

U.S. Senator John Edwards

**Prince George's Community College
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Thank you. Thank you. Thank you all so much. Do you think we could get a few more people in this room?

What a great crowd. And I am so proud and honored to have as an advocate and supporter of mine this extraordinary congressman, Al Wynn. Are we proud of him or what?

And to all of those on the stage and in the audience who are helping and supporting, I thank you, every single one of you. It's my honor and privilege to be here in Prince George's County.

This campaign for opportunity and fairness continues. You know, the pollsters and the pundits, they don't always get it right, do they?

We have seen that there is only one-quarter of those seats in the Fleet Center in Boston where the delegates are going to sit -- only one-quarter of them have been filled; three-quarters of them are left to be filled. And I may be wrong about this, but I've got a feeling the people of Maryland are going to say something about this. What do you think?

The truth is -- and all of you know it, it's why you're here -- this country is so hungry for real change and real leadership. And I'll tell you one other thing: It would be a shame if the people of Maryland couldn't hear John Edwards and John Kerry debate here in the state of Maryland, wouldn't it?

Throughout this campaign, I've talked about building one America, one America that works for everybody, not just for a privileged few.

This president does not get it. He believes that as long as everything's going well on Wall Street, everything's fine. He's wrong about that.

Look at what's happened in Maryland since George Bush came into office. More than 21,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost; 13,000 more are living in poverty. More than 34,000 -- now think about this -- 34,000 families filed for bankruptcy last year alone, and there are more than 174,000 kids who don't have health insurance. This is not our America, and you and I are going to do something about it come next November.

Here's what we really need to do. We need to get this economy back in line with our

values, the things you and I grew up believing in: hard work, responsibility, integrity, fairness. These are things that George Bush just does not understand.

Throughout this economy, I've talked about making sure that we do the things necessary to embrace and lift up those values. This president is completely out of touch. If you watch what he talks about, when he talks about the economy doing fine, he's talking about the CEOs and Wall Street. He isn't talking about Main Street. He doesn't understand what's going on on Main Street.

And every one of us, every one of us knows it. By the way, let me just say what I think about that. I don't know how many of you heard this. But two weeks ago, the White House came out with its economic report. I love this. They said and the spokesperson said that the outsourcing of millions of American jobs over the next decade is a good thing for the American economy. What planet do these people live on?

Now let me tell you what'd be good for the American economy. What'd be good for the American is outsource his administration. That's what would be good for the American economy.

We all know that the greatest engine of this economy is small business. In fact, this congressman has been an extraordinary advocate for small business. Twenty two million small businesses create three-quarters of U.S. net jobs each year. And here in Maryland, there are more than 426,000 small businesses, almost half a million.

They employ over a million people, and the percentage of minority-owned businesses is now more than 20 percent. Unlike big businesses, small businesses don't take jobs overseas, do they? They keep them right here in this country.

And they address the unique needs of the community. The president's agenda is about making sure the CEOs and the executives of big corporations are doing fine, not the entrepreneurs and small business owners who actually move this economy.

Well, we've got to change that. Let me talk about a few ideas.

First, what I want to do is offer venture capital to small businesses in distressed communities. And we'll make sure that the focus is on businesses that are offering good jobs, not minimum wage jobs, good jobs, jobs with good benefits, jobs that will support a family, jobs that we need in our communities.

We also need to do everything we can to keep jobs here in this country. We've seen what's happened: loss of millions of jobs during the time that George Bush has been president. That's why I support small manufacturers and offer a 10 percent tax credit for manufacturers that keep jobs right here in America where we need these jobs and don't have them going overseas.

And finally, we're going to help these small businesses with something that they

desperately need help with: providing health care coverage for themselves and their employees, giving them tax credits that allows them to provide coverage.

All of these things we can do to strengthen our small business community, make sure that we provide diversity in small business ownership, and to create jobs in this country. But we have so much work to do in America.

The truth is, and you all know it, I know it, we live in a country where there are still two different Americas. You know, there's one for those families who never have to worry about anything. They're financially secure, they know everything's going to be fine. And then there's one for everybody else.

It doesn't have to be that way. You and I can change it.

We can build one America that works for everybody where we no longer have two different groups of people.

We can have one health care system in America instead of the two we have now. We have one health care system today for families that get the best health care money can buy. And then we have one for everybody else, right? Yes. Folks who struggle and suffer get their health care coverage from insurance companies, drug companies, HMOs, many millions of Americans have no health care coverage at all.

And, I might add, we've got some young people here who are advocating on an important issue, the issue of AIDS. Here in America and AIDS abroad, this is a place that we need to show some real leadership to show that this is a moral issue. And we need to make a commitment as a nation both here and abroad to address this issue.

Thank you for being here.

I'm proud of what these young people are doing.

We also have two public school systems in America. We've got one for the most affluent communities and one for everybody else.

We don't believe the quality of a child's education should be controlled by where they live and the affluence of the community they live in. We want every child to get a high-quality education.

And by the way, by the way, the starting place to building one school system that works for everybody is to stop the damage being done by No Child Left Behind in schools all across America every single day.

We got two tax systems in this country: one for the special interests and the big corporations, many of whom pay no taxes at all; and one for -- let me think -- you. Right?

People who just work hard and pay your taxes every year, you're carrying the tax burden in this country.

We shouldn't have two economies in America. You know, we got one for families that they know that their kids and their grandkids are always going to be fine. And then we got one for everybody else, most of the country, folks who live paycheck to paycheck, can't save any money, takes every dime you make just to pay your bills. You know what I'm talking about.

We need to strengthen and lift up these families, these working middle-class families. We can help them save. We can help them invest. We can help them buy a home.

We can also help them by cracking down on these companies that are preying on them and our most vulnerable families. I'm talking now about payday lenders, predatory lenders and credit card companies that are fleecing the American people.

And I do want to take a minute and talk about an issue -- Al mentioned this just a moment ago -- but an issue that's personally important to me. I think it's important for America, which is 35 million Americans who live in poverty every single day.

I get the politics of this. I do understand it. I know why politicians mostly don't talk about it. Because for the most part, these folks don't vote.

If you took a poll, it wouldn't even show up on a list of issues on a poll. Here's the reason we should not only talk about, but do something about millions of Americans who live in poverty: Because it's wrong. And we have a moral responsibility to lift those families out of poverty. You and I together, we can do that.

Just think about it for a minute. In a country of our wealth and our prosperity, to have children going to bed hungry, to have children who don't have the clothes to keep them warm, to have millions of Americans who work full-time, every single day, working for minimum wage to support their families and living in poverty -- it's wrong.

This is what you and I are going to do about it together: We're going to build an America where we say no to kids going to bed hungry; no to the kids not having the clothes to keep them warm; and no forever to any American working full-time and living in poverty. Not in our America. Not in the America you and I will build together. We can do this.

Thank you. Thank you.

Just a few miles down the road, we also have two different governments in Washington, don't we. You know. We've got one for the insiders and the lobbyists and the people who get whatever they want every single day. Whatever's left is there for you.

And you don't have to go any further than this prescription drug Medicare reform bill --

see, I see some of you have been paying attention.

You know, here we go again. We've got millions of seniors who need prescription drugs. Look what we ended up with: Billions of dollars in taxpayer dollars going to HMOs instead of going to seniors, driving seniors out of Medicare into HMOs.

Not only that, everything we could have done to bring down the cost of prescription drugs, the drug companies were against it, so it came out.

Let me say this in very simple language: This government, this democracy does not belong to that crowd of insiders in Washington and their lobbyists; it belongs to you. And we're going to restore the power in this democracy back to you, where it began, where it belongs. That's what this election and campaign is about. You and I can do that together.

We also do live in a country that's still, in far too many ways, divided by race. And this is something I, like many of you, have lived with my entire life.

And I grew up in the south in the '50s and '60s. You know, from the time I was very young, I saw the ugly face of segregation and discrimination, young African-American kids sent upstairs in movie theaters, "White Only" signs on restaurants and luncheon counters. I feel such an enormous responsibility, personal responsibility, when it comes to issues of race and equality and civil rights.

And we have so much work to do for economic equality, for educational equality, for judges who we know with a certainty will enforce our civil rights laws, so important to continuing the march forward for civil rights.

But I want to say something about this, Al mentioned just a minute ago, he's been out on the campaign trail with me around the country. You know, I've heard some of these pundits on television and some of these politicians on television debating about where in America and in front of what audiences we should talk about race and equality and civil rights. I'll tell you where: Everywhere. This is not an African-American issue; this is an American issue.

We've also had two different images around the world over the last 40 years: the image we all used to be proud of -- America, this great shining light, this beacon of freedom, democracy and human rights -- that everyone looked up to; and now the image that George Bush has given us, right?

America acting on its own, unilaterally, disrespecting the rest of the world. It doesn't have to be that way. You and I can change it. We can build a world and an image of America around the world where we're, once again, looked up to and respected. And the truth is that every child and every family in America will be safer and more secure, if they grow up in a world where we're, once again, looked up to and respect. That's the world that you and I can create together.

We can do that. Yes, we can. Thank you.

And to those who say to me, "It's been this way too long, you can't change it," here's what I say: Cynics didn't build America; optimists built America. You and I can do this together. And I'll tell you, if I can just be personal about this for just a minute, you know, I've been listening to this kind of pessimism my whole life, probably like some of you have.

You know, when I was young, I decided I wanted to be a lawyer. And people would say to me, "Now wait a minute. Your father works in the mill. Nobody in your family has ever been to college, and you're talking about being a lawyer?"

And then I was lucky enough to get there. And I'd go into courtrooms representing you or a family just like yours. We'd be on one side of the courtroom. On the other side of the courtroom would be all the armies of lawyers representing the big corporations. You know, they always have the best lawyers money can buy, very experienced, very distinguished.

And they would look across the courtroom at me and they'd say, "What does he think he's doing here? He thinks he belongs in the same courtroom with us?"

Well, here's what happened: I beat them. And then I beat them again. And I beat them again. And I beat them again. And I'm proud of those fights, proud of having won those fights.

And then I ran for the Senate and here we go again, same old thing. We've got an incumbent Republican senator in North Carolina, hand-picked by Jesse Helms

Appropriate response.

part of the Helms political machine in North Carolina. And everybody said, "Now wait a minute. What's that young fellow think he's doing? He thinks he can run against the Helms political machine?"

Well, here's what happened: I ran against the Helms political machine, beat that incumbent Republican. And the result is: Now I'm the senior senator from North Carolina, not Jesse Helms'. And that is a very good thing for America.

But the truth is -- the truth is every one of you can relate to this. Just think in your own mind for just a minute, how many times has somebody said to you, "You can't do this." Right? You know what I'm saying. You and I can do this together.

The truth is, the American people deserve a president who understands their lives, who knows what it's like to work for a living, who knows the struggles that middle-class working families, those who live in poverty, face every single day, who will wake up every morning in the White House standing up for them, fighting for them, because it

comes from in here, not because of some academic issue.

It's what they live. It's what they believe in. This is part of who I am. And it is what I will fight for as president of the United States every single day that I am in the White House.

I want to talk to you about one last subject, you know, because it's hot in here, isn't it?

One thing I've learned is to know when to quit talking.

I got one last thing I want to talk to you about. You know, if you've been watching the presidential campaign over the last couple of months, one of the things you've seen are some of the other candidates attacking each other.

And if you're me and you're traveling around the country campaigning, some of these reporters in the back of the room right now, every day they ask me, "Well, wait a minute, when are you going on the attack? Why aren't you attacking? How can you win without attacking?"

Well, the answer is, no. I don't know how to say it any more clearly. If you are looking for the candidate who will do the best job of attacking the other Democrats, that's not me.

I believe this election is bigger than that. This election is about the future of America, it's about lifting up the American people, making them proud to be Americans again, making them believe again that everything is possible.

You know, the truth is -- the truth is that my campaign has never been based on the politics of cynicism. It's based on the politics of hope. It's based on the politics of what's possible.

We are past all the preliminary stages, and it is now time for you to choose a president. I came here today to ask you to vote for, campaign for and choose a president that you believe you'll be proud of, that you believe your children -- and it's not George Bush, by the way.

Our country has been in a place like this before, 70 years ago. Franklin Roosevelt came into office at one of the worst times in American history. He believed that everything was possible. He lifted up the American people. We still have Social Security as a result.

John Kennedy came into office at one of the times of greatest racial division in American history. He believed everything was possible, and he gave the American people what they were hungry for: hope.

The truth is this. What you and I believe is we believe you should never look down on anybody. You ought to lift people up. We don't believe in tearing people apart, we believe in bringing them together.

What we believe, what I believe, is that the family you're born into and the color of your skin in our America should never control what you're able to do.

I can't change this country by myself, but I know that you and I can change it together. And I know that for a very simple reason: Because I believe in you and you deserve a president who actually believes in you.

Thank you for being here.

Join me in this campaign. Join me in this cause. We'll build one country all of us can be proud of. Thank you so much for being here today. It's my honor and privilege to be here with you.

Thank you. Thank you.