

Thank you.

As students and as general observers of your country, you probably understand quite a bit about how our democracy works. We elect our representatives and then they sit in council and make decisions on our behalf. They represent our needs and our values and, we hope, our common sense and our ideals of statesmanship, creativity, and civil manners.

There are several ways the system can break down, as I'm sure you know. If campaigning for office becomes so expensive that only the very rich can attain office, then a kind of political nobility sets in, with high offices becoming the estates of the wealthy, who hand it down to their sons and daughters. In this first instance of breakdown, I am opposing it by running for high office without the use of millions of dollars—turning away the contributions from special interest groups and accepting only modest contributions from regular people. By doing that, I am giving the voters a chance to choose a candidate who runs on ideas and

experience, but not on expensive advertising. My chances of victory are considered very narrow, but this is how we begin great reforms. You continue to give the people a real option until the moment is right and they go for it.

The second area of democracy breakdown is this: candidates who need and accept millions of dollars to run for office receive those funds, for the most part, from the executives of companies and other special interests who have a lot of money to gain or lose from legislation being considered by Congress, including the tax code, environmental regulation, and the many safety and benefit rules for their workers. Once these contributors write their checks, they push you for this program or that.

How much money is involved? Each person can give up to \$4,000 in an election to each candidate, so quite a bit of money can change hands. The candidates must use that money only for running the campaign and placing ads, printing signs and brochures and all the things you would expect, such as bumper stickers and buttons—though television ads are the biggest

part of it, as they cost hundreds of dollars each, or more.

Some of this money comes because the Member of Congress or other elected official believes in these issues and the groups naturally give their support to the candidates and officials who tend to vote their way. But often enough, especially where commercial interests are involved, the campaign donations DEfect rather than REfect the voting pattern of the official.

As an example, the people back home may want and need a particular kind of program to be passed, perhaps to protect their water or their jobs or their health, and their representatives in Congress may be, over time, siding more and more with the polluters and the companies who are moving jobs overseas or who oppose cheaper health care insurance. The people get upset, but, after awhile, a sort of general anger sets in, but people accept their new condition of not having real representation. This has happened in this country on a broad scale, and it is why people tend to have a low opinion of Congress in general, though they often respect

their own representatives and tend to overlook the fact that they are not getting much from them. People respect power, and they are impressed when their Member of Congress sends home some federal help for this or that, even if the larger issues are at a standstill or going backwards.

This second kind of breakdown, where big campaign donations deflect the votes of our Members of Congress, is the issue that I walked across the country for several years ago when I was 90. I am presently 94.

I began my walk in California and walked to Washington D.C. Along the way, I talked to many thousands of people and many hundreds of reporters to generate interests in passing a bill that would make it illegal for corporations and unions to directly give their own money to candidates for federal office, which includes the president and Members of Congress.

The walk was difficult, but the very act of doing something difficult attracts people to your cause, so many people helped me, and the phones

started ringing in the Senate and House offices as I walked on. I thought I would not be able to finish my walk on time, because a large blizzard hit near the end of my journey. Lucky for me, I am a longtime skier, so I skied the last hundred miles into Washington, where some 2,300 people met me and we walked the last miles to the Capitol Building together, where quite a few Members of Congress, who were supporting that reform, met me and we made speeches and all that. I took nearly two more years to get the bill through, and there were lots of ways we walked and organized during that time, but we did it.

But it was not much of a reform, really. It did stop a lot of check writing in one direction, but money flows to power and it will find its way in about ten minutes, and so other ways have been thought-up for the rich to support their servant Congressmen. The real reform has to come from candidates who pledge to take none of that special interest money, and who begin to win elections without it. The power for that reform is in the fingertip of every voter, and it may take us awhile to make it happen, but here we are, giving it a go.

You are aware of the fact that many thousands of people have given their lives and their careers so that you can live in a free country. Being free means that you have a voice in your own government. Being free means that no powerful interests have stolen your vote from you in Congress, or anywhere else. It means that you are personally a part of the self-government of a great and free people. That is what is at stake in these matters--your freedom.

So you defend your freedom in your own way. And you participate as a free citizen in the affairs of your town. If you are only a taxpayer, only a consumer, only another driver on the highway or face in the crowd who lets others decide the future for them, then you are an ant when you could be a king. You are a fan when you could be a star. We are given great personal power by the documents of our nation's founding, and you have the right and obligation to stand beside those men and women who fought for our freedom, and who died for it.

Finally, I would like to ask your opinion on something. I am speaking out for the idea that high school students, by helping junior high students prepare for high school, can receive something of value for that community service, and that something of value would be free college tuition and books, or a large reduction of those expenses. And the college students, as part of the bargain, would mentor high school students, so that the younger students, who might otherwise be tempted to drop out at some point, would have a good view of the road ahead, and someone there to pull them aboard. I want to know if you think this might work for you, and if you think you would participate. What would work about the idea, and what might not make sense? I am anxious for your ideas.

Now, I have covered a lot of ground. I expect you have questions, or your teacher may wish to begin a discussion of some kind. So I thank you kindly for your attention and am now all yours.

Thank you.