

**Speech By Senator John F. Kennedy, Democratic Rally  
George Washington High School Stadium, Alexandria, Va.  
August 24, 1960**

Senator KENNEDY:

Senator Fenwick, thank you for that generous introduction. Governor Almond, who, from the day that I was nominated in Los Angeles, has been my friend and counselor, my running mate, Lyndon Johnson, and Mrs. Johnson, Governor Battle, my friend and campaign chairman in this State, Bill Battle, Members of the Congress, the next Congressman from this district, Ralph Kaul, who will be one of the great ones, Dorothy McDiarmid, and members of this great Democratic meeting in the State of Virginia, 170 years ago Thomas Jefferson and James Madison left the State of Virginia and went to New York on a botanical expedition up the Hudson River. After they had caught fish and butterflies, they rode down the river and stopped in New York City, and there they met Aaron Burr, and the Knights of St. Tammany, and founded the modern Democratic Party, a party which has united the country and the city, the East and the West in the only and oldest national party in the history of the world.

[Applause.]

I come here tonight not on a botanical expedition, not to catch fish and butterflies, but I come to the home of this party with Lyndon Johnson and ask for your help. You started it, you began the Democratic Party, and I cannot believe in the most dangerous time in our country's history, that Virginia is going to say, "We will not join up again."

We ask your help and we are here tonight to begin this campaign. [Applause.] Virginia is an old State and it values the past. But if there is any lesson that history has ever taught us, it is that those who hold the past are the ones who move ahead. This country was founded by men who valued the past and were revolutionaries to preserve it. I cannot believe that there is anyone in the State of Virginia who believes that this country should stand still, who believes that everything that had to be done was done in the past, who does not believe that there is any necessity for us to break new ground in the future. If they are, they should vote Republican, because that is what they are going to get - standstill.

[Applause.]

I know that there are some Americans and some Democrats who say that they have now developed a wonderful arrangement in Washington. The Congress is Democratic and the President is Republican and nothing happens and isn't it wonderful. [Laughter.] Thomas Jefferson of the State of Virginia was so anxious for this country to move that when he came back from Europe after the Constitutional Convention he objected to George Washington because the Constitutional Convention had agreed to the founding of the Senate. He said, "Why is a Senate necessary?" And, as you know according to the story, Washington said, "Why do I pour my coffee in a cup? To cool it. So we need the Senate."

I don't want legislation so cooled off that after it passes the House and the Senate that it is vetoed by a Republican President and sent back to die. [Applause.]

I value the American Constitution enough to believe that the checks and balances required by our system were written into the Constitution, the House, the Senate, the legislative, the executive, the judiciary, the Federal Government, the State governments, townships. Those are the checks and balances which permit freedom to develop and yet action to take place. They have had a session of the Congress for the last 3 weeks. It has not been a happy experience. But if the people will study it, they will see that in the last 3 weeks we will have, if the Republicans are successful, a microcosm of what will happen in the next 4 years, of a Congress in the hands of one party and an administration in the hands of another party, with threats of vetoes, with party war in the most dangerous time in the life of our country. I think it is time to move. I think this country wants to go ahead, and the way to do it is to give us the responsibility or give the Republicans the responsibility. But don't divide it and end up with no one responsible. [Applause.]

Finally, let me say what I consider to be a most important issue in this campaign. The Republican orators are fond of saying that experience in foreign policy is the greatest issue in this campaign. I agree. But the issue is not merely the experience of the candidates. It is the experience which the entire Nation has gone through in the last 8 years, and what an experience it has been. [Applause.] Never before has this country experienced such arrogant treatment at the hands of its enemy. Never before have we experienced a more critical decline in our prestige, driving our friends to neutralism, and neutrals to our right of hostility, never before has the grip of communism sunk so deeply into previously friendly countries. Mr. Nixon is experienced in policies of weakness, retreat, and defeat. [Applause.]

During the past 8 years that he has presided over the National Security Council, never in all that time in our country's history has our strength declined more rapidly than it has during the comparable period, in terms of defensive strength and retaliatory capacity, in terms of our alliances, in terms of our scientific effort, and our national reputation. Mr. Nixon may now say that he has been urging an acceleration of our defense effort all along, and yet in his August 10 press conference, the President said he knew of no such different viewpoint of the Vice President, adding "Certainly if there is, he has not come to me with it." [Applause.]

Why would anyone boast of presiding over the National Security Council during the years that it rejected the now accepted findings of the Killian report, the Gaither report, the Rockefeller brothers report, during the years it held back on our progress in missiles and space. During the years it failed to come up with one great single idea of international importance. They say he has traveled abroad. He has. In Vietnam he urged the French to continue to fight. On Formosa he implied our support of an invasion of the Mainland of China. In India he questioned Nehru's right to be neutral. In Venezuela his goodwill tour provoked a riot, and in the Soviet Union he argued with Mr. Khrushchev in the kitchen, it is true, pointing out that while we may

be behind in space, we were ahead in color television. [Applause and laughter.] But does anyone think for a single moment, do they take the Communists so lightly that they think Mr. Khrushchev was diverted for a single moment from his objectives by an argument in the kitchen? Do they think he changed his plans, pulled back his forces since that argument? He could argue in the kitchen every day and move every night. [Laughter.]

So let us talk about experience in this campaign, let's talk about it. Let's talk about the experience of this Nation. Let's learn from that experience, to learn that neither smiles nor frowns - and President Roosevelt and President Truman and President Eisenhower had the same experience, they all made the effort to get along with the Russians. But every time, finally it failed. And the reason it failed was because the Communists are determined to destroy us, and regardless of what hand of friendship we may hold out or what arguments we may put up, the only thing that will make that decisive difference is the strength of the United States. [Applause.]

Three years ago I went to Havana. I was told that the American Ambassador was the second most powerful man in Cuba. Probably he should not be, but he is not today. We have within 90 miles by the same group who have stood up to Khrushchev, we have Castro, who attacks us daily. In the Congo, the most intimate adviser to the new Prime Minister is the Soviet Ambassador. In Laos where we have spent more money per capita than in any country in the world, they are moving from neutralism to hostility, and the reason is singlefold. Though it may vary in shape in every country and the reason is the same impression you get from standing by a beach, if you look at the ocean and watch it, you see no change. But if you leave it and come back in 3 hours or 5 hours, you may see that the tide has run out. We standing here tonight cannot, with certainty, make a judgment of our times or the last 5 years or the last decade.

But I think there is a great danger that history will make a judgment that these were days when the tide began to run out for the United States. These were the times when the Communist tide began to pour in. These were the times when people began not to worry what they thought in Washington, but only to wonder what they thought in Moscow and Peking. I run for the office of the Presidency not because I think it is an easy job in soft times. I think it is going to be the most difficult and hazardous year in our country's history. This is a time of danger. I don't think anyone should vote for the Democrats if they are satisfied with what is happening, if they feel that our status is fine, if they are not concerned by the fact that last year we had the lowest rate of economic growth of any major industrialized society in the world. If you are satisfied, then I think this country should make Mr. Nixon the President. But if you feel that we have unfinished business, that our generation faces the same kind of challenge that Franklin Roosevelt faced in 1933, then I say to you that this country will move and the Democratic Party will lead it. Thank you. [Applause.]