“Stump Speech”

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Delivered at the Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church[[1]](#footnote-1)

October 14, 2017

Hi, I’m Steve Schwartzberg and I’m running for Congress in the 5th district. I am grateful for the opportunity to share some of my background and some of my reasons for running for Congress. The short version of my background is that I’m a historian—Yale PhD 1996—a scholar of the history of American foreign relations. The short version of why I’m running is that I strongly supported Bernie Sanders in the primaries at a time when the incumbent, Mike Quigley, was supporting Hillary Clinton: Bernie carried the 5th district and I believe I would do a better job representing the views of a majority of its voters.

That’s the short version of who I am and why I’m running. There’s a longer version that I’ll come back to at the end.

There are five main issues that are central to my campaign:

1) Healthcare for everyone as a human right—Medicare for All

2) Massive Infrastructure Investment—A Marshall Plan for America

3) A Foreign Policy devoted to what I have called Civility—by which I mean not merely good manners and diplomacy, but concern for the common good.

4) Respect for Tribal Sovereignty. We, as a society, years from now, will ultimately judge ourselves—and as a believer I think we will ultimately be judged by God—in no small measure by our relations with the native peoples.

And 5), A Freedom Budget for the 21st century. When A. Philip Randolph first proposed the idea of a Freedom Budget in the 1960s, the idea of a budget that would seek to finance progress toward social justice out of the resources of a growing economy, and contribute to its further growth, he was focused on ending poverty. I think it’s time for a Freedom Budget for the poor, the working class, and the middle class.[[2]](#endnote-1)

We must begin with a vision of the kind of society we want to be. I believe we want to be a social democratic society: just, prosperous, ecologically-sound, and self-governed by we the people.

We are a long way from that right now. 81 percent of American households experienced flat or falling incomes between 2005 and 2014.[[3]](#endnote-2) Nearly half of all Americans, according to a recent Federal Reserve study, couldn’t cover an emergency expenditure of $400 because they have so little in savings.[[4]](#endnote-3) Ninety percent of the children born in 1940 ended up higher in the ranks of the income distribution than their parents, barely forty percent of those born in 1980 have done so. [[5]](#endnote-4) In part this reflects the weakness of the American labor movement, but privileged treatment for the rich for more than a generation in the form of preferential tax cuts, preferential bailouts, and preferential treatment generally, have also led to a situation in which the take home income of the 1% has more than doubled from about 10 percent of the total in 1980 to more than 21 percent of the total in 2015.[[6]](#endnote-5)

This represents a concentration of wealth and power in our society that is incompatible with our democracy. Beyond making the rich pay their fair share of the nation’s taxes by restoring Eisenhower era top tax rates, we must invest massively in our nation’s infrastructure and in guaranteeing quality healthcare for all, programs of action that will benefit everyone—including the rich—but which will especially benefit the poor, the working class, and the middle class.

The struggle to insure that quality health care is guaranteed for all the inhabitants of our land—citizens and non-citizens alike—begins with building as strong a consensus as we can that, in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world, people should not be crushed into bankruptcy by a chance illness, or driven into debt by excessive deductibles and co-pays, or completely denied the care they need by insurance company bureaucrats who are ignorant of the art and science of medicine, or by an inadequate governmental compensation system.

If there were one article on American healthcare that I could persuade everyone to read, it would be Atul Gawande’s article, “The Heroism of Incremental Care,” in the January 23rd issue of *The New Yorker*.[[7]](#endnote-6) Gawande makes clear how and why the path to lowering health care costs over the long run is providing better quality care. We need to dramatically increase the number of primary care doctors in the country and the compensation provided to these doctors relative to specialists. The United States is 51st in the world in terms of doctors per capita. It is high time for that to change.

Now let’s look at infrastructure. If we have a barge stopped on the Upper Mississippi because there is a problem with the shipping locks what happens? Commodities just sit there until the problem is fixed. There are no detours, there’s no way to do anything but wait. And waiting costs a lot of money. If we can decrease the tremendous delays in our economy that are caused by poor infrastructure we can increase our productivity and with it the growth of our economy. Nearly eighty percent of lock sites with commercial traffic had an unexpected breakdown in 2016. Half of these shipping locks are older than their intended fifty-year lifespan.[[8]](#endnote-7) And the locks are just illustrative of our infrastructure in general. We have almost a hundred and fifty thousand problem bridges in our country. The US infrastructure from our railways and airports and bridges to our dams and water systems and electrical grid, have not been properly invested in or maintained. It’s time for a Marshall Plan for America.

We helped rebuild Western Europe after WWII and we can help rebuild ourselves. Beyond restoring Eisenhower era top tax rates, I believe it is best to finance the rebuilding of our infrastructure with a massive bond issue. If tolls are necessary, the government should collect them rather than farm them out to politically favored firms. In the long run, infrastructure investment will more than pay for itself through its contributions to economic growth and help to generate millions of good jobs in the process.

The social democratic economist Jeffrey Sachs, in his book *Building the New American Economy*, writes of the urgent need to “decarbonize” our economy. He writes: “There is nothing ‘shovel ready’ about decarbonization. The challenge combines the technological complexity of the moon shot and the organizational complexity of building the interstate highway system.”[[9]](#endnote-8) The “decarbonization” of our economy is an essential piece of the infrastructure investment we need if we are to help pass on a planet to our children and grandchildren that is habitable.

I have spent most of my career as an academic studying the role of civility—of concern for the common good—in American foreign policy and showing how our greatest successes rested on such civility. One of the most important contributions the United States ever made to the cause of social justice in another country was its support for the postwar land reform in Japan. Rather than seek revenge on those who had attacked us in WWII, we sought to make allies of the Japanese people as against the Japanese militarists that had betrayed them as well as the people of the United States. My article on the subject—“The ‘Soft Peace Boys’: Presurrender Planning and Japanese Land Reform”—is available online for free download.[[10]](#endnote-9) From the Trail of Tears and Death in the 1830s to the invasion of Iraq in the early twenty-first century, the consequences of American incivility and brutality have been disastrous for other peoples and, in the long run, bad for the United States as well. We must seek to build our foreign policy on what is best for the peoples of the world as well as for ourselves.

The beginning of justice for the native peoples of America is recognition of the fact that under our own Constitution, as well as under international law, the Indian tribes are entitled to all the rights of foreign states—they have the right to sue states of the United States in the Supreme Court for violations of their treaty rights and to expect that, in seeking to adjudicate, the Supreme Court will rely on international law rather than on what the American Bar Association calls “Federal Indian Law.” The United States is, in my opinion, both morally and legally bound to abide by its word as given to the Indian nations in the treaties it has signed with them. We are obliged to reopen a treaty making process with the native peoples and to cease attempting to rule over them as if they were in any way our subjects or subject to our jurisdiction.

Just as we will judge ourselves—and be judged—by our relations with the native peoples, we will also be judged by the inhuman detention and deportation system we have established for undocumented immigrants, and by our overcrowded jails—we have more prisoners than China, an authoritarian country more than four times our size—and by the ways we fail to provide liberty and justice for all, including LGBT folk.

As a people, we must restore and renew the sense of ourselves—of America—as a nation of immigrants. This is who we are and who we want to be: a hospitable people made up of individuals from every other nation on earth. One in ten Americans in the private sector is employed by an immigrant-owned business. Immigrant-Americans are twice as likely as United States-born Americans to start their own business.[[11]](#endnote-10) Reduce the number of immigrants in the United States and economic growth will decline, increase that number and economic growth will increase. We are all in this together and should embrace our common humanity and common destiny as a people who love this country. As I once heard Congressman Keith Ellison say: our ancestors may have come over on different ships, but we’re all in the same boat now. That is exactly right. There must be a swift legislative path to citizenship for all of the undocumented immigrants in the country. They are already part of who we are, but in a second-class status that they do not deserve and that weakens our unity as a people.

We must demilitarize our police forces, train them in de-escalation, ban for-profit prisons, turn back from the War on Drugs, eliminate mandatory minimums, and increase investment in programs that help individuals recover from substance abuse and from mental health problems. Any requirement for bail should be eliminated unless an alleged offender is deemed a threat or a flight risk by a judge. There are 450,000 people in our nation’s jails today pretrial—that is to say 450,000 people presumed innocent—450,000 people the vast majority of whom are there not because they pose a flight risk or a danger to society, but simply because they can’t afford to post a monetary bond.[[12]](#endnote-11) Prisoners should be provided with opportunities for rehabilitation and, especially, for education. Once they have done their time, former felons should be able to vote. On leaving prison, former prisoners should receive assistance in reentering society.

The rule of law that treats every citizen as equal is undermined by the Supreme Court’s mistaken decision in *Citizens United*. That decision rests on an explicit dismissal of the dangers of corruption, and the appearance of corruption, by big money of the nation’s political processes. As a result of this decision we must either pass a constitutional amendment making it clear that Congress and the states have the power to regulate money in elections or else persuade the Supreme Court that its view of corruption is mistaken. Consider an example that everyone should know: In 1998, Citigroup acquired Travelers insurance, even though the law on the books—the Glass-Steagall Act—prohibited such mergers. Travelers’ CEO, Sandy Weill, explained at the time that this apparent conflict with the law would “not be a problem” on the basis of the conversations they had held with the Fed and the Treasury. The head of the Treasury at the time was Robert Rubin. Rubin lobbied the House extensively to gut Glass-Steagall and the day after it did so, by a bipartisan vote of 343 to 86, Rubin left the Treasury. Three months later, Rubin was hired at Citigroup at a salary of $15 million a year, without any operating responsibility.[[13]](#endnote-12) We as a society must organize to say that this kind of conduct is unacceptable. And we must bust up the “too big to fail” to which this kind of conduct has helped give rise.

Aware of the contribution that overleveraged giant companies made to the Great Recession, the liberal capitalist economist Luigi Zingales has proposed a tax on the use of short-term debt (debt with a maturity of less than a year) to help discourage short-term leverage. He has estimated that a tax of 1% on short-term debt would raise $21.5 billion annually from the nine largest institutions as they exist at present all by themselves.[[14]](#endnote-13) I would suggest that this tax be imposed—and maintained even after the “too big to fail” are broken up—and that the monies raised be devoted to help build a national Montessori-style pre-K for All.

I support many other social democratic programs and policies from guaranteed paid family and medical leave, to raising the minimum wage to $15 an hour, to affordable tuition at public colleges and universities, to jobs training programs for disadvantaged youth. From my perspective, all of these are a logical part of a larger endeavor: a Freedom Budget for the twenty-first century.

When A. Philip Randolph first introduced the idea of a Freedom Budget in the 1960s, he championed its program as being capable of wiping out poverty in ten years. Designed by Leon Keyserling, who had been the chairman of Harry Truman’s Council of Economic Advisers, this program was intended to benefit all who were poor regardless of whether they were poor African-Americans or the poor members of any other ethnicity—including the poor whites who constitute most of our country’s poor people.

There has been some decline in the poverty rate among African-Americans from 31.1% in 1976 to 24.1% in 2015.[[15]](#endnote-14) But the statistics on the gap in wealth between white households and black households remain striking evidence of ongoing inequality in America: the median net worth of white households was roughly 13 times that of black households in 2013 ($144,200 for white households, $11,200 for black households).[[16]](#endnote-15) Moreover, both white and black Americans largely misperceive the situation and assume much “greater progress toward racial economic equality than has actually been achieved.”[[17]](#endnote-16)

The Freedom Budget, as Martin Luther King, Jr. said in his introduction to that historic document, “is a moral commitment to the fundamental principles on which this nation was founded.”[[18]](#endnote-17) We must build a consensus around the need for a Freedom Budget for the twenty-first century, a budget for the poor, the working class, and the middle class.

I said at the beginning that I would say more about my background. I became politically active in high school with a national organization, the Social Democrats, USA, whose national chairman was the great civil rights organizer, Bayard Rustin—the principal organizer of the 1963 March on Washington at which King gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. I learned a lot from Bayard about the moral authority of nonviolence and about the importance of strategy. The most important lesson I learned from him is that a community fighting for justice fights for *all*, or it is fighting for nobody, least of all itself. Because we seek to stand in the center of progress toward democracy, Bayard argued, we have what he called: “a terrifying responsibility to the whole society.” I thought about a career in politics at that time, but in college I became more interested in academics and for decades have published work on both the good and the harm that America has done in the world in hopes of helping us do better. I have recently completed a manuscript on the fight against Cherokee removal in the 1830s—the fight to try to prevent what became the Trail of Tears and Death.

After getting my PhD in 1996, I taught at UNLV—the University of Nevada, Las Vegas—for a couple of years before returning to Yale in 1998 to teach and to serve as the director of undergraduate studies for international studies. To my horror, a student in the international studies major was murdered in December of that year and I came to suspect a colleague of the crime. Instead of keeping my mouth shut I was terribly unfair to this colleague and went public with my suspicions. Yale, to its credit, renewed my one-year contract for a second year in spite of this. But it was not renewed for a third year. Unemployed, I became profoundly depressed and at the low point in my life threw myself in front of a subway train, which is how I lost my hand.

While I wouldn’t recommend that course of action to others, to me it was an extraordinary blessing. I felt God’s love in the miracle of being alive and haven’t felt depressed since. With the help of a remarkable community in Stockbridge, Massachusetts—at an open-setting mental hospital where patients are free to come and go as they please—I began to put my life back together. The experience taught me the value of community at a deeper level than I had previously known it. It taught me, in the words of the Anglican theologian John Mbiti: that “I am because we are”—that we are all who we are within networks of relationships that are essential for our ability to be well and to do good in the world.[[19]](#endnote-18)

When I returned to Chicago in 2008, I became active in a program providing free meals to the homeless at Church of Our Saviour, and in its winter clothing drive, and in its Education for Ministry group. And in 2010, I became the church’s building and office manager. As my roots and friendships in the community have grown, I have felt the need to increase my religious and political commitments and activities. About a year ago, I became a parishioner not only at Church of Our Saviour but also at St Pauls—attending the 9:00 service at the former and the 10:00 service at the latter most Sunday mornings and feeling spiritually nourished for the week.

After canvassing door-to-door for Bernie in Iowa and Wisconsin last year, and returning to Iowa to canvass for Hillary in the fall, I felt after the November elections—as I imagine we all did—that I had not done enough. That feeling, and the encouragement that I received from many friends and neighbors, eventually led me to decide to run for office.

Here, again, are the five main issues that are central to my campaign. They reflect both lifelong commitments and a deep desire to contribute to the well being of the nation we love and share:

1) Medicare for All

2) A Marshall Plan for America

3) A Foreign Policy devoted to what I have called Civility

4) Respect for Tribal Sovereignty; And

5) A Freedom Budget for the 21st century.

I believe that I have a background and a perspective—a set of skills and a set of commitments—that is unique. If you find what I have to offer valuable, I hope you will consider supporting my candidacy.

Thank you.

1. The speech was delivered at the LPPC, but the church does not in any way endorse the campaign. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/FreedomBudget.pdf (accessed 11 October 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
3. Jeffrey D. Sachs, *Building the New American Economy* forward by Bernie Sanders (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
4. https://www.federalreserve.gov/2015-report-economic-well-being-us-households-201605.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
5. Raj Chetty, et al., “The fading American Dream: Trends in absolute income mobility since 1940,” Science (28 April 2017), Vol. 356, Issue 6336, pp. 398-406 http://science.sciencemag.org/content/356/6336/398.full (11 October 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
6. Sachs, *Building the New American Economy*, p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
7. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/23/the-heroism-of-incremental-care (11 October 2017) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
8. Shane Shifflett, “Disaster Looms on America’s Waterways,” 27 July 2017,

   http://www.wsj.com/graphics/americas-waterways-a-vicious-cycle-of-inefficiency/ (accessed 11 October 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
9. Sachs, *Building the New American Economy,* p. 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
10. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273601891 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
11. http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NAE\_Refugees\_V5.pdf (accessed 12 October 2017). http://money.cnn.com/2017/08/10/news/economy/trump-immigration-jobs/index.html (accessed 12 October 2017) [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
12. Michael Zuckerman, “Criminal Injustice: Alec Karakastanis puts ‘human caging’ and ‘wealth-based detention’ in America on trial,” *Harvard Magazine*, September-October 2017, http://harvardmagazine.com/2017/09/karakatsanis-criminal-justice-reform (accessed 11 October 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
13. Luigi Zingales, *A Capitalism for the People* (New York, Basic Books, 2012), p. 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
14. Zingales, *A Capitalism for the People,* p. 223. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
15. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/22/6-facts-about-black-americans-for-black-history-month/ (accessed 11 October 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
16. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
17. Michael W. Kraus, et al., “Americans Misperceive Racial Economic Equality,” PNAS (September 26, 2017), Vol. 114, No. 39, http://m.pnas.org/content/114/39/10324.full.pdf (accessed 11 October 2017) [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
18. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/FreedomBudget.pdf (accessed 11 October 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
19. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* second edition (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), p. 141. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)