

CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

TAKE BACK AMERICA 2006

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 2006

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

**12:45 – 2:40 P.M. CLOSING LUNCHEON:
YOU HAVE THE POWER**

**SPEAKER:
REPRESENTATIVE JAN SCHAKOWSKY (D-IL)**

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

ROBERT BOROSAGE: Representative Jan Schakowsky represented the Ninth District of Illinois since 1998. She's the chief deputy whip of the Democratic Party in the House. But most important, she's one of us. She's a mother with three children and four grandchildren. In the 1960s, as a community organizer, as a mother, as an activist, she organized the effort to put freshness dates on the products that you see in your grocery stores. And she got amazing attention for that, obviously. (Applause.) She then became, in the '70s, the director of Illinois Public Action, the leading public interest group in the state, where she worked on energy reform and championed protection against toxic poisoning.

She then was elected to the Congress, where she has been the leading champion on the cause of getting universal affordable health care for every American. (Applause.) Now, I could tell you a lot of stories about Jan, but I just want to say one summary thing and then turn the stage to her. You know, when you work in Washington, there are a number of people who vote the right way, and they are greatly appreciated, and there are a number of people – fewer in number – who talk the right way, and they're greatly appreciated. And there are people who are allies and easy to work with, and they are also appreciated. But there are very few who are actually leaders – people with vision and passion and the energy to help you see where you ought to be going, enlist you in the cause, get you off your duff and get you moving. It's a pleasure to introduce to you my leader, Jan Schakowsky.

(Applause.)

REPRESENTATIVE JAN SCHAKOWSKY (D-IL): Thank you so much, Bob, and I congratulate you on this wonderful gathering, and all of you who have come here today. My topic is "Closing the Deal" – "Closing the Deal." I believe that on November 7th, Democrats can be in the majority in Congress, both houses, and I believe that the activists and leaders who are here today can make it happen. I am optimistic – cautiously optimistic.

At long last, nearly everyone in our country sees what we've seen for a long time. Let's just tick off a few of the problems of their own making that the Republicans face, beginning but not ending with the calamitous war in Iraq. During the time of this panel, about an hour, your tax dollars will have contributed to the \$11 million the United States spends in Iraq every hour, 24/7. And between Iraq and Afghanistan, the equivalent of one battalion of soldiers – that's 600 people – is killed or injured each month.

Move on to gas prices, heating costs, unaffordable health care, the Medicare Part D disaster, Katrina, Guantanamo Bay, Halliburton, Abu Ghraib, college tuition, the NSA spying on everyone, tax cuts just for the Paris Hiltons, drilling in ANWR, global warming, the 9/11 Commission failing grades, Dubai Ports deals, stagnant or falling

wages, everyone around the world hates us, Jack Abramoff, relentless attacks on women's reproductive rights, labor unions, affirmative action, gays and lesbians, civil rights and civil liberties. You know, after a while it starts to add up, and the conclusion is these guys have simply got to go. (Applause.)

Now, it's no wonder the president's approval, even after getting al-Zarqawi, continues to slip. Now, I don't know if Bush is the worst president in history. I'm not an expert on the presidents. As far as I know, there may have been less intellectual presidents. There may have been more incompetent presidents or one or two with worse judgment or more reckless or less curious. I don't know about Chester Arthur or Millard Fillmore. Herbert Hoover was certainly delusional about the economy and James Polk allegedly manufactured the war with Mexico, but it never mattered as much as it does now.

The decisions of the president of the United States – you know, the decider – have never been more consequential than they are today. While military misadventures of the past certainly claimed many innocent lives, it is only in recent times that the result could be worldwide death and destruction. There may have been presidents more contemptuous of science – though I doubt it – but nothing else matters if our planet becomes incapable of sustaining human life. Even the most upscale gated communities can't protect him and his friends. In the most profound ways, this president and his rubber-stamp Congress are proving that elections really do matter.

So you might think the real question is how can we lose? The answer is, well, we've already proven it can be done. Even when we win we lose. Fool me once – or whatever it was the president tried to say – (laughter) – this is no time to play the fool. We need to close the deal. Our challenge, particularly the challenge of the progressives and activists here at this great conference is not crafting the overarching thematics of the campaigns. Fortunately, the big theme is really change, and the goal to put this failed president on every ballot so far seems to be working. For us, I believe, it must all be about execution.

One, first we must not allow the Republicans to steal the election again. (Applause.) Two, we have to mobilize the voters who are already with us and run picture-perfect, aggressive, leave-no-voter-behind-GOTV-get-out-the-vote campaigns. (Applause.) Three, we have to persuade the persuadables. I'm going to briefly go into each of these. Four, we have to travel. I'll tell you about my committee – about the Committee of 100 in my district. And five, we need to keep our eyes on the prize: beating the Republicans.

So first let's go to stealing. I apologize for not taking seriously enough the allegations that the 2004 election was stolen. (Applause.) After reading Bobby Kennedy, Jr.'s article in Rolling Stone, "Was the 2004 Election Stolen?" I am convinced that the only answer is yes. (Cheers, applause.) He documents – for those few of you who may not have read it, and you should, he documents how 350,000 Ohio voters, the vast

majority Democrats, quote, “were prevented from casting ballots or did not have their votes counted more than enough to shift the results,” unquote.

So watch for the DCCC to take some very public steps in the near future to help ward off a repeat performance. But what we need to do – there needs to be a citizens’ effort, starting now, to access the machines, the ballots, the registration process within each and every election jurisdiction in each and every swing state – swing district and state in the case of Senate races. And where the situation looks perilous, we need to go to the media and make a stink and demand changes. And this is a great project for the many of you who have been diligently working to guarantee fair and accurate elections. Let’s do it. (Applause.)

Two, get out the vote – GOTV. Intensity equals turnout. That is one of the political truths we must not rely on. The Republicans learned about grassroots organizing from us and they learned it well. We must count on their willingness and capacity to drag out their voters. This is the reason they are throwing red meat at their base: constitutional amendments on same-sex marriage and flag burning, and demonizing immigrants. They’re attempting to motivate and mobilize their base voters. They also successfully targeted individual Republican voters in Democratic precincts, not just relying on larger demographic data. In some instances, their operations were more sophisticated than ours. But we know how to do mobilization. It’s grassroots, door-to-door campaigns that enable us to beat them on the ground. Air strikes – I’m talking about radio and TV – get you just so far. The personal contact drives home the point. As great a job as we did in 2004, we need to do more and we need to do it better.

Three, persuasion. In 2004, the Republicans left no constituency untouched. Their goal was to shave off just enough points from Jewish voters or Hispanic voters; not a majority, just enough to win. For the first time, they won the majority of Catholics. Why did we, the Democrats, lose Catholics? They had a Catholic strategy and we didn’t. I’m told that Karl Rove met with selected bishops and lay leaders on a weekly basis. Millions of “Voter Guides for Serious Catholics,” it was called, were distributed both inside churches, and if that wasn’t an option, outside churches. It says, this voter guide, quote, “This voter guide identifies five non-negotiable issues and helps you narrow down the list of acceptable candidates, whether they’re running for national, state, or local offices. Candidates who endorse or promote any of the five non-negotiables should be considered to have disqualified themselves from holding public office and you should not vote for them.” And then it goes on, “It is a serious sin to endorse or promote any of these actions: One, abortion; two, euthanasia; three, fetal stem cell research; four, human cloning; five, homosexual marriage.”

Who produced and paid for the distribution of these voter guides? Religious leaders? Catholics leaders? Forget it. The effort was run by political operatives armed with political money to defeat John Kerry and other Democratic candidates. Well, guess what? We know how to produce voter guides. We know how to pass out voter guides. I’m not expert on Catholic teachings, but I didn’t see anything in that voter guide about

poverty, or health care, or the dignity of work. (Applause.) And so I say to you, shame on us when we don't compete at all, and we need to compete everywhere. (Applause.)

Number four, we have to travel. If you live in a safe Democratic district like mine is, you need to consider every candidate in every winnable district as our candidate, or at least adopt one or more of those candidates as your own. Let me tell you about an effort I'm helping build in my district called the Committee of 100. It started in 2004 with a group of activists, many first-time activists, who called themselves the Kerry Travelers. Since Illinois was solidly blue, we were able to send over 1,200 people to various cities, particularly in Wisconsin, to go door-to-door for John Kerry, helping put him over the top. Well, there was no moping for the Travelers after the November election. They created the Committee of 100 – 100 people who agreed to contribute between \$100 and \$250 minimum to a congressional candidate and to work in a swing district, mine being blessedly safe.

We met must last Sunday. So far they have recruited 200 people and are aiming for 1,000 by election day. Representatives – yeah, let's hear it for our committee. (Applause.) Representatives from the campaigns of four Democrats who are running for Congress in Illinois – one incumbent and three challengers – came to our meeting and made pitches for their candidates. Canvas days were announced for each of them and people signed up to travel to districts. Much of the organizing for the Committee of 100 takes place on the Internet, but this is no virtual community. You can do it too, and my young political director, Alex Amour, would be happy to help you get started.

Five, we need to resist, as hard as I know it is at times, griping about the Democrats. (Applause.) I'll tell you why. One, because it takes time away from the real work of defeating the Republicans, and two, because it's counterproductive, demoralizing the very people we need to be engaged and enthusiastic. Look, I'm not necessarily talking about staying away from primaries, but I'm refereeing to the time spent complaining about this or that performance or how we're not tough enough and we're not articulate and we're too wishy-washy, and in fact I agree that often those critiques are true, but keep in mind one thing: Right now we are winning, and we are not doing everything wrong.

I want to refer you to an article in the May Washington Monthly by Amy Sullivan called – I love the title – “Not as Lame as You Think: Democrats Learn the Art of Opposition.” Let me just read a few lines. Quote, “The truth is that Newt Gingrich and the contract loomed so large and today's D.C. Democrats seem so small, largely because of the magic of hindsight. Back in 1994, Republicans were at least as divided as Democrats are now, if not more so. As for the unity of message, the now-revered Contract with America didn't make its debut until just six weeks before the election,” unquote. And then she goes on to say, quote, “On virtually all of the major slips this White House has made in the past year, there have been unnoticed Democrats putting down the banana peels,” unquote. And she gives an example of the Dubai Port deal. Quote, she says, “If you read the press coverage of the story, you would have thought the issue surfaced on its own. In fact, however, the story was a little grenade rolled into the

White House bunker by Senator Chuck Schumer, who had been tipped off by a source in the shipping industry.” (Cheers, applause.)

Now, you remember, after it became a story, the president went on TV, and he, as sincerely as he could look, asked the American people if they really thought that he would support any deal that would pose a threat to our country. (Laughter.) And Americans answered with a collective, yeah – yeah. So when someone starts griping to you, remind them that we are winning, and ask them to think of just one good idea the Republicans have come up with lately. But, look, if you just have to vent – and there are those moments – pick a griping buddy and do it late at night or early in the morning when you’re not working to win.

And so let me end with this: On Memorial Day there was a Washington Post political cartoon by Tom Toles, reprinted in the Chicago Sun Times. It shows an old military veteran reading a newspaper that has the banner headline on it that says, “Security Bungle,” and then it has the articles. And the articles are “Domestic Spying,” “Data Loss,” “Official Lying,” “America Loses its Friends,” and “Inequality Growing.” And the veteran is saying in the little bubble, “My country’s identity has been stolen.” I love this country and I know that what motivates you to be here at this conference and to do what you do back home is a love of our country and its promise of justice and freedom, unfulfilled though it may be.

This is a room full of patriots – true patriots, the real patriots of our country. (Applause.) And I thank you for that and I do feel as if our American identity has been stolen, but I believe with every ounce of strength in my body, that working now with you, we can, together, and beginning in a mere five months, take back America.

Thank you so much for what you do.

(Cheers, applause.)

(End of remarks.)