

Guest Speaker

Former US Senator, Bill Bradley

United States

I ran for President twenty years ago. There is no experience like it. The intensity is all consuming. The press follows your every word and every action. When you stand before people at a town meeting you know what they're asking themselves: Do I trust this person with my life? Do I trust this person with my job? Does this person have a view of life that is similar to my own?

As I flew back and forth across America as a candidate, I'd think of the lives of all the 300 million people below---their dignity, their diversity, their setbacks, their invincible hopes. If I succeeded, I'd have the chance to make things better for them. I knew there was evil in the world but in those moments, I felt it was no match for our better angels.

But I lost the nomination—and lost it badly. Thirty-five years of dreams and expectations came crashing down. I felt disoriented.

Six months later I had the following dream: A 200 –foot tall giant strides across the countryside. He picks up a herd of elk in one hand and plucks giant trees from the soil with the other. While crossing the Amazon River, the giant's feet become mired in mud. Piranha swarm around him eating his flesh. He knows that when his flesh is gone, the piranha will attack his bones, he will fall and they will consume the rest of him. About that time a woman on a flying carpet passes over his head and drops white dust on him. When the dust hits him, he shrinks and falls into a boat that takes him to the other side of the river. In other words, he has shrunk from being a giant to just being human---and that's what saves him.

As I was thinking about what I'd say today I remembered a Leonard Cohen song, "Democracy". One of the stanzas says: "It's comin to America first; the cradle of the best and of the worst; It's here they got the range, the machinery for change; It here they got

the spiritual thirst; It's here the family's broken, here the lonely say; that the heart has got to open in a fundamental way. Democracy is comin to the USA.”

What this election is all about is “getting the heart to open in a fundamental way.” We need a president with more feeling and less cruelty, more of a uniter and less a divider, more someone who cares about us and less about himself.

American history is the story of advancing, then falling back, then advancing again further. It's the story of the light and the darkness. Both are part of our legacy.

The beauty and uniqueness of America is American diversity. We're the families of pilgrims, of native Americans, of former slaves, of immigrants still coming. As Vachel Lindsay once wrote, “All of these you are and each is partly you and none is false and none is wholly true.”

The Declaration of Independence proclaimed our values that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” The U. S. Constitution, a living document, gave a structure to our society and a pathway to change. The Separation of Powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government was designed to be a check against the passions of the mob. In our representative democracy voting is the people's voice. As Lincoln said, “Ballots are stronger than bullets.”

The history of America is the history of voting. In 1800 only white men with property could vote. In the 1830s white men without property were allowed to vote. In the 1860s black men were given the right to vote. In 1919 women were given the vote and in the 1950's young people over 18 got the vote.

For many years after reconstruction in the Jim Crowe South African Americans were disenfranchised again and again. It remained that way for nearly a hundred years. Then in 1965 a Democrat President Lyndon Johnson and Democratic Congress passed the 1965 Voting Rights Act that finally gave all African Americans the right to vote. It was supported by Republicans and Democrats alike. And in 2003 George W Bush with overwhelming bipartisan support reauthorized the Voting Rights Law for 25 years.

Then in 2013 the Supreme Court gutted that law by striking the requirement that all laws related to voting in states that had a history of discrimination (8 Southern and 4 Northern states) had to be approved by the Federal Justice Department. In gutting the law, the court in its willful blindness argued that such a requirement wasn't needed because there was no longer discrimination in these states. But literally two days after the Supreme Court rendered this terrible decision both North Carolina and Texas passed state laws that discriminated against African Americans.

In 2016 Donald Trump ran for President. I have known Trump for 30 years. He felt that I was one of the four worst politicians in Washington--largely because I passed a tax law that made him pay more taxes as a real estate investor. I wear his designation with honor.

In 2016 Donald Trump was elected president. His support was not monolithic. There were six distinct groups that supported him. First were Republicans who will vote Republican no matter who is the candidate. Then there were the Evangelicals who made a deal with the devil on abortion, giving their support to someone who did not mirror Christian values in exchange for Trump promising to appoint judges who would end legal abortion. The third group were those Americans who had been adversely affected by economic change as the first decade in the new century saw 40,000 factories close

and 6 million people lose their jobs because of technology and trade. The fourth group were those who hated the federal government in Washington DC and who believed that Trump would, as he said, "Drain the swamp". The fifth group were the racists who had always been there in the Republican party since 1965 when Lyndon Johnson empowered African Americans with the vote . The sixth group were those who thought elites (media, academia and urban liberals), looked down on them--their big extended families, their religious faith, their allegiance to their small towns.

But more important to the voting story than who voted were who didn't vote--the 100 million Americans over 18 who were able to vote but didn't in 2016. When I was a senator I would often say that if you didn't vote you can't complain about what happens in Washington. As Jefferson said, "We don't have a government by the majority. We have a government by the majority that participate."

I have known Joe Biden for fifty years. I wanted him to run in 2016 and told him so. Biden is running for the right reasons. He clearly sees that after the parade of neo-Nazis and racists in Charlottesville one night in 2017 that we are in a battle for the soul of our nation. He also knows the workers (both middle class and poor) who have lost their jobs to technology and trade. He cares about them; respects them; and he will champion them-- not the rich.

We have a country where there is more and more economic inequality and environmental degradation, racism is on the rise and China is on the move. America's role in the world has eroded and democracy itself is potentially threatened. I think Joe Biden can help on all those fronts. Then it will take all of us to back him up.

A campaign has phases: primaries, the nominating convention, debates and the ground game in the days leading up to the election. We are in the ground game phase.

There are now 16 days left. Biden is ahead. I believe by enough to win. For Trump to win he has to have a massive turn out of his base, attract all the undecided voters and win back women and suburban Republicans. I don't think that is possible with only 5% undecided voters. But Trump will try anything to win because losing is what he fears most and has since childhood.

Due to the pandemic mail-in-voting and absentee voting will amount to around 30% of all votes. Most of those will be Democrats. For some reason many Republicans have chosen not to vote by mail. That is why Trump is trying to label mail-in voting as fraudulent. He will never admit defeat. The various far right militias will try to affect the outcome of the election in ways that are impossible to anticipate. There will be legal attempts to delegitimize the electoral college. It might even end up in the House of Representative as it did in 1824. What could overwhelm all these efforts to cling to power would be smashing victories for Joe in two of four battleground states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Florida. I believe there will be an enormous turnout by those who want to take back their country from the forces of darkness.

Recently I had the following dream: "I'm walking in a park. A black clouds descends. I'm now tied down on the ground in a pit full of poisonous snakes. I remain very quiet but they sense my breathing and bite me. I feel the poison flowing through my system. I feel like I'm dying. I wonder what comes after death. I feel as if I'm going over when a lighting bolt strikes me and I ride it to a new place."

That lightning to me is the voting of the American people. They can take us out of the pit of poisonous snakes we've been living in. They are the ones who can take us as a country to a new place.

Senator William W. Bradley (U.S.), 77, is a Managing Director of Allen & Company LLC. From 2001-2004, he acted as chief outside advisor to McKinsey & Company's nonprofit practice. He was a Senior Advisor and Vice Chairman of the International Council of JP Morgan & Co., Inc. from 1997-1999. During that time, he also worked as an essayist for *The CBS Evening News* and was a visiting professor at Stanford University, University of Notre Dame and the University of Maryland. Senator Bradley served in the U.S. Senate from 1979 – 1997 representing the state of New Jersey. In 2000, he was a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States. Prior to serving in the Senate, he was an Olympic gold medalist in 1964 and a professional basketball player with the New York Knicks from 1967 – 1977 during which time they won two NBA championships. In 1982, he was elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame. Senator Bradley holds a BA degree in American History from Princeton University and an MA degree from Oxford University where he was a Rhodes Scholar. He has authored seven books on American politics, culture and economy, including his latest book *We Can All Do Better*. Currently, Senator Bradley hosts *American Voices*, a weekly show on Sirius XM Satellite Radio that highlights the remarkable accomplishments of Americans both famous and unknown.