



Thank You very much.

What issues do you care about? Is it of concern to you that the polar ice sheets are only half as thick as they were forty years ago? You have your issues and I have mine. Environmental issues do shape my choice of candidates and my own activities. Is it important to you that our Bill of Rights—which guarantee our personal freedom—be protected, even in dangerous times? You and I can differ on the details, but we probably are in favor of protecting our freedoms. And we probably agree that education should be as free as possible and medical care and old age care should be widely available, as it is in the other modern nations.

But of all my concerns, here is the most important to me: that our democracy be vigorous and healthy and real. That it should mean something to be a citizen, and that all citizens should —must!— participate in the decisions of community, state and nation. That is a basic requirement of our continuing freedom—and that we be informed enough to make good decisions for our society.

I am on a long trek across our beautiful country, to see what one person and a few friends might do to

engage more citizens in this democracy and to have them participate in the coming election in a way that will provide us with leadership that we will all have had a hand in selecting. That may seem like boring old politics, but it is much more than that, at least to me. And my journey is a great joy.

On the farms where I have stayed, and in the poorest corners of our poorest neighborhoods, I have met so many people who are kind and generous and full of dreams for their lives and for their community and for their country. It is heartbreaking sometimes to see how far their reality is from their dreams. Can I do anything to be of assistance? It is a simple question.

I am not an expert. I have no special university degrees or training that might suggest I have a role to play. And yet I do have a role to play, and so do we all.

To be a citizen of the United States of America is a very big job but it takes no special qualifications other than a capacity for love and a determination to take your part.

What if I told you that you ~~were~~ <sup>are ~~so~~ the center</sup> <sup>of the world? That you are</sup> the one critical person that the fate of the nation and of the world ~~were~~ in your hands. What if I told you that, after the

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centuries of American progress, after the wars for independence and unity, after the wars against sworn enemies of democracy, after the blood price paid by those who would have us all be equal citizens—black, white, brown, yellow and red—after all the devotion and sacrifice and hoping and dreaming, that this nation might be a special place of freedom, of equality, of peace and prosperity, of joy and of opportunity for the full expression of each person's highest and most creative potential? What if I told you that, after the dreams dreamt by so many millions, that it was now up to you to save the people, the nation and the world? Would this be sufficient to engage your interest and your passion and your longing for adventure and glory and achievement and victory? Would you be joyful in this great work?

Well, it is indeed joyful, and it is indeed the case: It is up to you. ~~what will you do?~~

You think I exaggerate, but I will now give you the example of my own experience on the road.

We have found communities waiting for ideas and leadership and hope, as if they were waiting for me. They also wait for you. ~~what will you do?~~

In the poorest communities of Tampa and Fort Myers and Miami I have met people who are alienated from

our democracy. They live in another nation, almost. They long for respect, inclusion, prosperity, dignity. They search for it in their own way.

Remarkably, they have the power to bring great resources to their communities and their families if they would vote as a community—not only for senators and presidents, but for city councilmen and county commissioners. Getting them to do that is like dragging someone from a gas-filled house: they are too overcome sometimes to do anything but lay down. *etc*

So we have, with the leadership of those areas, conceived ways to drag people into the fresh air where they might find their power over their own lives.

Let me tell you about one program we are building, called “Vote for Me.”

It began when the young artist traveling with me put out poster boards and blank bumper stickers and crayons at <sup>the</sup> block fair in a poor neighborhood of Miami. She asked the kids to make a “Vote for Me” poster or bumper sticker. All were different and all were beautiful, creative, surprising. We presented these treasures to their parents with the message that the adults are indeed voting for their children when they vote, and that they are voting against them when they fail to vote. There are too many education, health,



economic opportunity and justice issues in play to think that who we vote for does not affect our children's lives. It is a message that people instantly understand.

This idea connected with an idea that sprung-up in Fort Myers. An African-American leader worried with us that all the coming voter registration programs will fall on deaf ears in the poorest neighborhoods, especially among the youngest voters. Even if they are registered, they will do on election day whatever their peers are doing. Few of us, at that age, are stronger than the tides of our peer group.

But, we thought, what if, when those young people were registered to vote, they were given a bracelet with the name of someone who gave their life for freedom or for equality—someone who can no longer vote for themselves, but for whom the wearer of this bracelet might vote. The bracelet will come with the story of that person, and it will say, "Vote for Me." This emotional bond may become important enough to this new voter that he or she will break away from the normal activities of November 2, 2004 and show some respect for this name.

Within those same communities, we are working with gospel churches to create a "Wake up and Vote" gospel music tour, and we are working on a program

called "Stretch the Vote," <sup>sh</sup> were stretch limousines will shuttle between the polling places and the neighborhoods on election day. Whatever it takes to wake up the spirit, generate a smile, make it a day of fun and liberation, we shall do.

It is also a time to look at the deep needs of such communities. During the Clinton Administration, some 100,000 new police were put on our streets in an effort to make America safer. It did so, but at a great expense. Would some of that money have been better spent on community programs to improve life in poor areas? Perhaps. But the cities were made safer. Sometimes young people were stopped for a broken tail light and were found to be in possession of something that led to a felony arrest. It is hard for them to get their voting rights back after they have paid the price for that error. It is also a problem for them when they apply for jobs—they are stuck for life, it seems, at minimum wage. We need a "clean slate" program to erase these criminal records after a period of lawful behavior. No judge intended these to be lifetime sentences, and that is what they are in terms of job prospects. If we provide leadership in areas such as this, believe me, the mothers and grandmothers of the housing projects will become very interested in politics and voting and all that comes with it. It is no good for the Democrats or anyone else to show up in these communities a few

minutes before each election and ask for votes, when poverty and agony are never improved by it.

These people see the elites of the right fighting with the elites of the left. And that is all it is, usually. Even when the elites of the left are elected, there are never enough resources provided to really solve problems of the poor on the required scale. Unless we address this failing on our part, we have no right to ask people in poor communities to register just because we want them to. Part of waking up the vote is waking up our own moral sensibilities.

Now, I am telling you all this because I think it is amazing what can be done—what can be well started—when you come and you have your eyes and your ears wide open. I need hearing aids, you know, but I can still listen and I do. My eyes are old but they see injustice very clearly. My legs are frail but they can walk me through hard places where beautiful people live and dream.

What can one person do? What can you do? Anything and everything. You will not believe it, but the world is waiting for your ideas, your creative energy, your love, and your courage. It is your world, and you are remarkably more in charge than you can imagine. Have the courage to dream, to lead and to follow. I include the word “follow” because the

progressives, of which I am one, are rather leadership-averse, and they would sometimes rather trade emails back and forth and draft long statements of their precious positions on this or that than to actually pick a leader, be good followers and get things done that need doing in the world. And real progress is always an occasion for shoe leather more than email.

Just do it, friends. It's all out there and it's beautiful beyond description.

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GAINESVILLE VERSION (NOT HIGH SCHOOL) I am hoping all the progressives who have had candidates in the presidential race will join forces in a new progressive organization, and I hope that can begin this month. I specifically hope Mr. Kucinich and Gov. Dean will have a conversation about that soon. In person yesterday, I ~~have~~ asked Mr. Kucinich if he will call the Governor about joining forces for a new progressive organization, and he said he would. I will ask the same of Governor Dean if I can get to him.

Politics is a means of creating social change. The most important word in politics is the word energy, because energy is needed to overcome inertia of rest,



to lift us forward out of the old ruts in which the wagons of civilization get bogged down. There are two kinds of political energy: joy and fear. Too often, we progressives succumb to using the politics of fear, which is the specialty of our opponents. The politics of joy is more powerful. We live the free, creative, just and sustainable life we would hope will spread to others. Our events and our words and our campaigns must be expressions of this better world. Our politics must be grounded in the joyful present moment, not dragged from a fearful future. Even our most progressive candidates project fear of the future when they should operate from the joy of the present. That is who we are. We are about life, in all its flowering forms, and we are about love. We celebrate this. We are fearless of the future, for if we make too much space in our hearts for fear, we lose the joy that is the energy we need to move our people forward. So break out the food and the drinks and the kites and the music and the art and the creative juices of the moment. We must create a moving feast, a moving celebration of life. We must put the party back in party politics, and you will see who joins us.

Thank you.