

George H. W. Bush address accepting the presidential nomination at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans

August 18, 1988

Thank you. Thank you very very much.

I have many friends to thank tonight. I thank the voters who supported me. I thank the gallant men who entered the contest for this presidency this year and who have honored me with their support. And, for their kind and stirring words, I thank Gov. Tom Kean of New Jersey, Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, President Gerald Ford and my friend, President Ronald Reagan.

I accept your nomination for president. I mean to run hard, to fight hard, to stand on the issues and I mean to win. There are a lot of great stories in politics about the underdog winning, and this is going to be one of them.

And we're going to win with the help of Sen. Dan Quayle of Indiana, a young leader who has become a forceful voice in preparing America's workers for the labor force of the future. What a superb job he did here, tonight. Born in the middle of the century, in the middle of America and holding the promise of the future — I'm proud to have Dan Quayle at my side.

Many of you have asked, "When will this campaign really begin?" Well, I have come to this hall to tell you and to tell America: Tonight is the night.

For 7 1/2 years, I have helped the president conduct the most difficult job on Earth. Ronald Reagan asked for, and received, my candor. He never asked for, but he did receive, my loyalty. And those of you who saw the president's speech last week and listened to the simple truth of his words will understand my loyalty all these years.

But now, you must see me for what I am: the Republican candidate for president of the United States. And now I turn to the American people to share my hopes and intentions, and why and where I wish to lead.

And so tonight is for big things. But I'll try to be fair to the other side. I'll try to hold my charisma in check and, uh, no, I reject the temptation to engage in personal references. My approach this evening is, as Sgt. Joe Friday used to say, "Just the facts, ma'am."

And, after all, the facts are on our side.

I seek the presidency for a single purpose, a purpose that has motivated millions of Americans across the years and the ocean voyages. I seek the presidency to build a better America. It's that simple and that big.

I am a man who sees life in terms of missions — missions defined and

missions completed. And when I was a torpedo-bomber pilot, they defined the mission for us. And before we took off, we all understood that, no matter what, you try to reach the target. And there have been other missions for me — Congress, China, the CIA. But I am here tonight, and I am your candidate, because the most important work of my life is to complete the mission that we started in 1980. And how do we complete it? We build on it.

The stakes are high this year, and the choice is crucial, for the differences between the two candidates are as deep and wide as they have ever been in our long history.

Not only two very different men but two very different ideas of the future will be voted on this Election Day.

And what it all comes down to is this: My opponent's view of the world sees a long slow decline for our country, an inevitable fall mandated by impersonal historical forces. But America is not in decline. America is a rising nation.

He sees America as another pleasant country on the U.N. roll call, somewhere between Albania and Zimbabwe. And I see America as the leader, a unique nation with a special role in the world.

And this has been called the American Century because, in it, we were the dominant force for good in the world. We saved Europe, cured polio, went to the moon and lit the world with our culture. And now we're on the verge of a new century, and what country's name will it bear? I say it will be another American century.

Our work is not done; our force is not spent.

There are those who say there isn't much of a difference this year. But America, don't let 'em fool ya.

Two parties this year ask for your support. Both will speak of growth and peace, but only one has proved it can deliver. Two parties this year ask for your trust, but only one has earned it.

Eight years ago, I stood here with Ronald Reagan and we promised, together, to break with the past and return America to her greatness. Eight years later, look at what the American people have produced—the highest level of economic growth in our entire history and the lowest level of world tensions in more than 50 years.

Some say, you know some say, this isn't an election about ideology, that it's an election about competence. Well, it's nice of them to want to play on our field. But this election isn't only about competence, for competence is a narrow ideal. Competence makes the trains run on time but doesn't know where they're going. Competence is the creed of the technocrat who makes sure the gears mesh but doesn't for a second understand the magic of the machine.

The truth is, this election is about the beliefs we share, the values that we honor and the principles we hold dear.

But since someone brought up competence, consider the size of our triumph—a record number of Americans at work, a record high percentage of our people with jobs, a record high rate of new businesses, a record high rate of real personal income. These are the facts.

And one way you know our opponents know the facts is that, to attack our record, they have to misrepresent it. They call it a Swiss cheese economy. Well, that's the way it may look to the three blind mice. But, when they were in charge, it was all holes and no cheese.

Inflation—you know the litany—inflation was 12 percent when we came in. We got it down to four. Interest rates were more than 21. We cut them in half. Unemployment was up and climbing, and now it's the lowest in 14 years.

My friends, eight years ago this economy was flat on its back—intensive care. And we came in and gave it emergency treatment, got the temperature down by lowering regulation and got the blood pressure down when we lowered taxes. And pretty soon, the patient was up, back on his feet and stronger than ever.

And now, who do we hear knocking on the door but the same doctors who made him sick, and they're telling us to put them in charge of the case again. My friends, they're lucky we don't hit 'em with a malpractice suit.

We've created 17 million new jobs the past five years, more than twice as many as Europe and Japan combined, and they're good jobs. The majority of them created in the past six years paid an average—average—of more than \$22,000 a year. And someone better take "a message to Michael." Tell him we have been creating good jobs at good wages. The fact is: They talk, and we deliver. They promise, and we perform.

And there are millions of young Americans in their 20s who barely remember, barely remember the days of gas lines and unemployment lines. And now they're marrying and starting careers. And to those young people I say, "You have the opportunity you deserve, and I'm not going to let them take it away from you."

The leaders of this expansion have been the women of America, who helped create the new jobs and filled two out of every three of them. And to the women of America, I say, "You know better than anyone that equality begins with economic empowerment. You're gaining economic power, and I'm not going to let them take it away from you."

There are millions of Americans who were brutalized by inflation. We arrested it, and we're not going to let it out on furlough. And we're going to keep that Social Security trust fund sound and out of reach of the big spenders. To America's elderly, I say, "Once again, you have the security that is your right, and I'm not going to let them take it away from you."

I know the liberal Democrats are worried about the economy. They're worried it's going to remain strong. And they're right. It is. With the right leadership, it will remain strong.

But let's be frank. Things aren't perfect in this country. There are people who haven't tasted the fruits of the expansion. I've talked to farmers about the bills they can't pay, and I've been to the factories that feel the strain of change. And I've seen the urban children who play amidst the shattered glass and shattered lives. And there are the homeless. And you know, it doesn't do any good to debate endlessly which policy mistake of the '70s is responsive. They're there, and we have to help them.

But what we must remember, if we're to be responsible and compassionate, is that economic growth is the key to our endeavors.

I want growth that stays, that broadens, that touches, finally, all Americans, from the hollows of Kentucky to the sunlit streets of Denver, from the suburbs of Chicago to the broad avenues of New York, from the oil fields of Oklahoma to the farms of the Great Plains.

And can we do it? Of course, we can. We know how. We've done it. And if we continue to grow at our current rate, we will be able to produce 30 million jobs in the next eight years. And we will do it by maintaining our commitment to free and fair trade, by keeping government spending down and by keeping taxes down.

Our economic life is not the only test of our success. One issue overwhelms all the others, and that's the issue of peace.

And look at the world on this bright August night. The spirit of democracy is sweeping the Pacific rim. China feels the winds of change. New democracies assert themselves in South America. And one by one, the unfree places fall, not to the force of arms but to the force of an idea: Freedom works.

And we have a new relationship with the Soviet Union: the INF {Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces} Treaty, the beginning of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the beginning of the end of the Soviet proxy war in Angola and, with it, the independence of Namibia. Iran and Iraq move toward peace.

It's a watershed. It is no accident.

It happened when we acted on the ancient knowledge that strength and clarity lead to peace; weakness and ambivalence lead to war. You see, weakness tempts aggressors. Strength stops them. I will not allow this country to be made weak again, never.

The tremors in the Soviet world continue. The hard earth there has not yet settled. Perhaps what is happening will change our world forever and perhaps not. A prudent skepticism is in order, and so is hope. But, either way, we're in an unprecedented position to change the nature of our relationship—not by

pre-emptive concession but by keeping our strength, not by yielding up defense systems with nothing won in return but by hard, cool engagement in the tug and pull of diplomacy.

My life has been lived in the shadow of war. I almost lost my life in one, and I hate war, love peace. And we have peace, and I am not going to let anyone take it away from us.

Our economy is strong but not invulnerable, and the peace is broad but can be broken. And now we must decide. We will surely have change this year, but will it be change that moves us forward or change that risks retreat?

In 1940, when I was barely more than a boy, Franklin Roosevelt said we shouldn't change horses in midstream.

My friends, these days the world moves even more quickly, and now, after two great terms, a switch will be made. But when you have to change horses in midstream, doesn't it make sense to switch to one who's going the same way?

An election that's about ideas and values is also about philosophy, and I have one.

At the bright center is the individual. And radiating out from him or her is the family, the essential unit of closeness and of love. For it's the family that communicates to our children, to the 21st century our culture, our religious faith, our traditions and history.

From the individual to the family to the community, and then on out to the town, to the church and the school and, still echoing out, to the county, the state and the nation — each doing only what it does well and no more. And I believe that power must always be kept close to the individual, close to the hands that raise the family and run the home.

I am guided by certain traditions. One is that there's a God, and He is good and His love, while free, has a self-imposed cost: We must be good to one another.

I believe in another tradition that is, by now, imbedded in the national soul. It's that learning is good in and of itself. You know, the mothers of the Jewish ghettos of the East would pour honey on a book so the children would know that learning is sweet. And the parents who settled hungry Kansas would take their children in from the fields when a teacher came. That is our history.

'We're a nation of community and there is another tradition. And that's the idea of community — a beautiful word with a big meaning, though liberal Democrats have an odd view of it. They see community as a limited cluster of interest groups, locked in odd conformity. And, in this view, the country waits passive while Washington sets the rules. But that's not what community means, not to me.

For we're a nation of community, of thousands and tens of thousands of ethnic, religious, social, business, labor union, neighborhood, regional and other organizations, all of them varied, voluntary and unique.

This is America: [the Knights of Columbus](#), the Grange, [Hadassah](#), the Disabled American Veterans, [the Order of Ahepa](#), the Business and Professional Women of America, the Union Hall, the Bible Study group, LULAC {League of United Latin American Citizens}, [Holy Name](#), [a brilliant diversity spreads like stars, like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky.](#)

Does government have a place? Yes. Government is part of the nation of communities, not the whole, just a part.

And I don't hate government. A government that remembers that the people are its master is a good and needed thing.

And I respect old-fashioned common sense and have no great love for the imaginings of the social planners. You see, I like what's been tested and found to be true.

For instance, should public school teachers be required to lead our children in the Pledge of Allegiance? My opponent says no, and I say yes.

Should society be allowed to impose the death penalty on those who commit crimes of extraordinary cruelty and violence? My opponent says no, but I say yes.

And should our children have the right to say a voluntary prayer or even observe a moment of silence in the schools? My opponent says no, but I say yes.

And should free men and women have a right to own a gun to protect their home? My opponent says no, but I say yes.

And is it right to believe in the sanctity of life and protect the lives of innocent children? My opponent says no, but I say yes.

You see, we must change, we've got to change from abortion to adoption. [And, let me tell you this, Barbara and I have an adopted granddaughter.](#) The day of her christening, we wept with joy. I thank God that her parents chose life.

I'm the one who believes it is a scandal to give a weekend furlough to a hardened, first-degree killer who hasn't even served enough time to be eligible for parole.

And I'm the one who says a drug dealer who is responsible for the death of a policeman should be subject to capital punishment.

And I'm the one who will not raise taxes. My opponent now says he'll raise

them as a last resort or a third resort. When a politician talks like that, you know that's one resort he'll be checking into. My opponent won't rule out raising taxes, but I will, and the Congress will push me to raise taxes, and I'll say no, and they'll push, and I'll say no, and they'll push again, and I'll say to them, "Read my lips: no new taxes."

Let me tell you more about the mission.

On jobs, my mission is 30 in eight, 30 million jobs in the next eight years.

Every one of our children deserves a first-rate school. The liberal Democrats want power in the hands of the federal government, and I want power in the hands of the parents. And I will encourage merit schools. I will give more kids a head start. And I'll make it easier to save for college.

I want a drug-free America, and this will not be easy to achieve. But I want to enlist the help of some people who are rarely included. Tonight, I challenge the young people of our country to shut down the drug dealers around the world. Unite with us, work with us. "Zero tolerance" isn't just a policy; it's an attitude.

Tell them what you think of people who underwrite the dealers who put poison in our society. And while you're doing that, my administration will be telling the dealers: "Whatever we have to do, we'll do, but your day is over; you are history."

I am going to do whatever it takes to make sure the disabled are included in the mainstream. For too long, they've been left out. But they're not going to be left out anymore.

And I am going to stop ocean dumping. Our beaches should not be garbage dumps, and our harbors should not be cesspools. And I am going to have the FBI trace the medical wastes, and we're going to punish the people who dump those infected needles into our oceans, lakes and rivers. And we must clean the air. We must reduce the harm done by acid rain.

And I'll put incentives back into the domestic energy industry, for I know from personal experience there is no security for the United States in further dependence on foreign oil.

In foreign affairs, I'll continue our policy of peace through strength. I'll move toward further cuts in the strategic and conventional arsenals of both the United States and the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc and NATO {North Atlantic Treaty Organization}. I'll modernize and preserve our technological edge, and that includes strategic defense. And a priority: Ban chemical and biological weapons from the face of the Earth. That will be a priority with me. And I intend to speak for freedom, stand for freedom and be a patient friend to anyone, East or West, who will fight for freedom.

It seems to me the presidency provides an incomparable opportunity for "gentle persuasion."

And I hope to stand for a new harmony, a greater tolerance. We've come far, but I think we need a new harmony among the races in our country. And we're on a journey into a new century, and we've got to leave that tired old baggage of bigotry behind.

Some people who are enjoying our prosperity have forgotten what it's for. But they diminish our triumph when they act as if wealth is an end in itself.

And there are those who have dropped their standards along the way, as if ethics were too heavy and slowed their rise to the top. There's graft in city hall, and there's greed on Wall Street. There's influence peddling in Washington, and the small corruptions of everyday ambition.

But, you see, I believe public service is honorable. And every time I hear that someone has breached the public trust, it breaks my heart.

And I wonder sometimes if we've forgotten who we are. We're the people who sundered a nation rather than allow a sin called slavery. And we're the people who rose from the ghettos and the deserts.

And we weren't saints, but we lived by standards. We celebrated the individual, but we weren't self-centered. We were practical, but we didn't live only for material things. We believed in getting ahead, but blind ambition wasn't our way.

The fact is: Prosperity has a purpose. It's to allow us to pursue "the better angels," to give us time to think and grow. Prosperity with a purpose means taking your idealism and making it concrete by certain acts of goodness. It means helping a child from an unhappy home learn how to read, and I thank my wife, Barbara, for all her work in helping people to read, in all her work for literacy in this country. It means teaching troubled children through your presence that there is such a thing as reliable love. Some would say it's soft and insufficiently tough to care about these things. But where is it written that we must act if we do not care, as if we are not moved?

Well, I am moved. I want a kinder and gentler nation.

Two men this year ask for your support, and you must know us.

As for me, I've held high office and done the work of democracy day-by-day. Yes, my parents were prosperous, and their children were lucky. But there were lessons we had to learn about life. John Kennedy discovered poverty when he campaigned in West Virginia; there were children who had no milk. And young Teddy Roosevelt met the new America when he roamed the immigrant streets of New York. And I learned a few things about life in a place called Texas.

And when I was working on this part of the speech, Barbara came in and asked what I was doing, and I looked up and I said, "I'm working hard." And she said, "Oh, dear, don't worry. Relax, sit back, take off your shoes and put

up your silver foot."

Now, we moved to west Texas 40 years ago, 40 years ago this year. The war was over, and we wanted to get out and make it on our own. Those were exciting days. We lived in a little shotgun house, one room for the three of us. Worked in the oil business and then started my own.

And in time, we had six children. Moved from the shotgun to a duplex apartment to a house and lived the dream—high-school football on Friday night, Little League, neighborhood barbecue.

People don't see their own experience as symbolic of an era but, of course, we were. And so was everyone else who was taking a chance and pushing into unknown territory with kids and a dog and a car. But the big thing I learned is the satisfaction of creating jobs, which meant creating opportunity, which meant happy families, who in turn could do more to help others and enhance their own lives. I learned that a good done by a single good job can be felt in ways you can't imagine.

It's been said that I'm not the most compelling speaker, and there are actually those who claim that I don't always communicate in the clearest, most concise way. But I dare them to keep it up. Go ahead, make my 24-hour time period.

I may not be the most eloquent, but I learned early on that eloquence won't draw oil from the ground. And I may sometimes be a little awkward, but there's nothing self-conscious in my love of country. And I am a quiet man, but I hear the quiet people others don't. The ones who raise the family, pay the taxes, meet the mortgage. And I hear them, and I am moved and their concerns are mine.

A president must be many things. He must be a shrewd protector of America's interests, and he must be an idealist who leads those who move for a freer and more democratic planet.

And he must see to it that government intrudes as little as possible in the lives of the people and yet remember that it is right and proper that a nation's leader take an interest in the nation's character.

And he must be able to define and lead a mission.

For 7 1/2 years, I've worked with a great president. I've seen what crosses that big desk. I've seen the unexpected crises that arrive in a cable in a young aide's hand. And I've seen problems that simmer on for decades and suddenly demand resolution. And I've seen modest decisions made with anguish and crucial decisions made with dispatch.

And so I know that what it all comes down to, this election—what it all comes down to, after all the shouting and the cheers—is the man at the desk. And who should sit at that desk?

My friends, I am that man.

I say it without boast or bravado. I've fought for my country, I've served, I've built, and I'll go from the hills to the hollows, from the cities to the suburbs to the loneliest town on the quietest street to take our message of hope and growth for every American to every American.

I will keep America moving forward, always forward — for a better America, for an endless, enduring dream and [a thousand points of light](#).

[This is my mission, and I will complete it.](#)

Thank you. You know, it is customary to end an address with a pledge or a saying that holds a special meaning. And I've chosen one that we all know by heart, one that we all learned in school, and I ask everyone in this great hall to stand and join me in this. We all know it.

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Thank you, and God bless you.