industrialization: a nation of the very rich and the very poor--the exploiters, who own the politicians, and the exploited, whose far greater power to move history is possible but their guns smoulder silently in their holsters, but only for so long as they can bear.

It is interesting to those of us on the left that the vote no longer breaks down as a division of the exploiter and the exploited. People seem happy to vote for those who do everything possible to export their jobs, give their common wealth to the already too-wealthy, and undermine their social safety net programs, right to organize, right to privacy and on and on.

The division in the electorate is now between those who see government as a place where practical solutions are forged among people of different interests, and those who see government as an enforcer of their own private belief systems, regardless of the costs to themselves.

Both groups are willing to make a sacrifice. The first group is willing to not impose their personal belief systems when they are opening on the common ground of civic life, as when John Kennedy declared that the Constitution, not the Catholic Church, would be his guide in the civil matters of the presidency. The second group is not willing to lay down their private beliefs to find common ground in civil affairs, but they are willing to sacrifice their jobs, their health care, and the good name of their country in the world, and, more significantly, they are willing for all other people to suffer as well, in order that the government might be an enforcer of their personal spiritual beliefs.

Now, if this strikes you as a less than objective analysis of the situation, I told you going in that I am not bending my language to suit the audience, but only express how the Progressives feel about things today.

If you look at the red state-blue state map of the United States, you see a more useful picture. You see that urban areas voted Democratic and rural areas voted Republican, on average. Suburban spread has blurred this distinction, but it is meaningful to some degree, because where one lives is more elective today than ever before, and one might generalize that antisocial people tend not to live in dense communities, and social people do. The word anti-social well describes the

dismantling of social systems, environmental protection, job protection and all the rest that has been going on with a vengeance during the /Bush years. You might agree with what has been done, but I would bet that you also believe that government is too big, that it is the problem, not the solution, that minorities have too much given to them, that women should not have too much power, especially over their own bodies, and so on and so on. You tend to favor systems of authority over systems of shared power, and so the word Democrat doesn't appear very often in your wallets.

If this is a useful observation, then Progressives like myself must wonder what it will take for us ever again to have a common ground where we work out our common needs in a civil, meaning non-religious and non-ideological manner. How do you do that when half the population does not believe in that?

Well, I think we all believe in that. I have overstated my case to make my point come into focus, but let me look around at the human situation, not just the deadly abstractions.

The fact is, we are, each of us, both kinds of people. When I pay my taxes, ask me if the government is too big or too small. When my Social Security check is late, ask me again. We all have our belief systems that inform our words and actions, but the real world is a beautiful negotiation between our needs and our beliefs, and that is also the case in the large sense, where we interact as the American people.

The Republicans have a great duty to do in the nation, and that is to guard the rights of individual action. /the Democrats have a great duty to do in this nation, and that is to guard the rights of group action. If that pendulum of power can swing fairly and naturally, we do all right on both fronts. But it must operate in a civic atmosphere of mutual respect, or the swings will become wildly erratic and the machine may fly apart. I sense that rumbling now and pray that we can reason together as one people.

What happens when it swings too hard and too long to the right? We have seen that in the world, and we sent our young men and women off to die to end it. I have felt those sacrifices in my lifetime.

What happens when it swings too hard and too long to the left? We have seen that in the world, and we resisted it with the lives of another generation, whose names are endless on the black wall in Washington.

Both swings crush the freedoms of the individual and destroy the diversity of

culture and human life that define higher civilization.

Politics must be about things that work, rather than about our intentions, which is our private affair.

Let me give an example. Very few people on this earth like the idea of abortion, and most would very much like the idea of reducing the need for abortion.

In fact, most European countries have about one-eighth the abortions that we have in the U. S., and they achieve that reduction by employing things that work. Laws against women do not work, but some things do. Better public health programs, for example, and better reproduction education, and a more honestly open attitude toward human sociality with their young people

Now, if you care about reducing abortion, you do care to know what works. If, on the other hand, you are only interested in why people do what they do, and you only care that people do the right thing for the right reason, according to God's laws, then you are less interested in outcomes than you are in human motivation. That means you are out of the realm of politics and into the preaching business. Our founding fathers knew to separate the two with respect for the fact that we all have our own beliefs and that is our right. But we are all on a common search for things that work, that actually affect the outcome of what we seek.

The Founders were men and women of the Enlightenment, who cared to know about things that worked. They loved learning. They loved discovering new facts. The same Ben Franklin who shaped our founding was the same Ben Franklin flying a kite in the storm to learn about lightning.

Democracy, to survive, needs people who honour and seek the facts. Those in power today who create false facts when needed, and who ignore the true facts of science, or of gathered intelligence are not friends to our democracy.

The right wing of American politics is now moving rapidly away from a fact-based politics, and toward the crushing of diversity, and it is doing so in the name of religion. If you cannot see the danger in that, you have either not lived through as much World history, as I have, or you have not read your history, or you have no imagination. The danger is perfectly real and anything can happen here that happened in other places, and has already begun.

But the saving grace for us, I think, is the fact that Americans are richly complex, and we are for something one minute and against it the next. We have an abiding, deeply-set love of justice, even when we allow it to be unevenly applied to others.

It is there. There is no opinion that we do not all share at least a little bit. and there are enough facts in the world to justify about any opinion.

We will move through this time, neighbor-to- neighbor, friend-to-friend. We have seen the divisions in our families, and it isn't because one side of the dinner table is out in farmland and the other is in the city. Our divisions of opinion are more personal than that, though the arguments differ according to where one lives.

Are we all trying to have a democracy? I am not sure of that, but I hope it is so.

Are we willing to let our religious beliefs guide our private and family lives, but leave them aside when we work with people of other religions in the problem-solving civic area? Your answer to that question answers whether or not you are trying to have a democracy to leave to the next generation, or not.

As for me, the future is one day at a time, and the joy of democracy is in that old democracy road not in any shining destination. Being with people who care, who love each other and their country, that is such a blessing. It is why I ran for office, to meet ore people and to share more adventures on that great road..

We Americans have to walk together, or we shall only remember thereat nation we once had, and the greater nation we could have built together, had we indeed believe in togetherness itself.

Thank you very much.