

San Francisco + Manchester

Thank you.

10/15/05

I would like to share with you some of the joys of walking. I will tell you about the early hours of Valentine's Day, 2002 and the time leading up to it.

I would first like to impress upon you the healthfulness of walking. Many people manage to exercise a bit each day, and I applaud that. Many walk a mile or so, and that is quite good for you, at any age.

When I was 89, I began a quite aggressive schedule of walking. I got up to five miles a day, then to ten: Five miles out, and then five miles back to home. When I was comfortable with that I began doing something a little different: I didn't turn around at the half-way point; I just kept walking. I walked across the United States.

It was not easy, as I have suffered from emphysema for many years, after fifty years of smoking—though I quit many years ago. It makes the uphill miles quite difficult, so say the least. I have a rather bad back and arthritis. The first miles across the continent were the most difficult, despite my training. I flew to California and began.

My reason for taking this walk was to talk to as many Americans as possible about a campaign finance bill that I was hoping would pass Congress. It was a bipartisan bill, supported by Senators McCain and Feingold. The point of it was to remove corporate money from federal elections. I had already talked to everybody I knew in New Hampshire, and had sent thousands of

their signatures off to Washington on petitions. It was time to branch out a bit.

My son was of course concerned. But he is unusual in that he believes that, when a person finds their mission in life, we should all support them in their efforts. So he set out a training schedule for me and helped me to find people along the way who would take me in and walk with me. He was, and remains, my guardian angel.

Many years ago, he saw me off on another journey. My late husband and I, along with two Eskimos and a preacher and a few others and a large, white dog, crammed in a Volkswagen minibus for a trip to the far coasts of Alaska, where a small native fishing village was at risk of being a test site for a nuclear blasting program. I think my son took some pride in how his mother and father took up that cause, came home and worked the halls of Congress and the White House until the program was stopped, just in the nick of time. He, too, became friends with the Inuit people who, as a result, became our family friends. He has been the hero of causes of his own choosing, and I have watched him with all my admiration.

The Mojave Desert was difficult to walk across. My new friends in the desert followed me with an old van, so that I did not have to carry all my water. Even so, it was a long way. When I crossed out of it, and found myself on a bridge over the Colorado River at Parker, Arizona on my 89<sup>th</sup> birthday, the United States Marine Band was on that bridge playing Happy Birthday to me. A TV truck from Good Morning America and a live microphone from National Public Radio were there to interview the crazy old lady. The woman mayor of Parker put me in a parade

and had me talking about campaign finance reform all over town.

After that, in the deserts of Arizona, I was hospitalized once for dehydration but, after a short rest, I continued through the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico, where the winds and sandstorms were sometimes so severe that they sprung the door of the support van and sent me into a blind stumble. I cannot have counted the times my old straw hat went sailing.

After New Mexico, there was a thousand miles of Texas, and then Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio. Almost every day, there were reporters from little newspapers and small town television and radio stations walking with me and learning all about this important bill in Congress.

With every day, my arthritis seemed better and my lungs stronger. It was the exercise, but it was also the elixer of having an important mission in life and to be doing it.

A reporter from the New York Times, Frank Bruni, heard some Members of Congress talking about how they had better get on the stick with this reform bill, because, don't you know, Granny D is coming.

He wondered what all that was about, and came to walk with me. He said he came to see if I was the real deal or some kind of stunt. He couldn't keep up with me, so his story reported that I was the real deal. After his story, other newspapers and networks began to treat me a little more seriously, though they were always more interested in how many shoes I had worn out than

anything about the reform bill. I had to force them to talk about that, and I got pretty good at it.

John McCain wanted me to come off the trail and join him in New Hampshire when he announced for the Presidency, but I told him I would keep walking. Ross Perot met with me and said he would pay for anything I needed, but I only needed water and a little food three times a day, and that was never lacking.

In the South, I made speeches where Martin Luther King, Jr. had made speeches, and I said we all were fighting for our freedom now, as the special interests had stolen away our government from us, and thereby our freedom. More and more people started walking with me and calling their Congressmen. I met the head of the AARP and told him how important this bill was. The AARP started sending information to all their members, and the switchboards in Congress started to glow red.

Always in my mind was the dread of the Appalachian Mountains ahead. I hate climbing hills. By the time I crossed Ohio into West Virginia and began the long climb, blizzard conditions were all around me. I had a support car drive behind me so I could walk between the beams of the headlights and not lose my way. But it was perhaps the most difficult thing, physically, I have ever done.

At this same time, I did not know if all my labors were going to come to anything, and I had no idea that I was making any difference whatsoever. I was chilled to the bone. I was grieving over the decline of my daughter, who was losing her memory to Alzheimer's Disease,

which had taken my husband a few years earlier. It was a hard climb.

Two college girls were my constant companions in that blizzard, and their spirits lifted my own. Wherever I went, before or since, I have figured out a way to have young people along, as it makes all the difference in the world.

The Eastern Continental Divide is near Cumberland, Maryland. It was my 90<sup>th</sup> birthday as I walked through the town. The people of Cumberland, from the mayor to the school children and the musicians of that beautiful town, accompanied me through the streets and to their old railroad station, where I made a speech and we had some cake.

But the road ahead, another 100 miles remaining, was three or more feet deep in snow and walking would be impossible. It had been the worst blizzard in recent memory.

Well, that snow was sparkling and beautiful. It laid itself out along the old tow path of the historic C& O Canal that George Washington had surveyed. I sent home for my old cross-country skis and said goodbye to the dear people of Cumberland.

There were a few reporters with me, but all but a dear woman from a London paper quickly gave up in the snow. The dear woman trudged behind as gamely as she could, for several days.

A day or so out from Washington, the snow turned to a walking path along the furious upper rapids of the Potomac. I followed the river into Georgetown and then

across the bridge to Arlington Cemetery. From there, the next day, I would walk the final miles through Washington to the Capitol Building, where I would make a speech on its steps.

The morning broke clear and cold. A truck from Good Morning America and another from the Today Show rolled up to my starting point that last morning. There were a few of us. Then, up from a subway entrance, a few more. Some were familiar faces—people I had met along the way. People whose doors I had knocked at and asked for a bed for the night. People who had walked a mile or ten with me. And then, with the arrival of each subway train, more came up from above. And more, until the sidewalks were filled with over 23 hundred people with their signs and banners, hugs and handshakes.

We indeed marched to the Capitol. In the last mile, we were joined by many Members of Congress who marched with us, and joined us finally on the Capitol steps for a fine round of speeches.

But my dear McCain-Feingold bill was nowhere near passage.

In the months ahead, I would walk around the Capitol, sometimes around the clock in the cold, so that the Senators would have to meet with me if they did not want to see me dead on their doorstep. I met with over half. I threatened a few, saying I would walk across their states against them when they ran for reelection if they did not support the reform bill. The heavy lifting was of course being done by the good government lobbyists

and by Senator McCain and Feingold. I was just a citizen making the little difference one person can make.

I was in the Senate Gallery when the debate began. I was in the Senate Gallery when the vote finally came down in favor of the Bill. In the hall, moments later, I got a hug from the two sponsors of the bill, who knocked my hat off in the process.

But it still had to pass in the House of Representatives, and we were told that simply could not happen.

We kept at it anyway. You may be wondering what the limits might be for protesting at the Capitol. If, for example, you go into the Rotunda of the Capitol Building, start reciting from the Declaration of Independence, and unfurl a banner suggesting that Members of Congress declare independence from the special interest groups, will you be arrested and jailed? Yes I was. Twice.

But just when the bill seemed doomed, the Enron scandal happened. Enron had given millions, of course, to Members of Congress, and they were all scampering around as if cockroaches had just gone up their pant legs. They needed to redeem themselves. And there was the reform bill, just sitting there. That is usually how reform bills pass, you wait for the right moment.

So it was the day before Valentine's Day, 2002. I took a walk through all the halls of the House of Representative's office buildings, leaving little lacy valentines at each office, urging the Members to not break out hearts—to finally pass the campaign reforms that America longed for.

We had, out on the sidewalk where they had to pass under them on their way back and forth from the Capitol Building, large banners that said, "The Enron Congress: Redeem your sorry selves: pass campaign finance reform."

We lobbied them on the sidewalk, though it was bitter cold. The wife of Representative Christopher Shays came out to visit us, as did Senator McCain. Someone sent out some hot soup and tea from time to time. In the early afternoon, someone came up to me and said she was from the Minority Leader's office—Mr. Richard Gephardt. Would I come up and meet with him, please.

I sat in his office and he told me that he thought he had the votes to pass the bill that night. He gave me too much credit for the whole thing, and I advised him that I understood very well that I was just a pin prick on this this thing. Well, he replied, we're all just pin pricks. Against ~~my~~ better judgment I said that I was sure he was half right, anyway.

<sup>NY</sup>  
In the Gallery, well after midnight, I struggled to stay awake. The moment came. The votes came. The impossible happened. Mr. Gephardt, Mr. Shays, Mr. Meehan, who had led the fight, turned up and waved to me. It was done. So many miles, so many cold days and night, so many hot desert miles and gritty winds. It was done.

I walked out of the building an hour late with Mrs. Shays and Representative Shays, and with Representative Meehan and with a few of my friends. The great plaza between the Capitol and the surrounding park was pitch

dark. We said goodbye and went our own ways, each of us in our own state of bliss,

A staffer for Mr. Meehan had told me that the hardest thing about getting other Members of Congress to go along with the bill was that they said people back home just didn't care. But after my walk began, the staffers could say, "my, haven't you heard that a great-grandmother is walking across the nation for this bill, why, of course people care!" It was extraordinary that one person, by caring more, could make up for so many who cared too little. It remains a fact in this nation, in this wobbly democracy, that each of us can make a difference with our caring and our determination if we are prepared to make some sacrifices and never give up.

Did the new law really do any good? Well, it was the snare that Mr. Tom DeLay wishes were not there, and it has pushed corporate money out of the game quite a ways, though rich individuals are giving more than ever. The only real solution is the public funding of campaigns, as the states of Maine and Arizona have pioneered very successfully.

If nothing had come out of my walk, there is yet this: my doctor said that, at the end of my walk, I was biologically ten years younger than when I began. So, even if you do not have a cause to walk for, walk anyway.

But there are causes enough for our attention. And, believe me, there are years enough left in all of us to make a plan, get involved, and make a damn difference. I am here to tell you that, hell, if I can do it, you can do so much more, and the world needs you.

**And now it is your turn to follow your own soul, to do what your heart requires of you.**

**Thank you, and good luck.**