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Campaign Announcement Analysis: Carly Fiorina

On May 4th, 2015, Carly Fiorina released a brief announcement that she would be running for the Republican nomination for the 2016 presidential election. Her video was released on YouTube and quickly swept through the media. In her announcement speech, Carly Fiorina places citizens' wishes at the top of her list of concerns. Fiorina frames the issue of lack of citizen representation in government as an urgent issue of corrupt government, and sets herself up as the best candidate to combat this issue because of her unity with the audience and her no-nonsense attitude. After trying to rationally appeal to voters, she also tries to illicit emotional responses from her audience by invoking a sense of coming together in a patriotic manner.¹

Fiorina's announcement speech, although brief, utilizes agenda-setting to focus in on the issue of citizens' voices not being heard by government officials. She says, "It's time for us to empower our citizens, to give them a voice in our government," and "it's time for citizens to stand up to the political class." She urges voters to re-imagine the way the American Government is run and to emphasize a smaller and more efficient government.

Fiorina frames the issue of inadequate government representation for everyday people by making it seem like a pressing issue of corruption that has lasted too long. By claiming that politicians have a certain amount of "pettiness" and "egos," Fiorina establishes a common enemy for the American public and herself to overthrow. At the beginning of her announcement, Fiorina turns off an ad that Hilary Clinton has released for her own campaign where she announces her run for presidency. By suggesting character flaws in politicians such as Hilary, she is framing the issue as a country-wide political issue. She never states that some politicians are good, and some are bad, but instead emphasizes bad qualities that exist in American Government. She makes it clear that there is a problem with the way politicians run the government with little regard to

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

public opinion, and sets her campaigns focus on creating equality for Americans. Fiorina emphasizes that career politicians are one of the major problems in America by saying, “Our founders never intended for us to have a professional political class.” She then turns her focus to using unity of citizens as her weapon to combat the domination of lifetime politicians. She announces that politics are broken, and what the country really needs to gain through new leadership, and through new policy is a chance to “fix what has been broken about our politics and our government for too long.”

She frames the issue as urgent by emphasizing that now is the time for action, and saying that citizens must “stand up to the political class and say “Enough.”” According to Fiorina, now is not the time to turn our heads and ignore the corruption in our government, but now is the time to pair up with strong leaders who can bring about change in American politics. Her urgent and businesslike tone and demeanor show the audience that she is not willing to waste any time and is ready to get down to business fixing our government. By turning off Clinton’s add on her television, Fiorina is showing that she is sick of the “soundbites,” that politicians are presenting instead of acting, and she frames her agenda as more urgent and authoritative by addressing the audience briefly in only a 50-second speech.

Fiorina constructs her character as a no-nonsense and trustworthy leader who will stand with the American people in their journey for political reformation. Her character is established as a no-nonsense doer who is ready to take action immediately by the short nature of her speech which contains only the bare bones of her political agenda without the usual political fluff. Fiorina is “tired of the soundbites,” of politicians who are all talk and no action, and she portrays her character as different from the other candidates by metaphorically shutting them off on the television. Fiorina constructs herself as a take action kind of leader who will listen more than she

will talk, as implied through her 50 second speech. Moreover, by using “we,” and “us,” she creates a sense of unity between the American people and herself, while establishing herself as trustworthy to stand with Americans. She accomplishes making a strong connection and unity with her audience through her us and them mentality, and makes it clear that she will continue to offer the leadership and guidance the American people need if elected as president. Fiorina constructs herself as a take action kind of leader who will listen more than she will talk, as implied through her 50 second speech. Her character is established as a no-nonsense doer who is ready to take action immediately by the short nature of her speech which contains only the bare bones of her political agenda without the usual political fluff. Fiorina is “tired of the soundbites,” of politicians who are all talk and no action, and she portrays her character as different from the other candidates by metaphorically shutting them off on the television.

Carly Fiorina’s presidential announcement speech has strong emotional resonance with American audience members in several ways. First, Fiorina starts calls for a feeling of patriotism by talking about “Our founders,” she is already referencing an emotionally stimulating part of American history. She pulls from American knowledge of the founding father’s struggle for independence and political freedom from England, and creates a sense of pride and longing for the freedom our fathers have already once achieved. Fiorina’s language is meant to urge the audience to rise to arms in the fight against corrupt government, and to support her campaign as the vessel to bring about the needed change.

As the audience’s emotion is already peaked from the first line of her address, her next appeal to emotion furthers to inspire voters and gain support for her campaign. By appealing to emotion through her use of “we,” and “us,” Fiorina appeals to the emotional idea of country-wide unity and love. These emotional responses help to evoke support from the audience and

drive them to want to take action against the injustices that Fiorina has outlined. The audience feels that they are an important component in bringing government reform, and this emotional longing primes them to support Fiorina as their competent leader to take them to the promise land of having fair representation. They are urged to “come together,” with Fiorina to fight corruption and bring about change.

After Fiorina’s speech, voters are called to feel united and confident in having Fiorina as a leader to bring about change in a corrupt government that fails to hear the voices of civilians. She sets up the problem of big government and then sets herself up to be the solution to bring about social change and bring back equality for everyday people. By framing the situation as urgent, setting up her competent character, and appealing to the patriotic emotions of her audience, Fiorina uses her brief presidential announcement speech to try and persuade audience members for their vote in the upcoming primaries and caucuses.

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