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Speech for Hucklebury Orchard August 20, 2006

Thank you for that kind introduction. Thank you to all of those who made calls to invite people to come to our walk and our event here in Hucklebury Orchard.

I would like to share two thoughts with you today one is regarding the special character of the American community that makes us strong and indeed, very special in the world. The second idea regards the special moment in time we find ourselves right now.

The special character of the American people isn't the fact that we have a Constitution and its Bill of Rights, although we are blessed by that document and blessed by the way it has been improved by wisdom and humanity over the centuries.

The words of our Constitution and its Bill of Rights, while special indeed, only reflect something that was already deep in the emerging world dream that American is.

Here is a hint of that special aspect: Let me ask you a question—why is it that the first ten amendments to the Constitution are the Bill of Rights? Why didn't they just put the Ten Commandments in there from the Bible?

Why, indeed, did they go to so much trouble writing this new Constitution when they already had a guide

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book to living—their Bible? For they were, most of them, religious people.

Why did they create a strong and well-stated separation between their religious lives and their civic lives?

The word that gets to the answer is the word Respect.

They understood that different people have different belief systems, and that the civic square is where we come together to make our public lives and our economic lives work well together, in spite of, and sometimes with the help of, all our differences.

That respect for our differences is the key to understanding the genius of America. They certainly had not perfected a notion of the brotherhood of all people, as it took us, as a people, another century to eliminate human slavery on our shores, and generations more to accept the equality of all people. But the seed was there, and it remains—though it is now under attack as if by a serious disease.

In its most fatal form, the disease of moral intolerance somehow bestows the power of heaven on our humble human institutions of government. And so, where in a previous generation we might have been willing to let some great moral issues be decided between a person and his or her God or conscience, we now demand that institutions of government represent themselves as God's attorneys. The problem with that, of course, is

that government institutions are what we share across the entire community, and religious beliefs are not. So the only way that government can speak for God is if large parts of our community have a religion not of their choosing forced up on them, not as beliefs, but as oppressions.

This is easy for the women of Afghanistan to understand precisely. But it is not far away from us now, as an immoral element of our society, cloaked in false morality, moves hard on us to destroy that word that underpins our Consittution and its Bill of Rights and that is the bright little light that shines in the American soul and can be found in the torch of the Statue of Liberty. It is the flame of freedom, yes, but its truer name is the flame of respect for others and their beliefs. For that is where our freedom comes from, and that is where our nation comes from.

It is my view that intolerance that wildly Unamerican intolerance has infected the far right wing of American politics and, as with any tumor in a body, it endangers the entire American system. Throughout your life, you will occasionally find yourself being a bully. Check yourself on that. Am I upset because someone believes and acts differently than I do, or because they are attempting to push their beliefs on all of us by making our civic institutions their tools of enforcement? Ask yourself those clarifying questions and the high ground will always be under your feet.

God's attorney.

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What I have just said could have been said at any time in our national history. But it has greater meaning to say such things at this moment, for we are assembled here as people who are bracing for battle of great changes in our history. The struggle for America's soul and for our shared dream is just beginning, as it always is, and you are the warriors in the struggle, which is the greatest struggle on the planet. So many lives are at stake, so much happiness is in the balance.

That struggle is to halt what is happening in the United States today. We have let special interests and big corporations take over our White House, the Senate, the House, and administrations of our States. We have allowed them to ship the best jobs of our middle class out of the states. We have allowed big box stores to come in and take over many of our local business stores on our Main Street. I would have you walk with me across this land, to visit small towns where you will find boarded up stores on the Main Street, with Wall-Mart, Home Depot, Staples etc, three miles beyond the town. The safety nets as Social Security and our Bill of Rights, are being cut from under us, for the financial benefits of a few. The gap between the rich and the poor has never been wider. One child in five goes to bed hungry each night. Two of five if they are Afro-Americans.

But there is an answer to this problem. There is a way back to a democracy and that is by public funding of our elections at the state and the Federal level. We have Maine and Arizona's systems won by citizen's initiative

while Connecticut bill came recently through their legislature. We in N. H. are challenging the 30 plus other states that are also working on Clean Elections, to become state #4. *We don't need to* ~~We aim to convince the N. H.~~ *Indiana* Legislature that this is the way to go.

Here is how public funding works. Candidates collect a certain number of qualifying signatures and small contributions—usually in the five dollar range—from people who live in the candidate's district. This demonstrates community support. Someone who has long been active in their community will have an easy time of it, and they don't need to kneel down to a wealthy donor in order to run for office. You too, can run for office, if that is your desire. Once the candidate receives the required level of community support, the state provides the candidate with sufficient funds to run his or her campaign. The participating candidate (it is a voluntary system) must agree to neither raise nor spend any other monies, including his own. This neatly gets special interest contributions right out of the picture.

Public Funding has an advantage in that it costs just one tenth those of our present system, with no need to give our candidates' donors, subsidies, tax breaks and the like. It frees up our officials from having to raise large sums of money and saves them time to work for their constituents rather than the big donors.

Maine and

*and you are
the new voices (6)*

New voices have great power in politics. I am an old voice. I keep saying the same old things and it is no longer newsworthy, no matter how correct it is. Let us spend our energy helping new voices speak up for themselves. It is time to do new things to advance new voices and new visions of the better world we want for our children, the world for which thousands have given their lives and for those who are involved in that fraudulent war in Iraq today.

If you are not already involved get involved. It may not make sense to you for an old woman to stand here and tell you that you may be the answer to the problems of a troubled world, but that may indeed be the case. Learn what it means to be an American. It means involvement. If N. H. gets public funding other states will follow and when there is enough states with public funding a critical mass will form and the system will go federal. Think of a country in which there is a true Democracy once again. Democracy is not a thing we have, it is a thing we do So do it. And vote, see that your family and neighbors vote.