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Excerpts Of Remarks As Prepared For Delivery At The National Action Network Convention

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New York, New York - Below are excerpts of remarks as prepared for delivery today by Senator John Edwards at the Ninth Annual National Action Network Convention's "Keepers of the Dream Dinner."

"Tonight, I want to talk about intolerance and inequality and the insidious way they feed on each other, hurting not only the people and groups they target, but all of us and the future of our country.

"We've obviously heard a lot about this lately thanks to the repugnant remarks of one broadcaster on the radio and television last week.

"I find it astonishing that there was even a debate over whether Don Imus' comments crossed the line. And I know I don't have to tell anybody here: Don Imus' comments didn't just cross the line. They defined the line that divides this country like the blade of a knife.

"There can be no debate over how much bigotry is too much bigotry. Any bigotry is too much.

"There can be no question of how much intolerance this country can tolerate; we have already tolerated its effects for far too long.

"And let's be crystal clear: Intolerance affects everything, starting with our economy and ending with our ability to lead at a time of massive global change and new threats to our security.

"I think some people really believe that we have put these things behind us; that the civil rights movement took care of all that and everyone is on a level playing field now.

"I think some people really believe that all you have to do to succeed in this country is pull yourself up by your bootstraps and work hard.

"Well, I can tell you, I have traveled all over this country and I have been in the places where people's bootstraps are worn to a thread from all the pulling they've been doing. Places where all the hard work in the world hasn't helped to pull them out of poverty—because the system discriminates and opportunity isn't equal. But if we come together and are honest about it, we can change that and build an America that gives every American an equal chance.

"There is no question in my mind that intolerance is a direct cause of one of our greatest and most threatening problems: the growing disparity between rich and poor, between haves and have nots, between working people and all those powerful forces who do not have their best interests in mind. Because guess what? The people that are usually the targets of intolerance and bigotry are too often the same people who suffer from lack of opportunity, the same people who are left behind. And as long as intolerance pervades our culture, it's far too easy for politicians in Washington to ignore the big changes we need to make in order to end poverty once and for all.

"I don't just talk about these issues here—racial intolerance, the two Americas that still exists—I talk about them everywhere I go, because it's silence that allows them to survive and even thrive. And I hope everyone running for president will do the same, because we have an obligation and the opportunity to help end the silence.

"It's a shame we have to wait for the Don Imus' of the world to provoke a national conversation through bigotry—but we should jump at the chance to have this conversation, not just to look at whatever bigotry lies in our own hearts, but to finally engage on a problem that isn't going anywhere unless we do something about it. And our strength as a nation depends on it."

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Oct 24, 2007
Glenwood, Iowa

Community Meeting with John Edwards
Oct 24, 2007
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Community Meeting with John Edwards
Oct 24, 2007
Shenandoah, Iowa

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