

**CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE**

**TAKE BACK AMERICA 2006**

**MONDAY, JUNE 12, 2006**

**WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**11:00 A.M. -12:15 P.M. OPENING PLENARY**

**SPEAKER:**

**KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL,  
EDITOR & PUBLISHER, THE NATION**

*Transcript by:  
Federal News Service  
Washington, D.C.*

ROBERT BOROSAGE: Next, it's a pleasure to introduce Katrina Vanden Heuvel. Katrina has been editor of The Nation magazine since 1995. She has built it into the largest political news weekly in America. (Applause.)

She's the co-editor of "Taking Back America: and Taking Down the Radical Right." She is the author of "The Dictionary of Republicanisms," and she will do a book signing of that book right after this session in the exhibit hall, along with Celinda Lake who will be doing a book session on her book, "What Women Want" (sic). Her web log for The Nation is called the Editor's Cut. She's a graduate of Princeton. She's an extraordinary force in the progressive community, Katrina Vanden Heuvel. (Applause.)

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Thank you. (Applause.) Okay, so, from Tupperware parties to nightclub registration, who says progressives can't do it all? (Laughter.) Tough to follow Biko; I thank you for your words.

And what a great gathering, I mean, two thousands progressives of moxie, of passion, of conviction gathering – I think it started four years ago, right, Bob? It was a, it's grown in the way the progressive movement has grown. Across this country people are building a progressive politics, a populist politics, serious about taking power, committed to changing course, ending this disastrous war that is undermining our security, and building a more perfect union. It's going to be tough; you heard from all of us up here. You know it in your gut. I mean, this is a long battle.

Let's be clear, this administration, these people in power are not conservatives, they are extremists and they have little to no respect for truth in public debate and they will do almost – (applause) – they will do almost anything to hold onto their power and that says -- say almost anything about those who disagree with them.

We must build a politics of decency and sanity which speaks to the generosity of the American people. That's going to require taking on other powerful forces and a Democratic leadership that is often too fearful of its own shadow. (Cheers and applause.)

You -- Democratic activists, the grassroots, the net roots, the base -- you are driving the debate. You are impatient with timid Democrats who have been hapless in challenging a president in free fall. When The Nation, as Bob said, now the country's largest progressive weekly laid down a marker last November for measuring any candidate in '06 and beyond, stating that we would support only those who stood up on Iraq, we were inundated with thousands – (cheers and applause) – thousands of positive emails, not just from Nation readers, but the broader progressive community, and scores from conservatives with a conscience, and independents.

These are times when we need to speak and act, as you do, with confidence and clarity. We need more of that in this city. We need more time proposing, less time opposing. We need to inspire, motivate, and give a reason to get out and work for progressive candidates and issues. As Stan has talked about, we need to understand that a generation of economic decline and failed government response, and the relentless demonization of government has left people deeply wary of government but also quite open to a progressive agenda if it is put before them.

Of course that is exactly what we need to do because, despite the self-evident collapse which you've heard about of the conservative, right-wing, extremist project, Americans need to hear alternatives. Without vision, says the Bible, the people perish, or at least lose hope.

Perhaps the worst legacy of this era of TINA -- there is no alternative -- and YO-YO -- you are on your own -- is the shackles it has put on our imagination. But after a long hiatus, we're loosening those shackles and replacing them with determined idealism and grounded realism. And we're building an independent movement, a progressive movement in states, towns, communities, at Tupperware parties, in nightclubs across this country. The anti-war net roots and community activists and organizers have Joe Lieberman on the run. (Cheers and applause.)

And challengers, like Ned Lamott in Connecticut, will send a message, even if he loses, as did Marcy Winograd in California last week in her primary against Jane Harmon. Politics is often simplified into winning and losing. Yeah, we want to win, but politics is also a process of changing the balance of forces. Winograd revealed the depths of anti-war sentiment -- of more than that among Democrats and delivered a message for 2008. And in New York, labor activist Jonathan Tasini's candidacy has helped lead the New York state Democratic Convention to pass a resolution urging a safe and orderly withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. Forceful populists, like Sharod Brown, Bernie Sanders, John Tester in Montana are going to help transform the debate when they are elected to the Senate. (Applause.)

But progressives are also taking it to the states. There are people running in what we call down-ballot races. Mark Richie, a great progressive activist running for Secretary of State. (Applause.) John Bonifaz, running in Massachusetts. (Applause.) Debra Bowen in California who has taken on Dibold (sp) -- these are people who believe in democracy. (Applause.) And progressives are taking their politics to the states because the gridlock in this city, figurative and literal, is making states and communities once again what Justice Brandeis liked to call the laboratory of democracy.

At The Nation we've been paying more attention to what's going on out there and the importance of building models, lots of scaled models of new left, progressive policies that work. Whether it be in health care, living wage, minimum wage campaigns, we're going to see that on ballot initiatives in five states. (Applause.) Eighty-three percent of Americans, we are in the mainstream, say they favor raising the federal minimum wage -- who couldn't after nearly a decade of not raising it? There's progress on campaign

finance reform, renewable energy and energy efficiency, living wage initiatives in more than 130 cities. Governors have aligned to support Apollo, the alliance, the moon-shot for energy independence. State-based, election-oriented networks have formed to counter the right's powerhouse, Alik (sp). A network of progressive mayors has formed in these last two years. Joel Rogers has done a lot of work on this because understanding that people like Rocky Anderson, the mayor of Salt Lake City, one of The Nation's most loyal subscribers, shows how wrong that red-blue divide is. This country is much more diverse. (Applause.)

And then there are groups you're going to hear from at this gathering. There are groups training and electing progressive candidates. Whether it is the great progressive majority -- read the article in you Nation on your seat about Gloria Totten and all those who work with her: Malia Lazu, the Racial Justice Fund of the Progressive Majority, Wellstone Action, DFA, PDA, or a new group, Voters for Peace, which was inspired by The Nation's cover editorial and is mobilizing to gather two million signatures to support candidates who want a speedy way out of Iraq. (Applause.)

And there are new voices. You heard from Biko. There is just a new generation of student activists and thinkers. We're witnessing the building, the emergence of a progressive student movement: finally, a counter to the right-wing on campuses. Last week The Nation did a conference with a hundred and fifty progressive student editors and journalists, the next generation of muckrakers from thirty-nine states. (Applause.)

And, of course, there's the internet and the blogosphere. And all power to them, a little humility, too, but I say -- (chuckles) -- but their online activism: raising money, changing the debate, sticking it to establishment pollsters -- not you, Stan -- (laughter) -- and pundits; mobilizing, coordinating, democratizing the public square. This is crucial.

Now, we still need to build that social capital in communities. We need on the ground because there are mega-churches, there is the NRA. We need to build those labor halls again and we need to build our countervailing force on the ground.

And there is a new, progressive media infrastructure -- Robert Greenwald is here - - brave new films. What he did with Wal-Mart -- (applause) -- was take it into church halls, into union halls, into house parties, and build a new way of distribution, even while our media is over-consolidated, and all of you have to fight to keep the internet free. (Applause.) But there is an independent media consortium, there is Link TV, there are other ways of getting out the progressive word. There is Air America. All of this is very important. (Applause.) We are building.

And we have a public that has at long last grown tired of George Bush. His approval ratings are now in the toilet. But we need to counter this destructive -- this rubble of you are on you own. It is there; the support is there. We need to say clearly to all that, whether you like it or not, we're in this together. If we don't hang together, we're going to hang separately.

And that leads me to a final word about what a renewed and real politics of the common good might look like. There has been a lot of debate -- galvanizing debate, good debate -- for the progressive movement about this idea of a common good, urging Democrats to return to their tradition of civic republicanism. We can build a more perfect union -- who's against that? Who's against building a more perfect union? But I'd argue that it's wrong to suggest that the problem Democrats have had with putting forth a clear governing philosophy is grounded in the success of the civilizing movements of the 1960s: the women's movement, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movements, or of interest group pluralism focused on rights. With less venom, some of those arguing for a common good are echoing arguments of the Democratic Leadership Council. I call them complicit conservatism. (Laughter.)

And we don't need a misdiagnosis of this moment for another 2006 Sista Souljah moment. That's a kind of calculated, a symbolic straight-arming of our base to demonstrate independence. What we need, as Biko spoke so eloquently about, is to tap into the passions and energy of our core constituencies, of movements on the ground. Learn from our base: the poor, the working poor, the Latino community, African Americans, single women, the young, labor, the religious left, and inspire them and be inspired by them.

So I worry that this appeal to the common good will turn out to be a cover to disempower important groups, to ignore the legitimate issues, but, maybe not. Maybe not. But I do argue that historically the Democratic Party's finest moments have come when it is pushed into action from outside by popular movements, by you in this room -- (applause) -- from the labor movements, civil rights, women's movement, so let us work together to build a real and renewed politics of the common good.

I'm a great believer in what Studs Terkel said not long ago -- what a great man. (Applause.) Action engenders hope. So let us go forth from this grand gathering -- we, the emerging progressive movement -- out of DC, out into the country, to our cities and communities with ideas and strategies about rebuilding this country, and don't ever listen to those who caution, don't rock the boat. This is a time for conviction, not caution. Rock the boat. (Applause.)

MR. BOROSAGE: So welcome to Washington. It's going to be a hell of a conference. Sharod Brown is here. Bernie Sanders will be here. Ned Lamott will be here. Bernie Frank will be here. Barbara Aaron Wright tomorrow. The groups that Katrina talked about will be demonstrating their skills and their talent and their energy. We look forward to it.

Now, time for lunch.

(Applause.)

(End of session.)