

## Remarks of Richard C. Leone

President, The Century Foundation

New American Strategies for Security and Peace Conference

Washington, D.C., October 28, 2003

Welcome on behalf of the sponsors—The American Prospect, the Center for American Progress and my own institution, The Century Foundation.

We have come together today because of our concern about America's present course. We believe, as do nearly all Americans, that the nation faces some of the gravest threats in its history. We also believe that our responses to these threats—particularly those involving sharp breaks with past bipartisan and multilateral approaches—are more likely to be wise and to be supported over time if they are subject to vigorous and open debate. Testing ideas in public is necessary in a democracy. It is our best assurance of self-correction; trust in government, and successful attainment of our goals.

One of the special challenges of the terrorist threat, of course, is that we can not easily separate our defenses at home from the strategies we pursue abroad in just two short years. For example, homeland security has become the rationale for changes in our system of justice, reductions in our right to privacy, increases in government and business secrecy, new constraints on transportation and travel, significant alterations in immigration practices, and a host of other revisions in public and private activity.

Over the same period we have undergone an even sharper break with many of our time-tested approaches to foreign policy and military strategy...

These dramatic shifts were possible in the stunning aftershock of 911. Americans—all across the political spectrum—were willing and eager to rally behind the administration. This rare impetus toward unity extended far beyond our borders, offering an unprecedented potential for a grand global coalition against terrorism—an alliance that could have encompassed nearly the entire civilized world.

But it is now clear that the domestic political consensus became the springboard, not for a new internationalism, but for a set of aggressive departures from past principles and policy. Now, as the evidence mounts that our current course requires both greater risks and costs than were originally understood questions have emerged. The nation is ready for a resumption of the normal give and take of democracy; thirsty for more information straight talk and vigorous debate.

Less than two weeks after Pearl Harbor, Ohio Senator Robert A. Taft—the man known as “Mr. Republican”—opined “as a matter of general principle, I believe there can be no doubt that criticism in time of war is essential to the maintenance of any kind of democratic government...too many people desire to suppress

criticism simply because they think it will give some comfort to the enemy... If that comfort makes the enemy feel better for a few moments, they are welcome to it as far as I am concerned, because the maintenance of the right of criticism in the long run will do the country maintaining it a great deal more good than it will do the enemy, and it will prevent mistakes which might otherwise occur.”

Taft had a powerful point...and it was not primarily about party politics; it was about democracy and government. The politics of “permanent emergency” are hard and perilous but they are nothing compared to the dangers of an atmosphere in which government and policies are shielded from examination and accountability. It’s the job of the opposition, the press, and the public to insist on full and open discourse about what we are doing and why there is nothing unpatriotic about pressing such questions—rather they should be seen as fundamental expressions of our deepest national beliefs.

In the short run, patriotism can be channeled into support for conflict. Increases in fear can be translated into acquiescence for more security even at the expense of freedom. But in the end, neither of these sources provide the abiding strength of a nation armed not just with the latest security hardware or the best army, but also with a deep belief in its course. A consensus based upon understanding and informed judgment must be politically more valuable and more durable than one founded on deeply felt but inevitably transitory emotions.

In that spirit, we welcome you and look forward to hearing your views over the next two days.

Thank You.

Richard C. Leone is the President of The Century Foundation.