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McCain Addresses Franklin Pierce University

November 19, 2007

ARLINGTON, VA -- U.S. Senator John McCain delivered remarks to a Town Hall Meeting at Franklin Pierce University in Rindge, New Hampshire today, Sunday, November 18th at 6:15 p.m. EST. Below are McCain's remarks as prepared for delivery:

My friends, we are at last nearing the moment in this long election season when something important happens: the voters get to speak. Until now, the race has been defined by political professionals and pundits, who talk about polls, and money, and ads, and endorsements, and who won debates, and who attacked whom, and all the things that make these campaigns interesting to Washington, and less so to you. Now it's your turn.

In less than two months, the voters of New Hampshire will choose the man or woman they believe should lead this country for the next four years. I trust you to make the right decision about who has the experience, judgment, character and courage to lead this country at a critical hour in our history. It's easy to lose sight of the importance of this election given all the nonsense that seemed to dominate much of its coverage to date. But New Hampshire voters understand our nation faces a truly historic decision that will affect not only America's destiny but the course of human history. We live in momentous times. We face a global threat from enemies for whom no attack is too cruel. The world is changing in profound ways. We need to make those changes work for us and for all people who share our beliefs in free markets and free people. Our government has failed to meet some of its most basic responsibilities and the American people have lost trust in their leaders. This election is about big things, not small ones. We can't muddle through the next four years, bickering among ourselves, and leave to others the work that is ours to do.

Now the responsibility again falls to the American people to set the course we follow in the years ahead: whether we go forward or backward; whether we fear the future or make history. That is your choice in this election, and it couldn't be a bigger one.

When you make your decision, you must ask yourself two questions: which candidate has the best chance to lead our party to victory; and which is best prepared and most committed to keeping this nation safe, prosperous, and powerful. I believe the answer to both questions is the same. I am that candidate. And I ask for your vote.

I'm the conservative Republican with the best chance of defeating Senator Clinton, or whomever the Democrats nominate, and take on the challenges that confront us. I'm as committed today as when I first put on the uniform of our country to the cause that has been the work of my life: the interests and ideals of our country. I'm no more a perfect servant of my country than I am a perfect human being. But in my years of service, I hope I have proven myself worthy of your trust.

We face formidable challenges, but I'm not afraid of them. I'm prepared for them. I know how the military works, what it can do, what it can do better, and what it should not do. I know how Congress works, how to make it work for the country and not just the re-election of its members. I know how the world works. I know the good and the evil in it. I know how to work with leaders who share our dreams of a freer, safer and more prosperous world, and how to stand up to those who don't. I know how to fight and how to make peace.

If I'm your nominee and Senator Clinton is the nominee of the other party, the country will face as clear a choice as any in recent memory. That's as it should be for such an important election. She will be a formidable candidate. And while our differences are many and profound, I intend this to be a respectful debate. She and I disagree over America's direction, and it is a serious disagreement. But I don't doubt her ability to lead this country where she thinks it should go.

On matters of war and peace, I offer Americans my experience, my personal familiarity with the tragedy of war, deep involvement in all of the national security issues of the last two decades, and steadfast conviction that America cannot afford to relinquish its leadership of the world, and the world can't afford it either.

There comes a time when a President can no longer rely on briefing books and power points, when the experts and advisors have all weighed in, when the sum total of one's life becomes the foundation from which he or she makes the decisions that determine the course of history. No other candidate has my experience or the judgment it informs.

I would never make a judgment about going to war based on whether it was a popular thing to do. I would only make that grave decision were I convinced America's interests and ideals were so threatened that it required the greatest sacrifice our country can make.

And once I decided, I wouldn't surrender when we can still succeed, and accept the terrible consequences that would ensue, because I feared the polls more than history's judgment.

Senator Clinton told General Petraeus that his confidence in his new strategy and in the ability of the troops he has the honor to command required "a willing suspension of disbelief." Now, it becomes clear that General Petraeus was right. For the time being, Senator Clinton has suspended her belief in the abundant evidence of success as her rivals and

the fringe of her party pull her toward a position she knows is irresponsible.

I was the only candidate in either party to say we were following a strategy in Iraq that was doomed to failure, and to call for the change that is working today. I took abuse from members of my own party -- some of it pretty tough -- for doing so. And I stuck by it knowing it could hurt my chances for the presidency. I did it for one reason: I would rather lose an election than stay silent and watch my country lose a war. I will always put America's security before politics, always.

One the one hand, Senator Clinton says we can't abandon Iraq to al Qaeda and the influence of Iran. On the other, she wants a firm deadline for withdrawal that would do just that. Senator Clinton rejected unconditional talks with Iran, but now says she would negotiate with no conditions.

As we deal with the threat of a nuclear armed Iran there are many things we can do short of war to prevent Iranians from making that fateful decision. We can strengthen our diplomacy, stand up to the Russians and Chinese, and organize our allies and Iran's neighbors to impose tough economic sanctions that could undermine Iran's economy and unleash popular resentment of the regime that should cause them to reconsider their dangerous ambitions. We can make it very clear to Iran's leaders that we will not allow them to obtain weapons that would destabilize the entire Middle East and threaten America's most vital security interests. Senator Clinton would start with unconditional negotiations, despite Iran's clear record of using negotiations to forestall sanctions and growing international opposition while they accelerate their nuclear program.

I will increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps. For too long we have asked too few to do too much. We have asked our servicemen and women to bid their loved ones goodbye for a third or fourth or fifth combat tour. We need to recruit more Americans willing to defend our country -- and I know there are more if we only ask them -- but for reasons I will never understand, the former Secretary of Defense refused to do so.

To rebuild our military as well as the capabilities of our intelligence and law enforcement agencies; and the capacity of all branches of government to defend us will require some hard choices. We will have to stop the inexcusable growth of government in other areas. Senator Clinton promises to increase the size of the military as well, but she won't make the tough decisions necessary to do it.

I am absolutely committed to reducing the size of government. I've fought against wasteful spending and big government solutions from my first day in Congress. Senator Clinton would preside over another massive increase in the size of government. She'll have Washington assume more of your responsibilities, and raise your taxes to pay for it. She won't address seriously the fiscal crisis of Social Security and Medicare or if she does she'll let congressional Democrats convince her to raise your taxes.

I won't ignore the problem and leave it to another unluckier generation of leaders and I won't raise your taxes. I will work with Congress in an open and sincere way to address these problems, but if at the end of the day, Congress wants to play politics with the issue, I will go to them and the American people, and insist they vote up or down on my proposal. I won't lack the courage to fix our toughest problems and let them become worse on someone else's watch.

I'll take on every special interest in town to finally reform our insanely complicated and punitive tax code. Senator Clinton won't.

Senator Clinton will address the lack of health care insurance in this country by proposing another big government mandate. I'll make health care more accessible by making it more affordable, without ruining the finest quality health care in the world.

Senator Clinton will appoint more judges who believe they should make the American people's political decisions for them. I will appoint judges who take their oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States as seriously as I take mine.

These are some of the essential issues this election will decide. I offer one direction for America. Senator Clinton and her Democratic rivals offer another, a course I believe is absolutely wrong for America and wrong for the world. It is your turn, my friends, to decide who is right. It's a huge responsibility. I know you will take it seriously.

I don't expect you to take our promises on faith. I expect you to listen to us, as New Hampshire voters always do, and then examine our records to determine whether we can be trusted to keep our word to you.

I didn't seek public office to go along to get along. I went to Washington to get something done for the people who sent me there. And since then, I know I've made some people angry.

I made defense contractors angry when I blew the whistle on a \$30 billion boondoggle and the culprits were sent to jail.

I upset the special interests and Washington lobbyists when I fought for ethics reform and to stop union bosses and corporations from writing million dollar checks to political campaigns.

I made the Pentagon angry when I called for the resignation of Don Rumsfeld; said we needed a different strategy in Iraq; and a bigger military so that our sons and daughters didn't have to serve four and five tours in combat zones.

I displeased a lot of the media when I said we couldn't afford to fail in Iraq, and stood by the changes in our strategy that are now showing success.

I made some folks mad when I worked to cut harmful greenhouse emissions because I believe climate change is a real and needs to be addressed now.

I made politicians angry when I called for earmark reform and spending cuts; for government to do its job, not your job; to do it better and with less of your money. I said no to bridges to nowhere and 74 million dollars for peanut storage in a defense spending bill.

Yes, I've made a lot of people angry. But I didn't go to Washington to win the Mr. Congeniality award. I went there to serve my country.

I might not like the business as usual crowd in Washington, and they might not like me. But I love America. I love her enough to make some people angry.

I'm going to put the business as usual crowd out of business -- and make them thank me when I do. I won't only restore your trust. I'll make you proud of your government again. I'm going to keep this country safe, prosperous and powerful. So help me God. And I respectfully ask for your vote to help me do it.

Thank you.

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