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Jacqueline A. Bast

Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois

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Jacqueline Bast

Descriptive Analysis of Ted Cruz's Announcement Speech

In his speech at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, on March 23, 2015, Texas Senator Ted Cruz announced he was running for President as a Republican candidate. He positions himself as the strongest candidate to repeal the “Affordable Health Care Act” by framing it as a harmful policy move for the American economy and society. In order to gain support, Cruz constructs his character as courageous and determined and incites the emotions of anger and unit in his audience.¹

Cruz sets the agenda on the issue of a new health care reform. He points out the importance of revoking the Affordable Health Care Act, what he calls Obamacare, and announces his intent to sign “legislation repealing every word of Obamacare.”

He frames Obamacare in a way that makes it seem like a big mistake that had many consequences. He lists all the disadvantages Obamacare brought to the American health care system and the people by reminding of the “millions who’ve lost their health insurance, [...] have faced skyrocketing health insurance premiums” and lost their jobs or were “forced into part-time work.” His diction suggests that this law brought massive damage to a great mass of people and that it ignored the people’s interests because they could not choose their own work times anymore.

Cruz then frames his policy solutions in contrast to Obama’s. Within his whole speech, he constantly repeats the word “imagine” at the beginning of his sentences and combines them with clauses that start with the term “instead of” in order to create a contrast in his favor. An example is when he says, “Instead of the joblessness, [...] imagine health care reform that [...] makes health insurance personal and portable and affordable.” This contrast not only makes the audience aware of what they are deprived of by the current government, but also what they

¹ This essay applies Medhurst’s (2005) conceptual overview of presidential campaign rhetoric – agenda-setting, framing, character construction, and emotional resonance.

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would be given if they vote for Cruz as the new President. He frames the actions and issues of the present government as damaging whereas his own proposals are desirable and helpful. This reoccurring parallelism also suggests that the list of contrast goes on beyond what he actually lists.

Moreover, the repetition of contrasts accumulates during the speech and finally gains an additional meaning. For the first half of his speech, one does not really understand the reasons behind these repeated imaginations. Then, Cruz gives a review of the past achievements of the American Founding Fathers and states that “That, too, seemed unimaginable” but “yet, with the grace of God, that’s exactly what happened.” This statement implies two important aspects that help to understand how he frames his issues. Firstly, he builds up a climax in his speech by repeating prompts for the audience to visualize. By giving the example of General Washington, who was “fighting for freedom against the most powerful army in the world,” he encourages them to think back to a time where our present reality seemed impossible to the people of the past. Similarly, he suggest that things that seem unimaginable now can become reality. Therefore, the abstract images become a plausible reality with his prospective candidacy. Secondly, Cruz frames his issues, health care included, as so important and necessary that they will be enabled by the grace of God. This context could appeal to the religious part of the audience as it fits their frame of God’s will and receiving his grace for good intentions. At the same time, this clause provides him with an excuse for potential failure in the future. By bringing in God’s influence and saying that “the power of the American people when we rise up [...] knows no bounds”, he makes the whole nation responsible for the desired changes. One could say if he fails and does not fulfill his promises, it is because the American people did not stand together or God did not want these changes.

In his speech, Cruz constructs his character as a warrior who will win the battle of contrasts he sets up. Most warriors have to go through struggles in order to develop leadership and fighting skills, and so did Cruz according to his stories of his humbled background. His

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father left his family because he decided “he didn’t want to be a father to his 3-year-old son” anymore and he himself worked his way from the bottom up and took loans he “just paid off few years ago.” Having overcome all these struggles, he became the warrior of people who decided to “join a grassroots army across this nation” and fight with him to repeal Obamacare. By using terms like “under no circumstances, fight, defeat” and “call it by its name” he obtains the confident and outspoken character traits of a warrior. This emphasizes his strong will to realize his policy solutions and fight Obama’s damaging laws such as Obamacare. An important association can be found in his use of the term “grassroots army.” A grassroots army implies that the people themselves build the basis of this battle. Therefore, he shows his intention to involve every American, raise this army from the bottom up and form not just any government, but a government with and for the people.

He encourages the audience to fight the battle with him by encouraging them to feel the emotions of anger and unity, created by variations in his tone and diction. Whenever he speaks of Obama or the current federal government, he uses negative words such as “lawless,” “unconstitutional,” or “boycott”. This points out Obama’s failure and intolerable attitude as a president and provokes anger in the audience.

Cruz then incites the feeling of unity by emphasizing the strength of unified people. He asks his audience to imagine “rising up together to say in unison ‘we demand our liberty’” and claims that “The power of the American people [...] knows no bounds.” This suggests that everything is possible with him as a President if they just stand together and fight at his side. Additionally, he reinforces this feeling of a unity by constantly using the word “we.” This makes everybody feel involved and like an important part of this process. Specifically, the present students feel proud and taken seriously when he reminds them that “Liberty University went to court filing a lawsuit to stop that failed law” of Obama’s. Cruz makes his audience feel like they

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are all part of the history and are strongly needed as a unit to improve the United States of America.

In conclusion, Cruz frames his main issue Obamacare in a way that it seems intolerable to his audience and likewise, presents himself as a warrior who can solve this problem if the American people are willing to fight with him. He incites the audience to feel angry at the current conditions but hopeful that together they can change it.

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