

Remarks of Senator John Kerry

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To: National Desk and Political Reporter

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 8 /U.S. Newswire/ -- Remarks of Senator John Kerry (As Prepared)

Cincinnati, Ohio

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Yesterday in Iraq, we marked the most incalculable loss of all. Yesterday, we reached a tragic milestone. More than 1,000 of America's sons and daughters gave their lives in service to our country. More than 1,000 sons and daughters, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters who will never come home to live the lives they dreamed of. We honor them, we pray for them and for their families, and we owe it to their memory and all our troops to do what's right in Iraq.

I also want to speak directly to the more than 150,000 troops currently risking their lives as far away as Iraq and Afghanistan. Your country is proud of you. You are the most dedicated, capable military we've ever had. We are united as a nation in our support for you. We pledge to stand with your families as you stand on the front lines for ours. You are the best of America. And you perform magnificently every day. We thank you for your service and your sacrifice.

Twenty-three months ago, President Bush came here to ask the American people for our support. And he promised then to make the right choices when it came to sending young Americans to Iraq.

Here in Cincinnati, he said that if Congress approved the resolution giving him the authority to use force, it did not mean that military action would be "unavoidable". But he chose not to give the weapons inspectors the time they needed to get the job done and give meaning to the words, going to war as a last resort.

Here in Cincinnati, he promised "to lead a coalition." But he failed to build a broad, strong coalition of allies and he rushed to war without a plan to win the peace.

Here in Cincinnati, from this hall, on that night, he spoke to the nation, and promised: "If we have to act, we will take every precaution that is possible. We will plan carefully. We will act with the full power of the United States military. We will act with allies at our side and we will prevail."

But then, George W. Bush made the wrong choices. He himself now admits he miscalculated in Iraq. In truth, his miscalculation was ignoring the advice that was given to him, including the best advice of America's own military. When he didn't like what he was hearing, he even fired the Army Chief of Staff. His miscalculation was going to war without taking every precaution and without giving the inspectors time. His miscalculation was going to war without planning carefully and without the allies we should have had. As a result, America has paid nearly 90 percent of the bill in Iraq. Contrast that with the Gulf War, where our allies paid 95 percent of the costs.

George W. Bush's wrong choices have led America in the wrong direction in Iraq and left America without the resources we need here at home. The cost of the President's go-it-alone policy in Iraq is now \$200 billion and counting. \$200 billion for Iraq, but they tell us we can't afford after-school programs for our children. \$200 billion for Iraq, but they tell us we can't afford health care for our veterans. \$200 billion for Iraq, but they tell us we can't afford to keep the 100,000 new police we put on the streets during the 1990s.

Well we're here today to tell them: they're wrong. And it's time to lead America in a new direction.

When it comes to Iraq, it's not that I would have done one thing differently from the President, I would've done almost

everything differently. I would have given the inspectors the time they needed before rushing to war. I would have built a genuine coalition of our allies around the world. I would've made sure that every soldier put in harm's way had the equipment and body armor they needed. I would've listened to the senior military leaders of this country and the bipartisan advice of Congress. And, if there's one thing I learned from my own service, I would never have gone to war without a plan to win the peace.

I would not have made the wrong choices that are forcing us to pay nearly the entire cost of this war - \$200 billion that we're not investing in education, health care, and job creation here at home.

\$200 billion for going-it-alone in Iraq. That's the wrong choice; that's the wrong direction; and that's the wrong leadership for America.

While we're spending that \$200 billion in Iraq, 8 million Americans are looking for work - 2 million more than when George W. Bush took office - and we're told that we can't afford to invest in job training and job creation here at home.

But for the Bush administration, helping Americans find a good job has never been the priority. The first time we've heard much about it at all was during this campaign. And at that convention in New York last week, they actually told us that outsourcing jobs was good for America. That shouldn't be a surprise because that's what they've been doing for four years - and if they get another chance, that's exactly what they will do for four more years. That's the wrong choice; that's the wrong direction; and that's the wrong leadership for America.

As president, I will set a new direction. I will close the tax loopholes that reward companies for shipping jobs overseas. Instead, we're going to reward companies that create and keep good jobs here in the United States of America.

Because of this President's wrong choices, we're spending \$200 billion in Iraq while the costs of health care have gone through the roof and we're told we don't have the resources to make health care affordable and available for all Americans. Today, 45 million Americans have no health insurance at all - 5 million more than the day George W. Bush took office.

And after four years of no action, no concern, and hardly a mention of those struggling to afford health care, the President finally told us last week that he actually had a plan. Well, we only had to wait twenty-four hours to find out what that was. Because the very next day he raised Medicare premiums 17 percent - the biggest increase in Medicare premiums in the history of that program. And here's the kicker - a lot of that money is nothing more than a windfall to the insurance companies and HMOs. They're charging 17 percent more for Medicare while making America pay \$200 billion for a go-it-alone policy in Iraq. That's the wrong choice; that's the wrong direction; and that's the wrong leadership for America.

As President, I will set a new direction. George W. Bush believes when it comes to health care, the big drug companies come first, the insurance companies come second, and you come last. Well, I'm going to put you first. Our plan will take on the waste and greed in the health care system and save the average family up to \$1000 a year on their premiums. Our plan will help small businesses deal with the most expensive cases. Our plan will cover all children. When I am president, America will stop being the only advanced nation in the world which fails to understand that health care is not a privilege for the wealthy, the connected, and the elected, it is a right for all Americans.

Because of George W. Bush's wrong choices, we're spending \$200 billion in Iraq while we're running up deficits that threaten Social Security. In fact, they're raiding the Social Security Trust Fund to pay for their mistakes in Iraq. At that convention in New York last week, George Bush said that he actually had a new idea. And you know what it was? The bad, old idea of privatizing social security -- and cutting your benefits. That's the wrong choice; that's the wrong direction; and that's the wrong leadership for America.

As President, I will not privatize Social Security. I will not cut benefits. I will not raise the retirement age. Because when you've worked for a lifetime, America owes you what you've earned.

And because of this President's wrong choices, we're spending \$200 billion in Iraq instead of investing in making America energy independent. George W. Bush's energy policy is to trust the big oil companies and the Saudis. In fact, a national news magazine just reported that a senior member of the Saudi Royal family said that as far as they're concerned, in the U.S. Presidential election, "It's Bush all the way." I want an America that relies on its own ingenuity and innovation, not the Saudi Royal Family.

We're going to invest in technology and the vehicles of the future, so that no young American will ever be held hostage to our dependence on oil from the Middle East. That's the right choice; that's the right direction; and that's the

right leadership for America.

Because of this President's wrong choices, we're spending \$200 billion in Iraq while we're told that we can't afford to do everything that we should for homeland security. I believe it's wrong to be opening firehouses in Baghdad and closing them down in the United States of America. It's wrong to cut money for our first responders. It's wrong to let 95 percent of the cargo that comes into this country get by without ever being physically inspected. That's the wrong choice; that's the wrong direction; and that's the wrong leadership for America.

As President, I will set a new direction. We're going to defend this country here at home. We're going to do all we possibly can to protect it from another terrorist attack. And we're going to make homeland security a priority, not a political slogan.

My friends, today we are bearing the cost of the war in Iraq almost alone - \$200 billion and counting.

Nearly two years after George W. Bush spoke to the nation from this very place, we know how wrong his choices were. He says he "miscalculated." He calls Iraq a "catastrophic success." But a glance at the front pages or a look at the nightly news shows the hard reality: Rising instability. Spreading violence. Growing extremism. Havens for terrorists that weren't there before. And today, even the Pentagon admits, Entire regions of Iraq are controlled by insurgents and terrorists.

I call this course a catastrophic choice that has cost us \$200 billion because we went it alone, and we've paid an even more unbearable price in young American lives.

We need a new direction. I know what we need to do in Iraq. We need to bring our allies to our side, share the burdens, reduce the cost to American taxpayers, and reduce the risk to American soldiers. We need to train Iraqi military and police - we need to train them more rapidly, more effectively, and in greater numbers to take over the job of protecting their own country. That's what I'll do as Commander-in-Chief - because that's the right way to get the job done and bring our troops home.

You know, the President said one thing in his convention speech that's true. He said we all need to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. But you know, it's George W. Bush who has set low expectations -- and met them. He doesn't believe that America can be strong in the world while we also make progress here at home. He believes we have to choose one or the other. That's a false choice - and I reject it. I believe we can lead in the world and lead America to greater progress and prosperity than we've ever known before.

Half a century ago, from here in Union Terminal, thousands of soldiers waved one last goodbye to their families before heading off to the Second World War. In that war, their bravery, and leaders who made the right choices, brought victory over tyranny and prosperity here at home.

When I'm president, America will once again stand up to our enemies without destroying or denying our best hopes here at home. We will strengthen our military to meet new threats and we will build and lead strong alliances. We will build a stronger America, with good jobs, better wages, health care for all, and energy independence. With the right choices and the right leadership, we will set a new direction for America. We will build an America stronger at home and respected in the world. As Franklin Roosevelt once said, "The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today." Well, I believe there are no limits for tomorrow. But we need to make the right choices today. With your help, we will restore the true greatness of our nation and set a new direction for our future.

Thank you, God bless you, and God Bless America.

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