

CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

"TAKE BACK AMERICA"

SPEAKER:

JESSE JACKSON, RAINBOW/PUSH COALITION

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ROBERT BOROSAGE: I first worked with the Reverend Jesse Jackson in 1984 – I was a bit younger then – and I have learned more, seen more, benefited more, from that relationship and working with him ever since than with any other political figure. Let me – I don't need to introduce Jesse Jackson to you – but let me say a couple things about him. When I talk to friends about the Reverend, they tell me – you know, he's very articulate – and he is – he gives a great speech – and he does - -he knows how to rouse a crowd – there's nobody like him. But you know, too few people know what I know, which is I have talked to presidents and senators, governors. This is the most intelligent, the smartest political figures that I have had the privilege to advise and talk with in my entire political career. This guy is brilliant. (Applause.)

Secondly, politically from the beginning, Reverend Jackson understood the need for a coalition. He brought together the faith-based and the secular. He understood we had to have a big tent if we were going to win. Let me tell you one story from the '88 campaign. He would go – his basic them in '88 was that working people, particularly white working people had to understand their need for a coalition with minorities and with poor people. We would go into union halls – we went into a union hall outside of Atlanta in Newt Gingrich's district – Teamster union hall – and I can tell you the African-American Teamsters were excited. They were revved up, they were ready to have him come, and the white Teamsters came in like this. (Chuckles.) Somebody told them they had to be there, but they were not happy about it.

And then the Reverend came in and we had this whole road show. We had Billy Carter to say, you ought to listen to this guy. He's an incredible person and he's my candidate for president. We had Haystack Slim, who was a six-foot eight white professional wrestler in Bib jeans, who said this is my man and lifted the Reverend up by the shoulders. And we had the white union leaders who said I want to introduce you to Reverend Jackson and I want you to take a listen to him. And the white Teamsters sat like this.

And then Reverend got up and he gave them his speech and he talked to them about them and about what was happening to them in the modern economy. And how companies were merging and workers were being purged and families were being submerged. And he said, you know, when the lights go off in the plant, when they shut it down, we all look alike in the dark. And he told them jokes and they liked him and they started to elbow each other a little bit and loosen up a little bit. And he finishes that speech with a speech about his mother making a quilt from many patches – discarded cloth, strong bonds, a quilt that could keep the family warm. And he said to those guys, you know, your problem is your patch isn't big enough. You need to make a quilt, you have to unite with women. And your patch isn't big enough; you have to unite with African-Americans. Your patch isn't big enough; you have to unite with gays and lesbians. Now this is 1988 in the suburbs of Atlanta. We're saying, Reverend, gays and lesbians, sorry. He did the whole coalition fearless and I tell you at the end of that speech, he had black Teamsters and white Teamsters both on their feet chanting "Keep Hope Alive" with him. And it was a miracle to see.

There has never really been a political leader who has done as much, who has worked as hard. Reverend Jackson gets up at five in the morning. He always outworks everybody. Those of us who get his six in the morning calls know that. (Chuckles.) It's a great privilege to introduce to you the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

(Applause, cheers.)

REVEREND JESSE JACKSON: Thank you. Let me express my thanks and appreciation to my friend brother beloved across these years, who has done so much to build ideas and build relationships. We've built this progressive coalition to a school of thought. It's given us a place to rally together. No one has done it better and more effectively than Bob Borosage. We cannot take Bob Borosage's contributions for granted. He's rather unassuming and yet always so relevant and so caring and so passionate. You appreciate Bob Borosage's work and all that he does. Give Bob a big round of applause. Tell him you feel it. (Applause.)

Let me hear you scream. (Cheers.) As we gathered in Phoenix with the coalition of black trade unionists on Memorial Day Weekend, we recall the origins of this national holiday. The first Decoration Day came to be recognized in some circles in the north when an estimated 10,000 people, most of them former black slaves, gathered in a place called Planter's Racecourse in Charleston, South Carolina. The racetrack was a prison for Union soldiers, of whom at least 257 died. The Union soldiers were buried behind the judge's stand in unmarked graves. The African-American citizens of Charleston, South Carolina built a fence around the graves, landscaped the area, and painted a sign, which read "Martyrs of the Racecourse." On May 1st, 1865, the 10,000 blacks marched around the racecourse and formally dedicated the martyr's cemetery. Thus the first Memorial Day was born.

The Statue of Liberty was a gift from the French abolitionists after we ended slavery and the Union was saved. The struggle to make this a more perfect union continues. Which side of history are you on? The competing ideas of slavery, work without wages, and freedom – the values of the Union or that of the states' rights – the Confederates – which side are you on? Slave labor, scab labor, right-to-work law ideology, a worker's right to organize freely and collectively bargain – which side are you on? Equal high-quality public education and health care and housing for all as a right – are these protections or as privileges for the few? These lines are as pronounced today as they were 140 years ago.

Whose God is God? The tug of war between these competing definitions of American democracy and theology are at the root of our struggle today to make this a more perfect union. Whose God is God is at the heart of our struggle. Is it a God of one supreme race, one supreme gender, the God of the rich, young rulers, or is it the God of mercy and grace and justice for all? Is it the God that condoned slavery, denial of women's rights, denial of workers' rights, denial of education for all, or is it the God of liberation, a God who finds joy in our reaching back for the least of these, our defending the poor, and our setting the captives free? Do we serve a God of the rich, young rulers

who see life from the mansion down or do we see a God whose view of life is life from the manger up, who sees life through a door for all of us and not through a keyhole for the lucky and the few?

Out of our theology comes our politics, our economics, our culture. Today we meet under intense pressure – under pressure and heat, you can reshape iron and reforms that lead to human progress, rails and bridges and cars. Under pressure, there is more alloy than metal. You can do something great. I must say today, I am not pleased with the Democrats and I'm not scared of the Republicans. (Applause.) I am not pleased with the Democrats, I 'm not afraid of the Republicans. We must frame a new partnership, not be a pawn in the struggle for our dignity and identity. Republicans who bear states' rights ideology strongly attack us. Democrats offer a weak defense with a fuzzy ideology. Under their watch, we've become the brunt of NAFTA and now CAFTA and three strikes and you're out.

Today, our struggle for the shattered American dream, our struggle for equal protection under the law, equal access, equal opportunity, social justice, equal high-quality public health care and education as a human right is under pressure. Because there is such hostility toward the historical struggle for social justice and such radical polarization politically and economically because there is so much political fraud in Washington and economic fraud on Wall Street, we feel the pressure. The pressure of headwinds and crosswinds – feel the winds compounded by a land of groping darkness. If the last two elections had not been determined by voter fraud and manipulation, we would have felt a tailwind behind our back.

There was a little sense of celebration as opposed to anger and anguish of the rightness of our cause, the silence of our institutions, of better days ahead for working people in our country and in our hemisphere. Because of the outcome of these two elections, we're now into a kind of radical introspection that could lead to disintegration of our strength. It's called playing under pressure. We fought hard enough to get out the vote and win the games. We did not fight hard enough and overtime to count the votes and stop the fraud. (Applause.) We fought hard enough to win, but not hard enough to stop the fraud and count the vote until the victory has been obtained – pressure.

Pressure in the house leads to domestic violence, anger, separation, abandonment and divorce. Pressure in the house of labor: the undermining of workers' rights to organize, the role of the NLRB as a cushion for Tom DeLay for denial of workers' rights, reduction of health benefits, exploiting jobs, lack of access to our government, politically targeted IRS audits has created pressure. Under pressure we must reshape our priorities and increase our determination. We must not crack or come apart and divide. Under pressure, blacks and Latinos must coalesce and not co-annihilate, politically and economically, and share power, as we are about to do in Los Angeles – (applause) – as we have done in Houston and Denver and Chicago. We must not fight each other over crumbs under pressure. We must not allow Mexican Americans, immigrants, to be used as pawns, and blacks to be used as scapegoats. We must turn to each other and not on each other. Under pressure, the white progressives, their ideas and deeds and actions,

must look like the multi-racial coalition that we dream about and that we talk about.
(Applause.)

Labor feels the pressure intensely. Labor may or may not have new leadership through a democratic process, but labor must not have new divisions for old structural problems and turn on itself. Anguish and panic under pressure will not lead to progress. When the storm rises, the mother hen makes room under her wing for all of the chickens. They do not scatter. The pressure is immense; the storm winds are fierce. We must not dissolve. Pressure. The growing gap between the surplus wealthy and the working poor – pressure. The growing gap between CEO salaries and the workers – pressure. Tax cuts for the wealthy and corporate elite, job and health benefit cuts, freezing the minimum wage for families; we feel the pressure. Fifty million without health insurance, and the number is rising.

The Iraq budget, a war of choice, \$400 billion and rising, while states and cities face cuts in education and vital services – pressure. The NEA had to file a lawsuit because with a \$27 billion underfunding of Leave No Child Behind, the administration granting another \$80 billion for the war in Iraq; we feel the pressure. Our present policies takes more jobs and capital and import cheap labor, guest workers and products, as in Wal-Mart and China – pressure. Second class schools and first-class citizens, first-class jails become – it rationalizes the need for more guest workers. We feel the pressure.

Immigration – up from 500,000 to nearly 2 million a year. We need a hemispheric vision. Mexico is not a foreign nation. In reality, Mexico is not backdoor; it is next-door. (Applause.) It is a partner with enormous potential that is now being manipulated, with which we must come to grips. Mexico purchases \$250 billion a year in U.S. products, more than five European countries: Italy, France, U.K., Germany combined. Mexico – 25 million American citizens – 25 million Mexican Americans live in the U.S. Fifteen million are U.S. citizens, 5 million undocumented, 5 million legal without full citizenship. We share 2,000 miles of border with Mexico. One million people cross the border each day, a thousand deported every day; most telephone traffic between the U.S. and Mexico of anyplace in the world. Mexico is our next-door neighbor.

When President Fox said about Mexicans taking jobs that not even blacks want, that was divisive and insensitive and damaging. But President Bush, using another language, said immigrants take jobs other Americans don't want. He said the same thing. As insulting as the statement was, neither Bush nor Secretary Rice called Fox to defend the honor of African American citizens, and that's their duty. That's because the 10 million undocumented workers and those who are here working without status as citizens push down the job market. That's manipulation. So in this battle, turning poor against poor, black against brown is not the way to our future. (Applause.) Illegal immigration didn't determine foreign content in autos and traumatize Detroit. Immigrants didn't ship textile manufacturing and Nike shoes manufacturing to Indonesia, or Wal-Mart to China, or close down Pillowtex in North Carolina. Corporate business took these jobs and manufacturing overseas to search for global cheaper profits – pressure.

Two-point-three million Americans in jail, about 75 percent black and brown, who are facing increasing voter denial upon release. We have to coalesce, which led to victory for Villaraigosa and Bradley and Harold Washington. We cannot disintegrate into tensions and gang violence. The 2004 elections were determined voter fraud. We fought hard enough to get out the vote. (Applause.) We didn't fight hard enough to count the votes in the overtime.

What must we do? We must be driven by a kind of vision. Unity is not enough. If everybody in this room were unified and blind, a one-eyed person would be the king. Unity is not enough because in unified blindness, the one-eyed man or woman is king or queen. But there is power that appropriately applied we will not get the desired results. We need a vision that makes room for all of us. It must be accompanied by a will to fight, and go public with our pain. The Bible says "Without vision the people perish." All of the unions and protesting and civil rights organizations and churches are on the IRS audits. And public broadcasting is under venomous attack. We must tell it, we have no choice but to fight back.

When President Bush was asked at the CBC meeting by Congressman Jackson, will you support the Voting Rights Act with reauthorization, he answered, I will support D.C. statehood. Karl Rove must have pushed the wrong button. (Laughter.) Mr. President, do you support extending the Voting Rights Act with Section 2 and 65 enforcement provisions? He said, I don't know what you're talking about; when it gets to my desk I'll look at it. That was a very disingenuous answer for a former president – a president of the former of Texas as governor.

What does this mean? Two weeks later – hear this – the state legislature in Georgia passed a bill reducing voter rights identification from 18 to five. So students at Georgia and University of Georgia can use their ID to register to vote because they are state public schools. But students at Clark, Emory and Morehouse cannot because they are private schools. We should be demanding voter booths on campuses; instead we are facing restrictions. Citizens must now have government-issued ID. In many parts of the state, seniors and others without transportation must go to the next county to get an ID. That amounts to a poll tax. Attorney General Gonzalez discussed voter rights protections. He will not meet with us, saying he is waiting for instructions from the president.

So on August the 6th we are going to have a major march. August 6th is the 40th anniversary – (applause) – August 6th is the 40th anniversary of LBJ signing the Voting Rights Act of 1965. We must march. In Atlanta, Georgia, we marched to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act, marched for workers' right to organize, marched for comprehensive immigration reform, marched for an end to the war in Iraq, marched for equality, healthcare and education for all. We must go back to the streets and march and fight back. (Applause, cheers.)

There's a Rainbow-PUSH convention in Chicago June 11th through the 16th, a Saturday and Sunday. We are convening state legislators, mayors and labor leaders, congressional reps. Look at the threat to our political rights and our projection for 2006 and '8. The convention will have John Sweeney and Andrew Stern, John Wilhelm and Bill Lucy at that convention. We'll have Howard Dean and Barack Obama and Maxine Waters and Julian Bond and Ann Marie Tallman from MALDEF. And Monday morning at our labor breakfast we'll have Bill Clinton and John Edwards and John Kerry. We'll have workshops on Social Security and health and labor – a women's luncheon on that Monday. Tuesday we'll focus on healthcare and the need for a constitutional right to healthcare. Business day will be Wednesday, and then Thursday comes a session involving Michael Eric Dyson and Reginald Weaver and family farmers and coal miners from Appalachia, and Ross Preles (ph) and Harry Belafonte. We must convene – I urge your presence in Chicago June 11th through 16th.

What are our projects that we're fighting for? One, we must stop election fraud. If we had won the last two elections we would feel less pressure from the NLRB, IRS and the Department of Labor. We need the reauthorizing act, and so let us march. We need to pass the voter reform, the Conyers-Dodd bill. We didn't fight hard enough, I tell you, to count our vote. We need the right to organize and stop the right to work. For example, maids in New York, Chicago who clean rooms made \$20 an hour. They have healthcare. They have a retirement. Maids in Atlanta make \$7 an hour – no healthcare, no insurance. Hotel workers in Harrods in Las Vegas make \$40 (000) to \$60,000 a year. The fastest group of homebuyers in Las Vegas are hotel workers. Those same workers at Tunica, Mississippi make \$20,000 a year. That's what right-to-work laws is all about. That's why we need the Employee Choice Act. It's time to fight back. (Applause.)

Our future is to confront the unorganized market. Let's go south to challenge workers in the South to choose real economic needs over cultural insecurity and racial affinity. The Senate filibuster was a cave-in from a civil rights and labor point of view, and not a compromise. It protected the minority in the Senate; it didn't protect minorities and labor outside the Senate. It was a bad deal. (Applause.) The records of Owen and Janice Brown call for a new deal – call the New Deal a “socialist revolution” – (unintelligible) – the 1900 decision that struck down Rooker health and safety laws as “infringement on the rights of business,” and yet somehow this deal lets them through. We must fight to raise minimum wage for working people.

We have healthcare initiatives in targeted states. Last year Tony Hill did an amazing thing in that state. He put on the state initiative: healthcare, up or down? The people voted to keep it up. But fight for healthcare bill but also fight for healthcare habits. In Illinois last year fewer than 200 people died from an overdose of cocaine, crack or heroin – fewer than 200 people. Seven-thousand died from secondhand smoke – self-imposed wounds and death (?). Sixty-five thousand died last year from secondhand smoke. Only 55,000 died from the Vietnam War – sixty-five thousand secondhand smoke. Twenty-thousand die a year from street violence.

As we fight for a better healthcare system, we must also fight for better healthcare habits. It's the key to our living. (Applause.) We must do something bigger and bolder; we must, in fact, teach our children to learn the language of our hemisphere. I want to begin to ask corporations to help provide scholarships for teachers, to teach children in America how to speak Spanish. (Applause.) Teach Spanish. I want some urban black youth to learn Spanish – the rural youth of Mexico learn to speak English – because they're neighbors. English is a great language but don't make it into something sacred and heavenly. (Applause.) Jesus did not speak English. (Laughter, applause.) The Ten Commandments was not written in English. So we must, in fact, make the Kennedy-McCain comprehensive immigration reform a priority – our priorities.

Speaking of faith, how do you measure your faith? Jesus said beware – he said beware of wolves in sheep's clothing. Beware of a tree that has not fruit on it. It's a barren fig tree. How do you judge our faith? By fruit on the tree, by evidence – what are our values? Our values come from my mission statement. What is our mission statement? (Unintelligible) – order to preach the gospel. Good news to the poor, set the captive free, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, fight for the lost sheep, those whose backs are against the wall. We must not cover up our faith and bow to rich young rulers; we must make this land our land and this world our world. (Applause.)

The war in Iraq is a huge lie. (Applause.) It's dishonest, divisive and damaging, and it's too costly. We must, lastly, make a strategic adjustment. We cannot let the right wing steal the language of our struggle. We are pro-life. Ending slavery was pro-life. Women's right to vote was pro-life. Workers' right to organize is pro-life. Public education for all is pro-life. You cannot be against stem cell research one day and war the next day. We fight for scientific development to expand life. We are pro-life. (Applause.) We represent the course of life. You cannot love the unborn fetus and then reduce life options for the babies when they are born. Through the course of life – ending slavery was pro-life; ending Jim Crow was pro-life. Right to organize is pro-life.

My friends ask me why did I respond to Terri Schaivo's parents and go visit her in her dying days. I make my case. First, I'm not afraid to fight. The fight must take place in the fire. Ball players whose uniforms were clean were on the bench. On the field it's full of grass stains and blood. The right wing saw a woman dying and I saw a woman dying. As a minister I've gone to people who were dying in advanced stages of cancer. In their dying stages they went into a coma and then Demerol and then more Demerol. Then you could see the pulse slowing down and they were dying, and you pull the plug and there was no debate: transition had taken place.

In this case, a woman was lying there with vital signs. So, two fights: there was the legal fight between her husband and family. She was caught between two fights. She lay there in that state. The husband had the legal right but not the moral right to pull the plug, in my judgment. I'll go a step further. When they pulled that plug, the nation watched her die every day – every day. You see, the progressives missed the passion and the right wing missed the point. They saw her and said, well, therefore anti-Roe v. Wade. I say, therefore long-term healthcare, therefore Medicaid, therefore Medicare, therefore

comprehensive insurance. We must fight the great fights of our time. A notched-up warning: we have a right to define what is pro-life.

Lastly, as we seek to march at the White House today, we must go on the defensive strategically. Today in too many senses we have one party with two names in vital struggles. We must open up the process – the third-rail liberation mass actions – a third rail. The two parties made a new deal with each other over the court appointments, and it wasn't a bad deal for them; they can talk to each other, but they allowed these right-wing judges to come through. We must negotiate a new deal with the Democratic Party and change the options of the radical right. Neither party wanted the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The third rail changed the environment. Brother King said to Lyndon Johnson after receiving the White House – at the White House, receiving his Nobel Peace Prize he said, Brother King, you are an honored man; you deserve the Nobel Prize. He said, thank you, Mr. President, but all Americans deserve the right to vote. Brother Johnson said, I knew you would say that. I like you very much, but I can't grant you the right to vote unilateral. I wish I could but I can't. And so the Congress can but it won't, so I can – I can't but I wish I could; they can but won't, so you can't have the right to vote.

So neither party led the march. It grew at the Selma. It was the third rail. It was the new independent movement. We must use demonstration, litigation, legislation, registration. We must fight back in Chicago. (Applause.) I'm not looking for a Democratic leader. The leaders are in the house. I'm looking for somebody who's going to right right-to-work laws – the leaders in the house. Those who are going the immoral Iraq war, the leaders are in the house. Those who are going to fight for the poor in Appalachia, the leaders are in the house. Those who are going to fight against black lung disease, we need – leaders are already in the house. We don't need to import no leaders. In Chicago there is something called the Elevated Train. On the third rail – there are two rails. There's rail one and rail two. Then the third rail is where the electricity – where the juice is. You know, in slavery the liberals said, be kind to them. Conservatives said, they're our property. Abolitionists said, in the system, the third rail.

That's where our vision is on our best days. The women's struggle for the right to vote was third rail. Neither party sponsored it. Labor struggles of the 1930s were third rail. The '54 Supreme Court battle for equal education was independent; it was the third rail. The 1955 bus boycott against segregation was third rail. The 664 public accommodation bill, the right to vote, was in fact third rail. The '84, '88 Rainbow campaigns were in fact third rail. So parties must adjust to us. The party must join our struggle for liberation. (Applause.) They must join our struggle for liberation; we cannot join theirs for deliberation. Vanity asks the question, is it popular? Politics asks the question, will it work, is it practical? Conscience asks the question, is it right? We must build an independent political with defined priorities and behavior of both parties.

Who's your friend? Jesus asked one day in the parable: who is your friend; who is your neighbor? He said, well, a man was walking down the street on day, attending to his business, and two thieves robbed him; they leave him behind the bushes, and said, as

the man lay dying – you should watch this – one man, the man of religion, of his own religious denomination – he’s a minister, he’s a reverend, he’s rabbi, he’s a man of God – saw him bleeding. The man felt some hope because he saw the religion leader coming down the street, but he walked to the other side, prayer book in one hand, holy writ in the other hand, looking to heaven but going to hell, ignoring a dying man. Institutional religion. Another man saw him lying there, of his own ethnic group; my own Levite, my own skin ethnic-kin brother, and brother left him to die as well. Why must we be a coalition? A man came down from another race, another religion, another country, another culture, who spoke another language. He didn’t even have a green card. He was a Samaritan. (Laughter.) He stopped and helped him up. Beyond culture and color is something called character.

Who is your neighbor? Who stands with you as we fight for justice and seniors, healthcare, public education, to end war? Who is your neighbor? I say labor and civil rights must build a strong, independent force to realize our dreams. If we do not rise up to protect our interests, who will? It’s good for the healing of our nation. It’s healing time. It’s hope time. It’s organizing time. It’s fight-back time. It’s time to win. Keep hope alive. (Applause.)

May I – just before Bob – please have a seat before Bob closes out. Of course Kim Gandy is a member of – thank you, Kim – been a member of our board. Those who really are interested, our convention in Chicago is June 11th through the 16th. A lot of focus that weekend on political organizing and focused on the constitutional right to vote and voter fraud and pulling together political leaders and labor and the like. You can get more information on our website, www.rainbowpush.org. As I said, Monday the big focus will be on labor, and I want you who are in the area, or maybe not, then to come because we must build the coalition that we dream about. I believe our next stop will be Atlanta, Georgia. We should be in – I’m reaching out to Stevie Wonder and to Eddie Olmos and to the country and western allies that we have.

We’re going to have a strong march in the South, and we’re going to fight back and we’re going to win. I need your help. Thank you very much.

MR. BORSAGE: Let me ask you all to stand and applaud Local 25 of UNITE HERE, the people who have helped feed us and taken care of us. (Applause, cheers.)

(END)