Iowa, thank you.

Thanks to all of you here tonight for your patriotism, for your love of country and for doing what too few Americans today are doing.

You are not standing on the sidelines complaining. You are not turning your backs on the political process.

You are standing up and fighting back. That's what you are doing. And that's what my campaign is about.

When you see the middle class of this country disappearing, and people working two or three jobs so their families can survive, you don't shrug your shoulders. You fight to raise the minimum wage and pay equity for women workers. You fight for a massive federal jobs program to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure and create millions of good paying jobs. You fight for an economy that works for working families and the middle class, for our kids and our seniors — and not just for the people on top.

When you see the United States having more income and wealth inequality than almost any major country on earth, and almost all of the new income and wealth going to the top one percent, you know that that is not moral or sustainable and you demand a tax system that tells Wall Street, corporate America and the wealthiest people in this country that, yes, they are going to have to pay their fair share of taxes.

When you see the United States having more people in jail than any other country on earth — disproportionately African-American and Latino — you are demanding that we invest in jobs and education for our young people, not more jails and incarceration.

When you saw the United States Supreme Court, in the Citizens United case, vote to allow the wealthiest people in this country to spend unlimited amounts of money to elect the candidates they want, you are fighting for a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United and a presidential candidate who made it absolutely clear that any nominee of his to the court would vote to overturn that disastrous decision.

While many in the Republican Party continue to deny the reality of climate change, you have demanded that we work with other countries in transforming our energy system away from fossil fuel to energy efficiency and sustainable energies and that we leave our kids and grandchildren a planet that is healthy and habitable.

You are not on the sidelines. You are fighting back and that's what this campaign is doing.

Six months ago, when I began my campaign for president of the United States and announced that we were going to take on the political and economic establishment of this country, very few pundits took the campaign seriously. I was not widely known. We were at about 3 percent in the polls. We had no money and no political organization.

Well, in the last six months things have changed. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers in every state in this country are working hard on this campaign, including some 7,000 here in Iowa. We have brought out to our rallies and town meetings over 300,000 Americans and have drawn some of the largest crowds of any campaign. And today, I can tell you that we have raised more individual contributions than any candidate in the history of this country, at this point in a campaign, averaging all of $30 apiece.

The pundits said that, in this day and age, you can't win a campaign without a super PAC, without raising millions from the wealthiest people in this country. Well I am the only Democratic candidate for president who does not have a Super PAC and we are going to prove them wrong. We will win this election without a Super PAC.

And by the way, eight years ago the experts talked about how another Democratic candidate for president, Barack Obama, couldn't win. How he was unelectable. Well Iowa, I think we're going to prove the pundits wrong again. I believe we will make history.

My political life is not as well-known as some other candidates, so let me take a moment to tell you about some of the difficult choices I have had to make, some of the forks in the road I have encountered in my career as mayor of Burlington, Vermont, as a U.S. congressman and as a U.S. senator.

When I was elected mayor of the largest city in my state by 10 votes, I think it would be fair to say it was a shock to the establishment. Nobody thought I would win that election. The Board of Alderman opposed me at every turn. I faced a fork in the road — capitulate or take them on. We decided to fight. The result was that two years later we came close to doubling voter turnout and we elected a slate of progressive candidates prepared to fight for working families. We went to work, implementing innovative housing policies, creating a people oriented waterfront, revitalizing the economy and creating great programs for our kids. Now Burlington is one of America's most livable cities.

I learned valuable lessons from that experience. Lessons that must be applied today. And that is that when you stand with the middle class and working families and are prepared to take on powerful special interests, people will come out to vote in large numbers.

After I came to Congress, corporate America, Wall Street, the administration in the White House and virtually all of the corporate media pushed for passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement. I didn't believe their arguments. It didn't make sense to me then that American workers should compete with people making a fraction of our wages. I also opposed CAFTA and Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China. History proved me right. Since 2001 we have lost nearly 60,000 factories in this country and millions of decent-paying jobs.

And let me be clear about the current trade deal that we are debating in Congress, the Trans-Pacific Partnership. It is not now, nor has it ever been, the gold standard of trade agreements. I did not support it yesterday. I do not support it today. And I will not support it tomorrow. We had a chance months ago to stop it in its tracks on the vote for fast track authority. That vote was the fork in the road and I'm glad I took the right road at the right moment in time.

In 1996, I faced another fork in the road — another very difficult political decision. It was called the Defense of Marriage Act — brought forth by a Republican-led Congress. Its purpose was to write discrimination against gays and lesbians into law. Let us remember, that support for gay rights back in 1996 was not what it is today.

And I'm sorry to tell you that that bill won by an overwhelming majority of 342 to 57 in the House and 85 to 15 in the Senate, big majorities which included too many Democrats. That was not a politically easy vote. Today, some are trying to rewrite history by saying they voted for one anti-gay law to stop something worse. Let us be clear. That's just not true. There was a small minority opposed to discriminating against our gay brothers and sisters. Not everybody held that position in 1996.

Climate change is real. It is caused by human activity and it already is causing massive devastation all across our planet. It is a very sad moment in American history when almost all Republicans running for president reject science and the need for bold action to combat climate change. Sadly, they prefer to take the super PAC campaign contributions from the Koch brothers and the fossil fuel industry rather than to protect the planet for our kids and grandchildren.

And if you agree with me about the urgent need to address the issue of climate change, then you would know immediately what to do about the Keystone pipeline. Honestly, it wasn't that complicated. Should we support the construction of a pipeline across America and accelerate the extraction of some of the dirtiest fossil fuel in the world? To me, that was a no-brainer and that is why I have opposed the Keystone Pipeline from the beginning.

My friends, I want to bring you back to a very eventful year and a tragic moment in the modern history of our country. The year is 2002. The issue is whether Congress should vote to invade Iraq. Public opinion and most of the media were for the war. And it turned out that big majorities in Congress were too. The vote was 296-133 in the House 77 to 23 in the Senate voted to give President Bush the authority to go to war. Let me tell you that I listened to what Bush had to say, to what Cheney had to say, to what Rumsfeld had to say. I didn't believe them and I voted no.

If you go to my website, you can see exactly what I said at that point and the fears that I had about the destabilization of that region if we invaded Iraq. It gives me no joy to say that I was largely right about the war. I am proud to tell you when I came to that fork in the road I took the right road even though it was not the popular road at the time.

Throughout my years in Congress I have voted time and again to rein in Wall Street, the big banks and the big insurance companies that control too much wealth and wield too much power in our country. In 1999, I voted against the deregulation of Wall Street, including ending the Glass-Steagall Act. The House vote was 362 to 57. Yes, I was in a small minority. Yes I took on Wall Street which spent $5 billion lobbying for this deregulation. But the vote I cast was the right vote.

At a time when the top six banks in this country have assets of almost 60 percent of our gross domestic product and have incredible economic power, the truth is that it is not Congress that regulates Wall Street, it is Wall Street that regulates Congress. That is why I favor breaking up the big banks, because if a bank is too big to fail it is too big to exist.

And today those Wall Street interests are trying to buy the government of the United States with their bundled contributions and their super PACs. Well I don't take their money and I never will. And I don't have a super PAC either. Telling the big banks to cut it out is not going to work unless we cut it out. We have to cut out our reliance on their money if we expect to rein them in. That is why we have built a campaign that has received more than a million contributions from hundreds of thousands of contributors. It is unprecedented, and it is a real-world demonstration that together we can beat the old, corrupt and toxic system of campaign finance that is keeping in place a rigged economy that sends all the new wealth to the top. It's time to break the link between money and special interest favors in politics, and as your president I will.

So my friends, those are the choices I made when I came to the forks in the road. I think they tell you a lot about the choices I will make as president. And my message to you today is the same as it was yesterday, and will be tomorrow.

I promise you tonight as your president I will govern based on principle not poll numbers. I pledge to you that every day I will fight for the public interest not the corporate interests. I will not abandon any segment of American society — whether you're gay or black or Latino or poor or working class — just because it is politically expedient at a given time.

So as we go forth tonight, our job in this election is to build a winning coalition of voters beginning here in Iowa and spreading across this nation who will elect the next Democratic president. I believe I can build that coalition because I know we have begun to build it in huge rallies and small gathering. People are excited to be part of a political revolution that will change this nation and give us a future to believe in.

In conclusion, let me leave you with words that have inspired me and I think fit our circumstances today. The abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison wrote them when attacking the evils of slavery: I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—and I will be heard.

Well my friends, let us make sure that everyone knows that on the issues of equality, and justice, and ending a rigged economy that is held in place by a corrupt political system, on battling climate change, on halting the draining of American jobs to faraway places, on these issues and so many more:

We are in earnest; We will not equivocate; We will not excuse; We will not retreat a single inch;

And on the evening of February 1st, in every precinct, in living rooms, in high school gymnasiums, and all across Iowa, we will send a message to our nation and the world… We will be heard!

Thank you, and I ask for your support in the caucuses.