

“Building a Better America”

**Remarks by Simon Rosenberg
NDN Annual Meeting
June 17, 2003**

I'm Simon Rosenberg, the President of NDN and I just want to thank all of you for being here today at this wonderful Annual Meeting. There are a few people that I would like to thank in particular, the senior staff of the NDN, our whole team, particularly Tom Ochs, Rachel Hirschberg, Cynthia Rice and Jay Cooper and Maria Cardona, who have done such a remarkable job for us for so long. I want to thank our advisory board, which is growing and becoming an even more important part of our effort, particularly Mike McCurry and Vic Fazio, who roll up their sleeves every day for us and do so much work. I want to thank Bill Richardson and Senator Mary Landrieu, who are co-chairs today, who are providing just vital and important new voices for the Democrats. I also want to thank my wife Caitlin and my two boys Jed and Will, who inspire me to do better every day and help me get up and fight the good fight that we are all involved in today.

As I travel the country, I hear over and over again, “I don't hear you all in Washington. I don't know what Democrats stand for anymore. I'm unhappy with the direction of the country and I want to do something about it. Give me something to do. Sign me up. Put me in, coach.” And well, if you feel that way and if you're worried about where we're headed and you want to do something to make the country a better place, then you've come to the right event and the right organization here at NDN. I for one and I don't know about you, I'm tired about hearing the Democrat's despair, about the drift, about the division in our party because today, at this event, NDN is here to offer a better path forward.

I'm really grateful for you all participating in this effort that we've undertaken today. But what's critical for us is that we offer a bright and better path forward but it is one that acknowledges where things are today and where we really stand. I think one of the most important things that I'll be discussing is that we have to admit that the Republicans have built over 50 years in investing a better political machine than what we have. They've built organizations like AEI, CATO, Heritage, GO Pac, ALEC, Fox News, Americans for Job Security (laughter).

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These groups have given them a more mature, sophisticated political machine that is, frankly just better than what we have on our side. And look at what they've done. Over the past fifty years, they've taken an obscure ideology called conservatism and built it into near governing majority philosophy for a major political party in this country. It is no small feat and I think that we have to recognize that where they are today, we've got it up on the slide, is fairly impressive. They control the Presidency, the House and the Senate for the first time in fifty years. They control more governorships, more state legislative chambers and even more state legislative seats than the Democrats. For the first time in national polling, and this isn't political polling, but from the University of Michigan study that's done every year, which is used by sociologists and demographers, more people in the most recent poll identified themselves as Republicans than Democrats for the first time since FDR's first term as President. Things are changing and I think we have to be honest, as Democrats, about where things are. And so today as part of our effort to really help lead, we're going to announce a new and expanded mission for this organization, the New Democratic Network.

We're going to do three things. First, we're going to have this conversation that we're beginning today about what we can do to build a long term strategic response to the Republican challenge. Second is that we're going to continue to invest in the new and best leaders for our party all across the country. This is something that, with your help, we have done very, very well. Something that we're going to grow and expand in the years to come. Third and perhaps the most important thing that we're going to launch, and the newest thing is through the release of agenda, that we will be stepping up our advocacy for our agenda. Through the release of an agenda that we're releasing today, stepped up capacity with free and paid media to fight for our ideas and our values in the American political back and forth that goes on everyday. We are going to make sure that the important and the modernizing voice in New Democrats is heard loud and clear in the elections in 2004.

I think what's important though to understand about what we're going to do, is to review for one minute about what we've done, which is giving us all the work that we've done together, frankly, all the people in this room and around the country who've enabled us to have this opportunity to provide greater leadership for Democrats.

So let's review our progress. NDN, in the seven years that we've been in business, with your help, has raised millions of dollars for the top tier candidates in the toughest races. We've helped elect fifty new people to the House and Senate. We've supported hundreds of candidates

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in more than thirty-five different states all around this country. We've helped build the New Democratic Coalition groups in the House and the Senate, which today have one third of all Democrats in Congress as members. We've been effective champions of modern economic policies for the country. We've offered path breaking analysis for the national and Hispanic electorate. And finally, we've built, I think together, an important new and vital institution for the Democratic Party. I want to thank all of you in this room because without all of you and the work that you have undertaken with us, we wouldn't be in this position today to offer new and inspired leadership.

I want to spend a minute talking about some of the other themes that have been offered today by more articulate speakers than I. I think it's important to remember that the United States was founded on the Democratic premise that human beings have the capacity to create and manage governments, which could further the lot of all mankind. The pursuit of happiness as Thomas Jefferson called it.

Our Founding Fathers knew that what they were doing was constructing a country that could become an inspiration to the contentious warring world where governments have been established to protect the prerogatives of a few often at the expense of the many. Enlightened self-government, a simple but radical idea. It's an idea that has helped transform a small colonial outpost into one of the most powerful civilizations in human history, an idea that has allowed America to become the beacon of hope and light in what has often been a dark and dangerous world. It's an idea that has inspired people and countries for centuries to better themselves, to work towards democracy, liberty, capitalism, open markets, and the rule of law. Government that could be truly described as of the people, by the people and for the people.

At home, this idea has inspired us to do better. As a people, we've eliminated slavery, expanded the rights of women and minorities, established universal free education for all people, fought two World Wars and many smaller ones against governments who do not share our commitment to democracy, allowed tens of millions of immigrants from across the world to find new and better lives, created a progressive tax system that has funded a working social safety net, and made investments in our common welfare like the National Highway System, the GI Bill, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, what has evolved into the Internet, and cutting edge medical research that has made us a stronger nation and built the most extraordinary middle class that the world has ever seen.

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For over two hundred years, America, acting through its government, has led the world on a steady march of progress, showing along the way that hope can overcome despair, that humanity can improve its lot, that Democrats can overcome despots and that good can overcome evil. The last century has seen the greatest explosion of peace, of freedom and of prosperity that the world has ever seen. Part of this story of progress has been a demonstrated capacity for people acting through their governments to remake the world and to improve the lot of all of us.

Despite this unparalleled success of the American inspired era of hope and progress, the current administration seems committed to follow a different and albeit worse course. Their remarkable disregard of international institutions, their aggressive shifting of tax burdens from the wealthiest to those who struggle to pay their bills, their willingness to plunge the federal, state and local governments into unprecedented fiscal crises and accumulate historic debt. And their eagerness to shred the social safety net is creating a present and future that is clearly not in keeping with the spirit of the great American experiment. They say that he is a strong leader but looking back through history at our great leaders, Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, we know that what is in the White House today is not real leadership.

Leadership is about more than being strong and mighty. It's about doing the right thing, making the tough choices, preparing the country for the future and making the smart investments that will pay off for all of us down the road. Remember, all those people in the White House, it is the meek who inherit the earth, not the privileged and the powerful.

Driven by the sense of wanting to restore America's historic role of hope and progress, NDN today is releasing our agenda that we call a 'Commitment to Hope and Progress: An Agenda for the First Decade of the 21st Century'. The product of hundreds of people working over many, many months, this agenda is designed to provide a rallying cry for the members of our network in the years ahead. It lays out six specific large aspirations for America. Six specific obtainable goals, which we believe, if achieved, will once again reaffirm America's historic role. These are the six that we are committed today in this room to expand prosperity and opportunity, assert responsible global leadership, protect the homeland, strengthen families and communities, modernize our healthcare system and leave behind an even more beautiful America.

I hope that all of you in this room and those who are watching on television, if you want to participate in helping us achieve this agenda in the next decade, then join us to continue fighting the good fight. Because we believe that every day we can and must do better, better as a movement, better as a party, better as a country. Because the most immediate task facing

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Democrats today is not to argue among ourselves or scream loudly at our opposition but to work together to offer a new optimistic, achievable governing agenda that strongly reaffirms the common purpose of progressive politics, to fight for all of you. It brings along Democrats, Independents, and disaffected Republicans in a Majority Coalition that leaves a world for our children that is better than the world that has been left for us.

If anyone in this room or those watching on TV, shares our concern with the light that has inspired the world, the idea of America has dimmed, then join us. Visit our web site, NewDem.org, become part of our Network, fight for these priorities, use this agenda as a basis of a conversation and offer suggestions of your own, but take action. The idea of America is something that has inspired people to action for centuries. Let it inspire all of you today. Fight to make our tomorrow better than yesterday and fight to make sure that our children will have the same sense of possibility and opportunity that we have all felt in our own lives.

Here at NDN it is our solemn commitment to all of you today, all of you in this room and watching on television, that we will lead when necessary and follow when required. But we are going to fight together with all of you to build a brighter future, a better America, and a stronger and more modern Democratic Party.

I want to thank all of you for coming today. We've got a wonderful rest of the day, enjoy your visit here to the NDN Annual Meeting and thanks for your support over these many years.