

SENATOR PAUL TSONGAS

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Springfield Civic Center

Mr. Chairman. My fellow Democrats. We are here today to forge a platform for our party. We have this opportunity to pause and ask ourselves what we are all about -- as Democrats, as citizens of Massachusetts and as Americans.

What, then, are we about? What is the bedrock of values for which we, as a party, stand and have stood over the years? As diverse and evolutionary as our heritage is, there are themes that bind us together. There is a thread running from the New Deal, through the New Frontier and to this convention in the Springfield Civic Center.

There is in the Democratic Party an enduring spirit. There are recurring themes of decency, activism and hope. We are dedicated to opportunity -- and not for the few, but for the many. If these words sound clichéd, so be it. Would that have mattered to the Depression-era worker put back on the job by FDR or to the black of the early 1960's who found a civil rights ally in John F. Kennedy? The answer is; it would not have mattered. And the same is true today.

The values for which the Democratic Party stands are no less relevant today. Sadly, our problems are no less severe.

There are signs that our national buoyancy is seeping away -- the buoyancy that is the ultimate reservoir of our will and our strength. The risks of a nuclear holocaust hang over us like a lengthening shadow. In these perilous economic times social workers report an increase in the number of children found abandoned in the streets. Pollsters tell

us that more and more American parents expect that their children's lives will be worse than their own.

There are stories of an America in distress. They are red lights warning of a decline in confidence, a loss of optimism. They are signals that we would be reckless to ignore.

There are those who indict the Reagan Administration for the whole of the problem. They are wrong. We Democrats are not blameless, as I have said on other occasions. We have a great deal of rethinking to do ourselves.

But who can deny that the current Administration is a big part of the problem? Mr. Reagan may go down in history as proof that a President must do more than exude optimism if he is to instill it. President Reagan's optimism is fine. But where are the grounds to warrant it?

While he promises us an economic miracle, the reality is horrendous budget deficits and double-digit unemployment.

While he promises us serious arms negotiations, he proposes as his chief arms control negotiator a man who calls the whole idea a sham.

And while he promises us progress on the environment, at his E.P.A. shredded paper is the most important product.

It is time for something different. It is time for optimism based on the real hope of success.

It is time for brisk action to meet the Japanese challenge -- for fresh initiatives to spur American technological advancement and sharpen

economic competitiveness and create jobs.

It is time to stop the assault on everything in America that is public: public housing, public schools and public works.

It is time to redefine United States interests to avert the folly of supporting regimes in Latin America, South Africa and elsewhere that violate basic human rights and cannot even command the allegiance of their own people.

It is time to halt the military spending spree that exceeds our legitimate requirements for matching the Soviet buildup and siphons away resources needed for economic recovery.

And, lastly, it is time to work for real peace through mutual, bilateral and verifiable arms control.

On the front page of our newspapers we read of the President's desire to rush pell-mell and create a new generation of weapons, this time in outer space. If Mr. Reagan is serious about progress in the arms control talks in Geneva, his Star Wars initiative suffers from bad timing. And it is highly risky. It threatens to escalate the arms race into space, and it promotes a false sense of pie-in-the-sky.

Is this what America is all about? Billions, trillions for unproven nuclear gadgetry?

I thought we were about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

I thought we were about human rights, educational opportunity, respect for our elders, industrial competitiveness.

A strong America, yes. A willingness to deter aggression, yes. But not this. Not a craving for more nuclear destructive capability. Not a disrespect for the opinion of mankind that calls for peace and true negotiations.

We are indeed a nation chosen -- chosen to have great resources, great opportunities, great values. To struggle for peace is our responsibility as the leader of nations.

The platform before us today reaffirms our commitment to these goals. I am confident that what we endorse today will bear the stamp of realism, of hope and of responsibility that is the heritage of our nation and the Democratic Party.