

REMARKS BY CONGRESSMAN LES AuCOIN  
TO THE OREGON DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION  
SEASIDE, OREGON  
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Thank you, John. It's good to be at this convention. And it's also nice to spend some time with my friend and colleague, Congressman John Burton of California.

I want to say two things to you, John. First, as long as you managed to slip across the border, I hope you have a good time here. Second, now that you are across the border, you should know that your time expires 30 seconds before you're scheduled to speak.

I came here to support Jimmy Carter and Fritz Mondale. I'm glad to address this convention in their behalf.

I think it should be said that the truth is that any of us could probably write two speeches on the Carter Administration. One could be a list of disappointments -- all the things that fail to satisfy us completely. The other would be the solid achievements that we forget, because red-blooded Democrats are impatient. We want perfection. And we look at what's not perfect. My own disappointment list is not a short one. I'll bet yours isn't either. But I've got news for you -- next to what it was like for Harry Truman in his day, when the going was toughest, the Carter "disappointment list" is small potatoes.

It was the same for FDR.

And for Jack Kennedy.

And for every President who ever dared to take on the issues.

And you know, the one thing in common with all these men is that they didn't duck the gut fight. They didn't duck even when they knew it would cost them significant party support.

The very same is true of two other men, who were never president, but who are giants in the history of this party. I'm talking about Wayne Morse. And Hubert Humphrey. They fought the gut fights. They didn't duck. They didn't flinch. And there were times when they were willing to write off whole segments of the Democratic Party and even the country -- not because they wanted to, but because they felt they had to. Today we don't ridicule their memory. We've given them sainthood in the Democratic Party.

Why is it as Democrats that we let our impatience, our insistence on complete agreement cost us one important election after another? Why did we let it cost us a second full term for Truman? Why did we let it cost the country a Humphrey presidency -- and instead give us Richard Nixon? Why did we let it cost Wayne Morse another term in the United States Senate? There are no sensible answers to these questions -- and there are no sensible excuses. And there is no excuse to make the same mistake again this year in the race for the White House.

In this race, the only question for Democrats is whether we're going to put aside our differences in a world that's been turned upside down and where the old dogmas don't work any more and in doing so unite behind this President's achievements -- and help him build on them -- or whether, once again, we're going to develop a destructive fixation over what divides us and perpetuate a party battle that will set the stage for a Republican White House -- this time one that might be so awful none of us can begin to imagine the size of the disaster it would mean for this country.

This is the party of Wayne Morse. Some of the Senator's finest moments came when he addressed this convention.

And so, given the choices Democrats face tonight, we'd do well to follow the political advice I heard Wayne Morse give a thousand times: he used to say "have the courage to follow the facts, wherever they lead, and you'll never have to worry about your course."

What are the facts in this presidential contest?

The fact is that we are no longer a majority party. Independents now hold the balance of power.

The fact is they're not wedded to the gospel of either the Democrats or the Republicans.

The fact is they want social progress -- but they also want economic progress.

The fact is they want programs funded with real dollars, not deficit dollars.

The fact is they want better government before they get more government.

And the fact is they are joined by rank and file Democratic voters across this state and country.

I have no political grudge against Senator Kennedy; in fact, I was pleased to be invited to one of his first meetings with House Members to discuss his race. And while I don't think he can be called a party wrecker for having gotten into this race, the facts simply do not add up to a Kennedy victory in November. Let me lay out some cold facts. Even after New York and Connecticut, the Senator would have to win 60 percent of all the remaining delegates to capture the nomination. Each primary he falls below that, the higher the percentage becomes in each of the following contests.

The truth is -- Kennedy cannot win.

But what can happen is a long, drawn-out battle to the convention, which will do several things, none of them constructive:

Such a race will keep the national party from raising funds, mapping strategy, and doing research for the Presidential fight in the fall where the real struggle will be.

It will siphon off resources that Democrats need for other races -- including the battle to control the state legislatures.

And most important of all, it will hand Ronald Reagan the same gift we gave Richard Nixon in 1968 -- a divided Democratic party, which translated into control of the White House, which in turn translated into a world so abused it still hasn't recovered.

Do we really have to remind ourselves who Ronald Reagan is -- and what he represents?

"President Reagan" is a man who would oppose equality for women through the Equal Rights Amendment.

"President Reagan" is a man who would advocate, as he has, a voluntary Social Security system, which would destroy Social Security.

"President Reagan" is a man who would say, as he has said, that America was fighting for its "virtue" in Vietnam.

"President Reagan" is a man who would say, as he has said, the minimum wage should be abolished.

"President Reagan" is a man who would say, as he has already said, the semi-progressive income tax is an "immoral" tax because it taxes wealth.

That gives you a taste of what this country will be like if we as Democrats allow the White House to be taken by the man the Republicans are apparently going to nominate.

That's a world that Democrats reject. That's a world that Democrats find unacceptable.

That world can only be avoided if we decide to settle for a piece of the agenda we as individual Democrats might otherwise want to pursue and unite -- before it's too late -- behind Jimmy Carter and Fritz Mondale.

The Carter Administration has been willing to take on the tough issues.

Through its leadership, this nation will have the foundation for an energy policy for the very first time. No one says it's a pretty policy; no one says it's a pleasant policy, no one says it's a perfect policy. But it is a beginning; a beginning no other president has ever given this country. Getting it meant kicking butts. And cracking heads. And making a lot of us sore. But it also meant something else that Oregon Democrats ought to understand: It meant following the facts.

The economy that was handed to Jimmy Carter and Fritz Mondale was a house of cards. It was propped up by record deficits and was as vulnerable as it has ever been to the oil cartel. And when the cards started falling it was up to this President to make the tough decisions to correct the mistakes of a decade. He made them. And it meant cracking heads again. Making more enemies. But again it also meant something else: It meant following the facts.

What I'm telling you tonight is that we've reached a moment of decision for the Democratic Party. Are we going to remember the lessons of Truman and Humphrey and Morse -- and what we did to them when we left them when the heat was on?

Are we going to be able to use basic arithmetic and understand that the time has come to unite behind the President who has already won 17 of 20 primaries and caucuses and 50 percent of the delegates he needs to win the nomination?

Are we going to be able to concentrate on those things we agree on rather than give in to our differences and our insistence on complete agreement -- so we can face up to right-wing opposition in November, opposition that's determined to decide for you and me just what the 1980s are going to be?

That's the challenge we face as Democrats. And that's why we need to return the Democratic Administration of Jimmy Carter, and people like Fritz Mondale, Pat Harris, Cecil Andrus and Neil Goldschmidt.