

## Cognates out of the Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama

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### United States Capitol

THE PRESIDENT: Vice President Biden, Mr. Chief Justice, members of the United States Congress, distinguished guests, and fellow citizens:

Each time we gather to inaugurate a President we bear witness to the enduring strength of our Constitution. We affirm the promise of our democracy. We recall that what binds this nation together is not the colors of our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names. What makes us exceptional -- what makes us American -- is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, 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."

Today we continue a never-ending journey to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time. For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they've never been self-executing; that while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth. (Applause.) The patriots of 1776 did not fight to replace the tyranny of a king with the privileges of a few or the rule of a mob. They gave us a republic, a government of, and by, and for the people, entrusting each generation to keep safe our founding creed.

And for more than two hundred years, we have.

Through blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword, we learned that no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half-slave and half-free. We made ourselves anew, and vowed to move forward together.

Together, we determined that a modern economy requires railroads and highways to speed travel and commerce, schools and colleges to train our workers.

Together, we discovered that a free market only thrives when there are rules to ensure competition and fair play.

Together, we **resolved** that a great **nation** must care for the **vulnerable**, and **protect** its people from life's worst hazards and misfortune.

Through it all, we have never relinquished our **skepticism** of **central authority**, nor have we **succumbed** to the **fiction** that all **society's** ills can be **cured** through **government** alone. Our **celebration** of **initiative** and enterprise, our **insistence on** hard work and **personal responsibility**, these are **constants in** our character.

But we have always understood that when times change, so must we; that **fidelity** to our **founding principles requires new responses** to **new** challenges; that **preserving** our **individual** freedoms ultimately **requires collective action**. For the **American** people can **no** more meet the **demands** of today's world by **acting** alone than **American soldiers** could have met the **forces** of **fascism or communism** with muskets and **militias**. **No** single **person** can **train** all the **math** and **science** teachers we'll need to **equip** our children for the **future, or** build the roads and networks and research **labs** that will bring **new** jobs and businesses to our shores. Now, more than ever, we must do these things together, as one **nation** and one people. **(Applause.)**

This **generation** of **Americans** has been tested by **crises** that steeled our **resolve** and **proved** our resilience. A **decade** of war **is** now ending. **(Applause.)** An **economic recovery** has begun. **(Applause.)** **America's** **possibilities** are limitless, for we **possess** all the **qualities** that this world without boundaries **demand**s: youth and drive; **diversity** and openness; an endless **capacity** for risk and a gift for **reinvention**. **My** fellow **Americans**, we are made for this **moment**, and we will seize it -- so long as we seize it together. **(Applause.)**

For we, the people, understand that our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it. **(Applause.)** We believe that **America's prosperity** must rest upon the broad shoulders of a rising middle **class**. We know that **America** thrives when every **person** can find **independence** and pride **in** their work; when the wages of **honest** labor **liberate families** from the brink of hardship. We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same **chance** to succeed as anybody else, because she **is** an **American**; she **is** free, and she **is equal, not** just **in** the eyes of God but also **in** our own. **(Applause.)**

We understand that outworn **programs** are **inadequate** to the needs of our time. So we must harness **new ideas** and **technology** to remake our **government**, revamp our tax **code, reform** our schools, and empower our citizens with the skills they need to work harder, learn more, reach higher. But while the means will change, our purpose endures: a **nation** that rewards the **effort** and **determination** of every single **American**. That **is** what this **moment** requires. That **is** what will give **real** meaning to our creed.

We, the people, still believe that every citizen deserves a **basic** measure of **security** and **dignity**. We must make the hard choices to **reduce** the **cost** of health care and the size of our **deficit**. But we reject the belief that **America** must choose between caring for the **generation** that built this country and investing **in** the **generation** that will build its **future**. **(Applause.)** For we remember the **lessons** of our **past**, when twilight years were spent **in** poverty and parents of a child with a disability had nowhere to turn.

We do **not** believe that **in** this country freedom **is reserved** for the lucky, **or** happiness for the few. We **recognize** that **no** matter how **responsibly** we live our lives, any one of us at any time may face a job loss, **or** a sudden illness, **or** a home swept away **in** a **terrible** storm. The commitments we make to each other

through Medicare and Medicaid and **Social Security**, these things do **not** sap our **initiative**, they strengthen us. **(Applause.)** They do **not** make us a **nation** of takers; they free us to take the risks that make this country great. **(Applause.)**

We, the people, still believe that our **obligations** as **Americans** are **not** just to ourselves, but to all **posterity**. We will **respond** to the threat of **climate** change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and **future generations**. **(Applause.)** Some may still deny the overwhelming judgment of **science**, but none can avoid the **devastating impact** of raging fires and crippling drought and more powerful storms.

The path towards **sustainable energy** sources will be long and sometimes **difficult**. But **America** cannot **resist** this **transition**, we must lead it. We cannot cede to other **nations** the **technology** that will **power new jobs** and **new industries**, we must claim its **promise**. That's how we will **maintain** our **economic vitality** and our **national** treasure -- our forests and waterways, our crop lands and snow-capped peaks. That **is** how we will **preserve** our **planet, commanded** to our care by God. That's what will lend meaning to the creed our fathers once **declared**.

We, the people, still believe that enduring **security** and lasting peace do **not require perpetual** war. **(Applause.)** Our brave men and women **in uniform**, tempered by the flames of battle, are unmatched **in** skill and **courage**. **(Applause.)** Our citizens, seared by the **memory** of those we have lost, know too well the **price** that **is** paid for **liberty**. The knowledge of their **sacrifice** will keep us forever **vigilant** against those who would do us harm. But we are also heirs to those who won the peace and **not** just the war; who turned sworn **enemies** into the surest of friends -- and we must carry those **lessons** into this time as well.

We will **defend** our people and uphold our **values** through strength of arms and rule of law. We will show the **courage** to try and **resolve** our **differences** with other **nations** peacefully -- **not** because we are naïve about the dangers we face, but because engagement can more **durably** lift suspicion and fear. **(Applause.)**

**America** will remain the anchor of strong **alliances in** every corner of the globe. And we will renew those **institutions** that **extend** our **capacity** to manage **crisis** abroad, for **no** one has a greater stake **in** a peaceful world than its most powerful **nation**. We will **support democracy** from **Asia** to **Africa**, from the **Americas** to the Middle East, because our **interests** and our **conscience** compel us to **act on** behalf of those who long for freedom. And we must be a source of hope to the poor, the sick, the **marginalized**, the **victims** of **prejudice** -- **not** out of mere charity, but because peace **in** our time **requires** the **constant advance** of those **principles** that our **common** creed **describes: tolerance** and **opportunity, human dignity** and **justice**.

We, the people, **declare** today that the most **evident** of truths -- that all of us are **created equal** -- **is** the star that **guides** us still; just as it **guided** our forebears through **Seneca Falls**, and **Selma**, and **Stonewall**; just as it **guided** all those men and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great Mall, to hear a preacher say that we cannot walk alone; to hear a King **proclaim** that our **individual** freedom **is** inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul **on** Earth. **(Applause.)**

It **is** now our **generation's** task to carry **on** what those **pioneers** began. For our journey **is not complete** until our wives, our mothers and daughters can earn a living **equal** to their **efforts**. **(Applause.)** Our journey **is not complete** until our **gay** brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law -- **(applause)** -- for if we are truly **created equal**, then surely the love we **commit** to one another must be **equal** as well. **(Applause.)** Our journey **is not complete** until **no** citizen **is forced** to wait for **hours** to

**exercise** the right to **vote**. (Applause.) Our journey **is not complete** until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful **immigrants** who still see **America** as a land of **opportunity -- (applause) --** until bright young **students** and **engineers** are **enlisted in** our workforce rather than expelled from our country. (Applause.) Our journey **is not complete** until all our children, from the streets of **Detroit** to the hills of Appalachia, to the **quiet** lanes of Newtown, know that they are cared for and cherished and always safe from harm.

That **is** our **generation's** task -- to make these words, these rights, these **values** of life and **liberty** and the pursuit of happiness **real** for every **American**. Being true to our **founding documents** does **not require** us to agree **on** every **contour** of life. It does **not** mean we all **define liberty in exactly** the same way **or** follow the same **precise** path to happiness. **Progress** does **not** compel us to settle **centuries-long debates** about the **role** of **government** for all time, but it does **require** us to **act in** our time. (Applause.)

For now **decisions** are upon us and we cannot afford delay. We cannot mistake **absolutism** for **principle, or substitute** spectacle for **politics, or** treat name-calling as **reasoned debate**. (Applause.) We must **act**, knowing that our work will be **imperfect**. We must **act**, knowing that today's **victories** will be only **partial** and that it will be up to those who stand here **in** four years and **40** years and **400** years hence to **advance** the timeless **spirit** once **conferred** to us **in** a spare **Philadelphia** hall.

**My** fellow **Americans**, the oath I have sworn before you today, like the one **recited** by others who **serve in** this Capitol, was an oath to God and country, **not** party **or** faction. And we must faithfully **execute** that pledge **during** the **duration** of our **service**. But the words I spoke today are **not** so **different** from the oath that **is** taken each time a **soldier** signs up for duty **or** an **immigrant** realizes her dream. **My** oath **is not** so **different** from the pledge we all make to the flag that waves above and that fills our hearts with pride.

They are the words of citizens and they **represent** our greatest hope. You and I, as citizens, have the **power** to set this country's **course**. You and I, as citizens, have the **obligation** to shape the **debates** of our time -- **not** only with the **votes** we cast, but with the **voices** we lift **in defense** of our most ancient **values** and enduring **ideals**. (Applause.)

Let us, each of us, now embrace with **solemn** duty and awesome joy what **is** our lasting birthright. With **common effort** and **common** purpose, with **passion** and **dedication**, let us answer the call of **history** and carry into an uncertain **future** that **precious** light of freedom.

Thank you. God bless you, and may He forever bless these **United States** of **America**. (Applause.)