

**CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE**

**TAKE BACK AMERICA 2006**

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 2006**

**WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**9:00 – 9:30 A.M.**

**SPEAKER:  
SENATOR RUSS FEINGOLD (D-WI)**

*Transcript by:  
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SENATOR RUSS FEINGOLD (D-WI): (Cheers, applause.) Thanks again. Thank you. Thanks a lot! (Continued cheers, applause.) Good morning.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I love you, Russ! (Laughter.)

SEN. FEINGOLD: How does one live up to this? (Laughter.) Thank you so much for that incredibly warm reception. And I just think this Campaign for America's Future and this Take Back America event that you're having, it is going great guns. I can tell from a distance that this has been a fantastic event. I congratulate you, Roger, and everybody. You are showing the whole country what progressives can do here in Washington at this conference. (Cheers, applause.)

And I want to especially thank Eli for inviting me. I got a chance to spend a little time with him in Maine recently. And apart from the fact that I am well over twice his age -- (laughter) -- which is really incredible to me as a dad of somebody that age, to me he is a symbol; what he's done with the modern advances that we have that allow progressives to communicate with each other and to use it to help democracy, he is a symbol of the future progressive America that we're going to build. That's what Eli is to me. (Applause.)

2004, November, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to be reelected to my third term to the United States Senate. That was a night that we worked hard to make sure it would happen, in a tough race where my opponent came after me for my votes that Eli was just talking about. So we were happy. But as the night went on, it became obvious that really it was a disaster overall: the loss of the presidency, the belief that we had that we had a great chance of getting a majority of the United States Senate was just the opposite -- the worst-case scenario in many years -- 45 Democratic senators, one of the lowest numbers in American history. It was pretty sad. And I got a lot of communications from people saying, "Hey, you're one of the last Democratic senators around. What are you going to do about this?"

You see, my plan was to spend my 50s helping John Kerry and John Edwards change this country. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a United States senator. (Applause.)

But it didn't happen that way. And so I've been around not only Wisconsin but around the country. I started off by going to Alabama. And then we went to Nashville. And what we found all over this country is that there were people who really believed that if we take a 50-state strategy, that we really can turn this country around. It should be one progressive America, not a divided America. (Applause.)

And, understandably, my colleagues and their wonderful people have to said to me things like, "Russ, all I care about is that we get the majority this fall. That's all that matters." Sometimes it's used as an excuse to not do something we ought to do because we got to get the majority. Well, I want to remind you that we were in the majority in the United States Senate when we passed the USA Patriot Act and when we went to war in Iraq. Being in the majority is not enough. (Cheers, applause.) We have to show that when we're in the majority, that we are ready to stand on principle and do the right thing. That's part of the goal of getting the majority. (Cheers, applause.)

We have an obligation to our country and to the American people and especially to our most ardent progressives not to be afraid of criticizing this administration when it is wrong on either international or domestic policy. This is our job. I also happen to think it's good politics. But it is our obligation.

As I go to every Wisconsin county every year -- and I do -- I do a listening session in every county every year -- 72 counties. I'm about to do my 1,000th listening session. And as I go to all these states, from Colorado to Maine, people say the exact same thing, same words. I've never seen anything like it. They say, "When are you guys going to stand up? When are you going to stand up for principles?" That's what they say to me everywhere in Wisconsin and everywhere in the United States of America. (Cheers, applause.)

Now, our strategists -- who we sometimes listen to and sometimes hopefully take with a grain of salt what the consultants in Washington say -- they'll come in now and tell you -- although it's getting not so good right now -- the Republicans are in deep trouble, almost laughing about the situation they're in, suggesting that somehow the answer here is to just play it safe, don't rock the boat, don't talk about the tough issues. Well, I'll tell you something. There will not be progressive change in this country this year or any other year if we think we can win by default or by just running out the clock. (Applause.) That is not an approach that persuades people that you are ready to govern. Otherwise, what it makes us look like is that we are weak and full of fear.

We must show that we will take strong stands on tough issues, and today I want to focus particularly on the international situation since 9/11. We must show that we will stand up to the incompetence and wrongdoing of this administration in the fight against al Qaeda and terrorism.

Everywhere I go, as I've said, people say, "When are you going to get some backbone on these issues concerning the fight against terrorism?" The perception is that we won't stand up when the administration starts saber-rattling.

I've seen examples of this on a number of occasions. I of course voted to support the Afghanistan invasion. I thought it was the necessary thing to do, to attack the Taliban and al Qaeda.

But whenever they want to put us back in our foxholes, as I like to say, they just come out and say, "Well, you guys aren't patriotic. You don't support the troops." And time and again, too many of the Democratic leaders have said, "You know, you're right. This isn't working. It's too dangerous to talk about doing something different."

I saw a little sign of hope last fall, and I was very pleased when Senator Harry Reid said, "You know, until we get some answers on the deceptions that were involved in this Iraq war, we're going to send the Senate into secret session." That was a great moment, and it gave me hope that we would do this. (Applause.)

But it didn't last. There was some help on the Patriot Act issue. People had the right reaction in the first place to the illegal wiretapping. When the holidays came, we went back to our states. The president went out and did his little speeches. Everybody came back and seemed kind of nervous and didn't want to take him on anymore.

Well, we must stand up to this. We must be clear that we care about fighting the terrorist network that attacked us.

But we also have to be able to say when they got it wrong, and they got it wrong on Iraq. Iraq was a mistake. (Applause.)

You know, this was my reaction to the argument that we should invade Iraq. I listened carefully. Had there been a connection to Osama bin Laden, had there been credible proof of an imminent threat of weapons of mass destruction being used against us, I would have voted for it.

But it wasn't there. I was in the rooms with the CIA briefings. It wasn't there. It wasn't credible.

I still cannot believe that Democrats helped facilitate this. You know, I didn't just write an op-ed about this. I didn't, after the fact, say, "Gee, you know, that was kind of a mistake." I just plain voted against it because I thought it was a terrible mistake in the fight against terrorism. (Cheers, applause.)

I mean, if you need a smoking gun on this -- I hope you've seen this document. The administration had, two months after 9/11, on the State Department website with the president's name on there, a list of 45 countries where al Qaeda was operating. It included Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Ireland, the United States. Guess what country wasn't even on their list? Iraq wasn't even on their list. (Laughter.)

And then we expressed the joy that I feel that al-Zarqawi can never kill again. And I am extremely thrilled that he can never do what he did again. Remember, he wasn't in Iraq at the time. When they said this stuff at the U.N., he was up in the Kurdish-controlled area. He didn't have a base of operations in Iraq. The way we did this thing, the mistaken way we did this thing set up a platform for him to come into Iraq

and recruit terrorists from all around the world, who attack American soldiers and innocent Iraqis. (Applause.) That's what our policy did.

And as we recognize the enormous depletion of our military and the enormous cost of this Iraq mistake, let's also think about where we're not paying attention. You know, I recently went to Indonesia, largest Muslim country in the world, fourth largest country in the world. You know what I was told by the ambassador there? That I was only the second senator to even visit Indonesia in the last 2-1/2 years. Not even showing up. How about Somalia? We know that was a terrorist and al Qaeda base. Well, last week, because this administration wasn't paying attention or really getting serious about it, now a radical Islamic group has taken control of Mogadishu.

So we have all our eggs into one basket. While we act as if Iraq is the be-all and end-all of our national security, this administration is not minding the store. This is mismanagement. This is mismanagement of this historic battle that we have to fight.

And so I ask, what is wrong with having a clear timetable to bring our troops out of Iraq by the end of this year? What is wrong with that? (Cheers, applause.)

Last August I became the first member of the Senate to propose such a timeline. It is a timeline based on reality. Military experts that we have talked with say this can be done safely and reasonably within the next six months.

I advocate it, obviously, for many reasons, but first and foremost, it is in our national security interest to stop making the same mistake over and over again! (Cheers, applause.) We have to stop this mistake and get reoriented toward the real issues! (Continued cheers, applause.)

And as we correct this error, we also have to show that we're willing to stand up not only to these strategic mistakes and the seemingly endless misleading statements and the incompetence, we also have to stand up for our values, for our Constitution, for our Bill of Rights, and for the rule of law. That has to be part of this. (Applause.) The last time I checked, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution were not repealed on 9/11. (Laughter.) And so -- (applause) --

I know the administration likes to obfuscate this and say: Well, don't you think we ought to be able to wiretap terrorists? Yes, we do. I do. I think if we've got some evidence that somebody's a terrorist, we ought to be able to wiretap them. I hope nobody really disagrees with that. But that's absolutely phony. That is a red herring to justify what the president has said he has the power to do. When this program of illegal wiretapping was exposed, remember, he didn't just say: Yeah, you caught me. He said: Yeah, you better believe I did this. He said: I'm proud of it. He said: I will do whatever I can do to protect the American people, which is a very bold and proud statement. It just misses three words: under the law. The president does not have the right to do this on his own. (Cheers, applause.) He has to follow the rule of law. (Continued cheers, applause.)

And when these revelations came out in late December, I just checked back on what people said. I mean, George Will was confronted with this suddenly, and George Will said: Well, gee, I thought this was what the revolution was fought about. (Laughter.) He said: This appears to be monarchical. So I listened and I thought, well, people should be pretty upset about this. Well, the president, of course, had misled the American people about the fact that this program -- suggesting that it didn't exist, and he continued to basically say anybody that questioned what he had done here was being unpatriotic and didn't care about getting the terrorists.

Well, I thought that the Congress would respond. I'm on both the Intelligence Committee and the Judiciary Committee, and I listened carefully for three months to what the arguments could possibly be to justify the legality of this. Some of the more ridiculous ones were that we had authorized the illegal wiretapping on a domestic basis in the authorization of force against Afghanistan. Well, the Republicans even laughed that one out of the room. (Laughter.) And then, we got down to the bottom line, what the president was really arguing and what the president and his people continue to argue; and that is, that under Article II of the Constitution, as commander in chief, if he doesn't like a law that Congress has passed in the area of national security, he can disregard it and do whatever he wants. That is the doctrine. It has no limits.

Many of my colleagues said, well, maybe we should just make this legal, pass a statute. That's where we were at in early March. Let's just make it legal, and what a message to the kids: Break a law and we'll just make it legal. (Laughter.) Well, that's not good enough. In fact, this is a constitutional crisis. (Cheers, applause.)

I am not advocating the impeachment of the president, but I do believe that his assertion is right in the strike zone of what the Founders of this country meant when they wrote the words, "high crimes and misdemeanors." I believe that's what they meant. (Sustained cheers, applause.)

But what I recommend -- what I recommend and what I proposed was that we stop short of that, that we take a responsible step to make sure the pages of history are not blank, and that we pass a resolution to censure the president for his illegal conduct and for his attack on the Constitution of the United States of America! (Cheers, applause.)

My daughter called me up and said, "Dad, nobody's done this since 1837." (Laughter.) And I said, "Well, nobody's really ever made these assertions about Article II, and if they have, the Supreme Court has struck it down." I think this is a perfectly reasonable thing that we must do.

Now, I hope -- and I know that the reporters immediately wrote the story that nobody was supporting it, within 20 minutes -- I hadn't even introduced it -- and that somehow they were treating me like I had avian flu -- (laughter) -- or that I'd gotten the mumps in Iowa or something. (Laughter.) But when they looked at the public opinion

polls, they were shocked that in minutes, in days, people said, "Well, we have to do something here. There has to be some accountability."

And then I had to sit there in meeting after meeting in Washington with these consultants coming in saying, "Hey, this issue's a loser." This is what they tell you: "Don't touch this stuff. If we touch this, we'll lose."

Well, that is not only wrong in terms of our country and our system of government, it also misreads the mood of the American public, who want to be treated right, who want to have their Constitution stood up for -- (applause) -- who want to believe that we still believe in the value of the rule of law in this country! (Cheers, applause.)

So the president will be president for two and a half more years. (Boos from the audience.) Those who say how come your censure resolution isn't moving -- we've got two and a half years, and it is very important to remember that, because however this happens, if we don't do it, our kids will look at that history book and they'll say, "You know, they're saying the president can do whatever he wants. Let's look back what happened in 2006, what did they do?" And there will be a blank slate. We will have failed as a generation to reassert our Founders' vision of checks and balance, separation of powers and the rule of law! (Cheers, applause.)

And so to conclude, I would urge you, as you go out this year and do all the wonderful things you're going to do in the various venues that you work in, to make the point to people that you care as passionately as anyone about the tragedy of 9/11, you care as passionately as anyone about protecting our kids, that you have your memories of what happened on 9/11 and how it made you feel about your future and your kids' future and your grandchildren's' future.

But as you say that and as you share your own memories with people, make it clear that there is no greater victory for these terrorists than if they can get us out of fear to alter our great system of government. They would have no greater victory than to be able to do that to us. (Applause.) Make the argument -- make the argument based on the fact that the American people want to be focused on making sure that we're not attacked again. They do not want to fear that their own government is doing something inappropriate to them. That's a distraction that makes it harder for us to do this.

And finally -- and I'm not here to abdicate on anything to do with elections -- I just want to make an observation about the past. (Laughter.) Remember what happened in 2002. I was actually -- excuse me -- in 1992. I was elected to the United States Senate, and I was the 57th Democratic senator. There were 57 of us, and if you're the 57th, you're back by the candy drawer, which is great. (Laughter.) It's good candy. I was happy to be there. (Laughter.)

The Republicans had -- the Democrats had been control of the House for 40 years -- 40 years. We had a new, charismatic president, Bill Clinton. It looked like things were going to last for a while.

Well, you know what happened two years later? It's the first time I ever heard the term "tsunami," when people said what the Republicans did in '94 was a tsunami. And, you know, it was a political tsunami because they've had the House ever since. They've had the Senate all that time except for 18 months. And, yes, George Bush has been president for a very long time.

So my view is that this year can be a year when we win for a couple of years or we can win in a progressive way that will last for four years, six years, 10 years, 15 years or 20 years so we can change the face of America.

Thank you very much for having me. (Cheers, applause.)

(END)