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### Mike's speech at the DNC Winter Conference 2007

February 4, 2007

#### AMERICA'S LOST VISION

By Senator Mike Gravel

February 3, 2007

##### Winter Meeting, Democratic National Committee

Governor Dean. As a lifelong Democrat—proud when my party did great things and occasionally ashamed when it did the wrong things—I honor and commend your leadership in rebuilding the party in every corner of this nation. Even more, you have my respect for your earlier and outspoken opposition to the Iraq war in your own presidential candidacy.

I plan to speak truth to power today. You, the delegates, have the power to decide who will be the Democratic nominee. I also plan to speak truth to the American people, who have the power to choose the next President of the United State.

But first, I have one small favor to ask of all of you. Whenever anyone raises the question of my age in this campaign, please point out that Washington is in great need of adult supervision.

Permit me to introduce my wife Whitney, the love of my life, and my sister Marie. Between them with the iconic hat, is Granny "D," Doris Haddock, my strongest supporter in New Hampshire. Other candidates may have large campaign bank accounts; I'll take Granny "D" on my side.

Fairness. Freedom. Justice. Morality. Opportunity. Peace. All goals of our Founding Fathers and concepts central to the character of most Americans.

Our Founders envisioned the People and their political leaders working together to nurture these goals and to shape these concepts from generation to generation. Unfortunately, early on, in a compromise to perpetuate the evil institution of slavery in the Constitution, the People lost their power to amend the Constitution and make laws. The compromisers knew the People would not ratify a Constitution that legalized slavery and would outlaw it if they had lawmaking powers. The results of this moral compromise brought about the primacy of representative government and its monopoly on lawmaking power.

History teaches us that nations fail when leaders fail their people. The decision to invade Iraq without provocation and fraudulently sold to the American people, by a President consumed with messianic purpose, sadly confirms this lesson of history.

The Democrats controlled the Senate on October 11, 2002 and provided political cover for George Bush to invade Iraq. The Senate leadership could have refused to even take up the resolution, or a few Senators who opposed it could have mounted a filibuster.

But the fear of opposing a popular warrior President on the eve of a mid-term election prevailed. Political calculations trumped morality, and the Middle East was set ablaze. The Democrats lost in the election anyway, but the American people lost even more. It was **Politics as Usual**.

Given the extreme importance of any decision to go to war, and I am anguished to say this, it's my opinion that anyone who voted for the war on October 11—based on what President Bush represented—is not qualified to hold the office of President.

Political leaders must bring two qualities to any public office:

**political integrity** and **moral judgment**.

If political calculations trump morality and occasion substantial loss of human life, it reveals the sense of moral responsibility these candidates are likely to bring to the office of President.

Saying "I would not have voted for the resolution if I had known the mess it would create"—or worse, saying "the decision was right but Bush botched the job"—is inadequate rationale for a person who may hold the most powerful political position in the world. Presidents have moral responsibility for the life and death of millions of people.

**Politics as Usual** is not acceptable for the presidency.

I feel I am entitled to raise this issue because when I served in the Senate, during the Vietnam War, I spoke truth to power.

I officially released the Pentagon Papers, and as a result, Richard Nixon sued me all the way to the Supreme Court.

I successfully filibustered to force an end to the military draft.

I filibustered alone and with others to end the appropriations for the Vietnam War. Those are my credentials. I've been there and know how hard it is to oppose the majority of your peers.

I ask that you hold other presidential candidates to the same standard. Political leaders who had the opportunity and the power to stop the Iraq war before it could get started and did nothing—allowed it to happen..

America's current political leadership must not continue to avoid the obvious: Our presence in Iraq exacerbates the problem. Eighty percent of Iraqis want American troops to leave their country, and 70% of Iraqis think it's OK to kill American soldiers.

We made a grave mistake. We should have the courage to admit it. We must bring our troops home **now—not 6 months from now, not a year from now—NOW! One more American death for “our vital interest” is not worth it. We all know “vital interest” is code for “oil.”**

If we don't bring our soldiers home now, what do we tell the families of those killed and maimed between now and some **future arbitrary date**? The sooner we get our military out of Iraq, the sooner we can turn to the international community to help with a diplomatic solution to bring an end to the sectarian civil war we caused.

The Democrats in control of Congress need to act resolutely—and I'm not talking about some mealy-mouthed, nonbinding resolutions. They need to precipitate a constitutional confrontation with George Bush.

Under the Constitution, the Congress is the only body that can declare war. Implicit in that power is the ability to end a war and make peace. Even a Commander-in-Chief executing a war is subservient to the Congress's war powers. The Founding Fathers specifically created this constitutional check on executive authority and it was re-affirmed by the War Powers Act of 1973. Congress is the only hope we have, between now and January 20, 2009, to halt our continued involvement in the carnage and death George Bush has unleashed.

Our nation is in crisis. This crisis is greater than most people realize, and in some ways more significant than terrorism and the Iraq war.

We have become a nation ruled by fear. Since the end of the Second World War, various political leaders have fostered fear in the American people—fear of Communism, fear of terrorism, fear of immigrants, fear of people based on race and religion, fear of Gays and Lesbian in love who just want to get married, and fear of people who are somehow different. It is fear that allows political leaders to manipulate us all and distort our national priorities.

Fear has allowed our political leaders to spend more on military armaments **than is spent** collectively by all the other nations in the world.

#### **Who are we afraid of? Are we that paranoid?**

Despite the trillions of dollars we spent on defense, the Bush Pentagon sent our soldiers into harms way in Iraq without the proper body armor and with insufficiently armored Humvees.

And worse, the Bush Administration plays games with the problems of our veterans, in effect waging a budget war against the only Americans who made any sacrifices in George Bush's oil war.

Shame on you, George Bush, for letting the profits of arms contractors trump the needs of our veterans.

President Eisenhower, upon leaving office, warned of the dangers to democracy posed by a military-industrial complex. Since his warning, we have seen a rise in the culture of militarism. His concern that our foreign policy might be dictated by the financial interests “of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry” has been fully realized.

We should remember a lesson of the First World War: the presence of excessive weaponry in the hands of nation-states by itself is sufficient to induce **WAR**.

The decision to wage preemptive war in Iraq raises the specter of a much deeper problem facing the global community—nuclear proliferation. On this issue, we should first look at ourselves. The U.S. has more deliverable nuclear devices than the rest of the world combined. Just one Trident nuclear submarine can hold the entire world hostage. Yet we continue to build more nuclear devices. Who in the world are we prepared to nuke?

We started an arms race in space a decade ago, without provocation. Now the Bush Administration is pressuring Eastern European countries to let us station anti-ballistic missiles on their soil. Most Americans are unaware that the Bush administration, under the cover of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, has been aggressively initiating a new arms race with Russia and China, whose defense budgets are a small fraction of our own. Our political leadership, controlled by military industrialists, insists on pursuing a Cold War strategy in a **post-Cold War era**.

American political leaders often boast of American exceptionalism, as you head from this dais. We are indeed a great nation, one that has made significant contributions to humanity. But our leaders are promoting delusional thinking when boasting that the United States and Americans are superior to the rest of the human race. We are no better and no worse.

Unfortunately, the United States is not number one with what counts.

There are only two industrialized nations in the world that do not provide health care for all their citizens: the United States and South Africa. Despite spending more per capita on health care than any other nation in the world, we rank 37<sup>th</sup> for overall health performance.

The United States ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in literacy. *Time* magazine reported last spring that 30% of our students don't graduate from high school, condemning them to a diminished economic existence.

Of the Global Fortune 500 companies, only 50 are American. Wall Street and many corporate executives are awash in huge salaries and bonuses, yet the average American worker's compensation grew only .1% in the last decade.

China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan hold 40% of our government debt. Any one of these countries could throw the U.S. into an economic tailspin.

America's political leadership is in denial as to the gravity and scope of our problems, viewing them almost exclusively from a national perspective. In fact, the major problems we face are all global in nature—energy, the environment, terrorism, drugs, war, immigration, disease, economic and cultural globalization. These problems require global solutions that can only be addressed by concerted diplomacy and cooperation, not jingoism about America's Super Power superiority.

Ask the current and former residents of the Gulf Coast to rank our national political leadership for effectiveness either now or during the 17 months following the ravages of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. These tragedies exposed **to the world** that large numbers of Americans subsist in what is closer to a **“third world” economy**.

They exposed how callous we are to the plight of the poor.

They exposed strains of racism we refuse to acknowledge.

But in the face of a painfully slow and ineffective government response, this tragedy has inspired many **average** Americans to volunteer and help rebuild not only homes, but a spirit of community.

Our political leadership must begin to tell the Americans the truth. So I'll start right now:

Here are some of the areas where the United States is No 1.

- We are number one in the production of weapons,
- We are number one in consumer spending,
- We are number one in government, commercial and personal debt,
- We are number one in the number of people we have in prison,
- We are number one in energy consumption, and
- We are number one in the environmental pollution we produce.

Our Democratic Congressional leadership is attempting to address some of these problems, but there are serious limitations to the ability of even well-intentioned political leaders, **in part because** of the **limitations inherent in representative government, and in part because of human nature**.

Some skeptics might say that twisting truth for political ends is just **Politics as Usual**—and that **Politics as Usual** is in the nature of representative government. They accept as benign a system with 30,000 Washington lobbyists bundling campaign contributions for the election of politicians who then support and vote for the interests of the lobbyists' clients.

But the system is not benign. The corruption is real and cannot be reformed by those who are enriched by the corruption. Only the People can correct these structural flaws of representative government—if they can become lawmakers, as envisioned by George Washington when he said, “The basis of our political system is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government.”

He was right to affirm the role of people as lawmakers on a par with their representative lawmakers in

Congress.

We, the People are the fount of all political power. We have the right to propose and to enact the National Initiative for Democracy—a legislative package that includes a constitutional amendment and a federal statute that empowers Americans as lawmakers. A majority of Americans, about 60 million, will have to vote for it in order to become the law of the land. The National Initiative does not abolish representative government, but it adds another Check to our system of Checks and Balances—We, the People.

The National Initiative will provide a mechanism for us **to finally have** a government not just “**of**” and “**for**” the People, but, for the first time in our history, a government “**by**” the People.

I believe that we can have laws and policies that are more moral and more reflective of the public interest if citizens can exercise their collective self-interest by voting on major issues that affect their lives. Twenty-four states and several hundred localities already permit citizens to make laws.

I hope you will visit the web site—NationalInitiative.us—to learn more and vote. Think about it. Do you agree or disagree that we need to reform our government’s structure by bringing people into the operations of government as lawmakers in a partnership with their elected officials.

I’m proud to announce that the Democratic Party has been responsible for a **number of great social advances in the past**. However, as one Senator pointed out, it now anguishes for a new identity. Let me suggest the National Initiative as an epoch-defining identity for the Democratic Party.

The National Initiative would provide an opportunity for the Democratic Party to reclaim its role in American history, with **an advancement in human governance** on a par with the nascent Republican Party’s role in ending slavery on American soil.

The Democratic Party has the opportunity to undertake a change in the paradigm of human governance and to champion the lost vision of our Founders, and help make We, the People lawmakers. The statements of our Founders cannot be clearer about their vision. They had faith in the American People.

Can we have any less faith in ourselves?

In this campaign you will hear from many who would be President. Judge us not on how much money we raise from those who buy influence. Rather judge us on what we have done. And judge us on the solutions we offer.

I have unreserved faith in the American People and my presidential candidacy will champion empowering We, the People with real power, the **central power of all governments!** lawmaking

Thank you.

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#### amazing speech...

Submitted by ndo on Tue, 2007-02-06 13:07.

amazing speech... especially the part about the politics of fear.

... also, yes. anyone who voted for the war does not deserve our trust and hold office, let alone be our president.

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i don't expect my government to be efficient like the Nazi, just transparent and honest

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#### Great Speech

Submitted by jg51 on Mon, 2007-02-05 09:42.

After watching all of the other talking head candidates say the same thing over and over again. Its was great watching Mike Gravel get up and say something worth while. Great speech Sir,you are a breath of fresh air in a party that has lost its common sense.

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#### You were riveting before the DNC

Submitted by LNAB on Sun, 2007-02-04 21:08.

such honesty, forthrightness is so lacking in politics. Thanks Mike for calling a spade a spade. I was 20 minutes late to an appointment because I couldn't stop listening to you. I noticed I was not the only one who was thrilled by your speech as I watched person after person stand up to applaud.

Thank you for your "love of country" because truly you face an uphill battle. Money, influence, inside politics rule our political parties. There is no ability for candidates of quality and integrity to survive the horror of our electoral system. Absent state parties, a poor DNC and a DCCC and DSCC that prefers to eat grassroots candidates than to support them are part of the cancer that is killing American democracy.

I hope you are the candidate Mike. People like you can help American gov't attain the honest and caring

stewardship that all Americans and the world not only deserve but have a right to expect.

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### Mike Gravel is a true

Submitted by mikegravelfan on Sun, 2007-02-04 18:09.

Mike Gravel is a true patriot.

This is one of the most brilliant speeches ever.

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