

Sargent Shriver

Dear Friend:

You are one of the first people I am writing to tell of my decision to seek the Democratic nomination for President of the United States.

If I had to put in a nutshell why I am seeking this awesome responsibility, it would be the following incident.

Not long ago, a young married woman said something to me which I found profoundly disturbing. And yet I think it represents a widespread attitude today.

"I'm scared to have children," she said. "I wouldn't want to bring a child into the kind of world we have today. I don't know what's going to happen."

While I don't happen to agree with her, I can't blame her for feeling that way.

And the fact that she and so many others are so despairing about the problems we face in our country and our world disturbs me almost as much as the problems themselves.

For once we lose faith in ourselves as a great people and our ability to master our destiny, then we really will see our civilization begin a long downward slide.

And it's time somebody stood up and said it doesn't have to be that way.

I believe that this is what has been missing in all the candidates so far. Perhaps it is because they have all held elective office, and years of vote-seeking have made them unduly cautious. But whatever the reason, nobody presently inside our political system has demonstrated keen understanding and blunt talk about the seriousness of our problems -- a fierce determination to deal with them -- and proven ability to act on that determination in the White House. Not just one of these qualities, but all three.

Many leading figures in government, politics, business, labor, education, the arts and the professions have expressed to me their confidence in my ability to supply these missing ingredients.

But whether they are right or not is not for me to say. Your judgment, expressed by your support and eventually your vote, is the one that will be decisive.

All I can do is "lay it on the line" -- my view of the problems and the need, my political philosophy, my record. Then it's up to you to decide if you want to help provide the immediate support I need.

First of all, what is it about the world which so alarmed that young woman I mentioned, along with millions of other Americans? Just look at some of the problems we face...

- The steady, relentless march of a long inflationary trend which is keeping American families from owning a home or sending their kids to college. In fact, in many cases, keeping them just from being able to afford enough nutritious food for good health.
- Men, women, and young people tramping the streets looking for jobs in the richest country in the world, while bureaucrats in Washington debate the "acceptable" level of employment. Acceptable to whom?
- A frightening rise in the number of serious crimes from 3.4 million in 1960 to 10.1 million a year today, turning the downtown streets of our cities into ghost towns after dark and bringing fear into our suburbs and even our rural areas.
- Loss of faith and purpose by millions of idle and often impoverished young people, with a terrible cost to our society. In Chicago, for instance, according to a police official there, the largest group of lawbreakers is between the ages of 15 and 20 and the next-largest group is between 10 and 15!
- A tax system so grossly unfair, so riddled with loopholes and concessions for wealthy individuals and large corporations, that it makes a mockery of the original idea of the progressive income tax. For instance, according to Census officials, in 1968 people with total earned income of less than \$2,000 were paying half of that amount in taxes of all kinds! Yet in 1970 394 families with incomes of over \$100,000 paid no Federal income tax at all. And in 1971 the giant Texaco Corporation paid the U.S. government just 2.3 percent tax on nearly a billion dollars of net profits!
- Giant agribusiness and food and grain corporations swallowing up and driving out small family farms (which are disappearing at the rate of 250,000 a year) and driving up prices in the supermarket.
- A bloated defense budget which continues to swell, despite peace in Vietnam and détente with the Russians. We now have the nuclear capability to kill every Russian or Chinese 300 times, yet the Navy wants to build a fleet of nuclear cruisers for \$1.2 billion each! And we see our own President refusing to say that the U.S. would not be the first to use tactical nuclear weapons in Korea.
- Many of our greatest cities teetering on the brink of breakdown. Despite President Ford's claim that the

urban crisis is over, Boston has busing riots, New York is closing hospitals and laying off police, firemen, teachers, and sanitation workers. San Francisco has just gone through a strike by the police force. In New Orleans, necessary expenditures are rising four times faster than revenues, and there is grave concern about the purity of the drinking water. Chicago has lost more than 211,000 jobs in the last ten years.

And I am sure you could add your special concerns to this heavy list. I haven't even touched on such problems as the energy shortage, environmental pollution, civil rights, equal rights and opportunities for women, decent health care for all, and the long road back from government spying on, persecuting, burglarizing, and intimidating private citizens.

No wonder many people feel like giving up and burrowing down. No wonder pollster Lou Harris reported recently that the number of Americans who have confidence in the future had dropped from 60% to 18%. More and more, you hear people talking as if we are going through the last days of the Roman Empire.

But I don't feel that way! Despite the challenges we face, I have always been a deeply hopeful person -- and I still am. And given the chance, I believe I could give the country new hope and purposefulness again, as Franklin D. Roosevelt did in 1932 and John F. Kennedy did in 1960.

I have tremendous faith in what the American people can do to change things for the better if you just give them the leadership and the opportunity. That was the whole secret of the Community Action program I created for President Johnson to aid the poor as directly and quickly as possible.

Instead of our creating a whole new bureaucracy in Washington which would decide in its infinite wisdom what kind of aid poor people needed and then try to trickle it down, we put the power to decide and to act into the hands of the communities, through local boards representing all of the local institutions and the poor people themselves. It worked. And it's still working today, as almost any city mayor will tell you.

I also have faith in our land. We have the best climate, the most rainfall, the most sun and water and topsoil, among the most minerals, timber, and open space, and a national boundary formed by two vast oceans and two peaceable neighbors.

I have faith in our political system. I've visited over 100 countries and seen their systems. With all our inequities and injustices, I believe we still offer more freedom and more opportunity than any other land. (But we do need to strengthen our political parties, and to attract more men and women of excellence to public office.)

I have faith in our national traditions. It is inconceivable to me that the land of Washington, Jefferson, Jackson and Lincoln, of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, of Franklin

Roosevelt and Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, cannot master the problems which threaten us.

And I have faith in God, and in the Judeo-Christian ethic which I believe unites the vast majority of Americans in a common spirit of humanity and good will. This is our greatest natural resource of all, if only it can be summoned by a new call to national greatness.

But I know and you know that this faith, while essential, is not enough to justify the Presidential candidacy of me or anybody else in the race.

It seems to me that the next President should have and must have four important leadership qualities.

1. Convictions. The American people are tired of politicians who try to be all things to all people, or who simply say, "Put your trust in me." This explains, I think, a large part of the appeal of George Wallace to many ordinary citizens. He may be wrongheaded, divisive, narrow -- as I happen to think he is -- but he speaks with a blunt frankness which expresses the frustrations of the "little guy" in his audience.

I intend to be just as frank, but without the carping negativism of George Wallace, which I think divides rather than unites the American people.

For instance, I intend to speak out bluntly about the threat to our supposedly free economy by the growth of multi-national corporations so big they can devour competition and control prices. And although I realize that the laissez-faire philosophy of President McKinley and Calvin Coolidge is making a big comeback in Washington these days, with Gerald Ford leading the way, I think it's absurdly unrealistic -- and I'm going to say so. I just don't see how we can possibly protect the consumer and the worker and the environment in the last quarter of this century without the Federal government acting as a strong countervailing force to the powerful private interests that exist today.

2. Competence. By that I mean not just ordinary competence but presidential competence -- the proven ability to run a \$200 billion governmental enterprise.

All my life I've been successfully running things. I managed four million square feet of floor space in Chicago's giant Merchandise Mart for Joseph P. Kennedy, and learned from him the secret of putting first things first.

For five years I ran the Chicago School Board, which has a budget of a billion dollars, and Chicagoans will tell you it was a five-year period in the troubled history of that body which had no financial scandal of any kind. And we met our goals.

During the same period, I ran the Catholic Interracial Council of Chicago as its President, and we got blacks into schools that had never had a single black pupil before.

As you know, I created, got Congress to approve, and ran

such programs as the Peace Corps, Head Start, Vista, the Job Corps and Neighborhood Youth Corps, the Community Action programs, Legal Services for poor people, Upward Bound, Foster Grandparents.

And there are two important things about all these programs of which I am especially proud: (1) I got them through Congress, and (2) they work and are still going strong, despite seven years of the best efforts of Nixon and Ford to weaken and dismantle them.

Any candidate can have good ideas. But unless they can be guided through Congress, and then successfully implemented, they aren't worth a dime.

Most people have forgotten that when President Kennedy created the Peace Corps and named me to head it, all he gave me was a title and a little more than a million dollars of executive department funds for a planning staff. It was up to me to create the plan, draft the enabling legislation, and sell it to Congress. I spent five months talking personally with 363 members of the House and Senate. Finally Congress passed our first appropriation with the second biggest margin of favorable votes given any new non-defense measurement sent by President Kennedy to Capitol Hill.

3. Control. Many good, needed programs are endangered today because the public feels, rightly, that they are top-heavy with layers of paper shufflers and have simply gotten out of control. There is a real danger that we will give up on providing decent housing, feeding hungry children, training the unskilled jobless, simply because of public disgust with the waste and red tape of bureaucracy.

I hate red tape as much as anybody. But I have a record of cutting through it or bypassing it to get things done. For instance, within six months after we announced the concept of Head Start, we had 565,000 children enrolled and more than 100,000 volunteers working with them. And we managed to accomplish this with a staff of only 250 people.

4. Concern. Many people struggling to get by today have the feeling that their government doesn't know and care about them -- that they're just a statistic.

I have been fortunately able in my career to get to know the everyday hopes and fears of all kinds of people all over the country and the world. I have been in the fields of California with Cesar Chavez where foremen stood over children doing stoop labor for \$1.50 a day. I have been in not only the conference rooms of Washington and Wall Street but also the one-room schools and churches in Mississippi. I have slept in tents, huts, yurts, Navaho hogans, and jeeps. As Ambassador to France, I didn't just sit around having social teas in the embassy -- I got out and talked with miners, textile workers, fishermen. I know how ordinary people feel, and I care -- they could never be just statistics to me.

I know and I care what it means to ordinary families when they can't afford desperately needed medical treatment, or a catastrophic illness plunges them into personal bankruptcy -- when a plant closing or relocation wipes out twenty years of job seniority and forces hard-working men and women into unemployment lines -- when rising living costs and tuition costs shatter a lifelong dream of college education for the children. And I am deeply troubled by the forces working to weaken the traditionally strong American family, and the rising juvenile delinquency which inevitably results. I believe our government can and should lend a hand to help families weather storms like these, and I intend to make specific proposals for accomplishing that.

As for the conduct of our foreign affairs, I have also been uniquely favored in my career with unusual familiarity with the entire world. In the first four years of the Peace Corps, I traveled over half a million miles across and around the world, meeting with dozens of heads of state and thousands of common people. Today I am personally acquainted with more leaders in Moscow than some candidates know in Washington. I am as prepared as any candidate could be to lead our nation beyond the uneasy peace of co-existence toward the 21st Century necessity of a common existence with the nations and peoples of the world.

We Democrats lost twice to Richard Nixon -- and both times the result was even more disastrous than we predicted. Now Nixon's hand-picked successor, Gerald Ford, for all his personal decency, threatens to lead us unwitting into more disaster unless we nominate and elect a Democrat who can unite our Party and lead it to victory.

If you believe I can do this, I can only repeat what John F. Kennedy said, "Give me your hand." Your support in the infancy of my campaign can make a decisive difference.

This is the first presidential primary in which you, the contributor and voter, are completely the boss. Your votes in about 30 state primaries and 20 state Democratic caucuses will determine the nominee. And under the new law limiting contributions to \$1000, your modest contribution will weigh as importantly as that of any special interest. Furthermore, the Federal government will match your contribution up to \$250, so the impact and importance of your donation is doubled.

But I need your help at once. Already the first primaries are only weeks away. Will you join me in working to get this country back on the track? Never has the need been so urgent or the opportunity so great.

Sincerely yours,

Sargent Shriver
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