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Martin O'Malley Announcement Speech Analysis

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Karolyn Erickson

Campaign Announcement Speech

Martin O'Malley announced his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination on May 30, 2015, at Federal Hill Park in Baltimore, Maryland. In his announcement speech, O'Malley positions himself as the strongest candidate on the issue of immigration by framing the United States as a welcoming place to all immigrants coming into the United States. To gain support for this issue framing, O'Malley constructs his character as a patriotic leader and incites the emotions of trust and confidence to convince his audience that he will be a great President.¹

Candidate O'Malley sets the agenda on the issue of comprehensive immigration reform. During his announcement speech, he puts forth the idea that America should be welcoming all immigrants. O'Malley mentions how we would benefit from immigration reform by saying, "For the sake of our country's security, and our country's well-being, and our country's economic growth, we must also bring 11 million of our neighbors out of the shadows by passing comprehensive immigration reform." By this he means that we should be compassionate towards all immigrants, including refugees. In order to do so, immigration reform is necessary.

O'Malley frames immigration in a positive light by associating it with the American Dream. He says, "I want to talk with you today about the American Dream we share . . . All of us are included . . . there is no such thing as a spare American." By this statement he means that all people deserve to have the American Dream, including immigrants who come to the United States to begin a new and prosperous life. Throughout his speech, O'Malley also stresses the idea of equality and prosperity for all who work for it. O'Malley says, "Our nation was founded on two self-evident truths. That all of us are created equal. And that we are endowed by our

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

Creator with the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” He goes on to say that all people are included in these rights, even immigrants. O’Malley says, “All of us are included . . . Irish Americans, Asian Americans, Latino American, Native Americans. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Americans.” By listing all of these cultures and religions, he is showing that every immigrant deserves to possess the rights enlisted in our Constitution despite what their background may be. O’Malley is promoting the idea that every person deserves to live the American Dream.

O’Malley also frames his immigration reform policies as necessary to keep our American Dream alive and protected. He does this by comparing the American Dream to a thread. O’Malley uses powerful imagery when he says, “the American Dream seems to be hanging by a thread. And yet . . . the final thread that holds us just might be the strongest.” This quote is a reality check because it creates a sense of urgency by saying it the American Dream is hanging by a thread. As Americans, we imagine the American Dream to be highly attainable if we work hard. However, this may not be the case for potential immigrants who wish to come to America to start their own American Dream. Because of recent immigration laws, they may not have access to our country or they may not want to be criticized for their religion or culture. But by saying that the American Dream is hanging by the strongest thread, it means that there is still hope for those people. With O’Malley’s immigration laws, he will be able to assist them in their American Dream.

O’Malley also frames the Statue of Liberty as a protector of the American Dream. He demonstrates this when he says, “The enduring symbol of our nation is not the barbed wire fence, it is the Statue of Liberty.” By this statement, he is implying that we should not be warding off immigrants, but instead welcoming them to our safe harbors. He is implying how

the Statue of Liberty serves as a welcoming beacon of hope for all immigrants coming to the United States. O'Malley also says, "We are a nation of immigrants. We are a compassionate and generous people. And if we act according to our principles- and the better angles of our nature- if we return to our true selves, the dream will live again." Here O'Malley is suggesting that we should put ourselves in the immigrants' shoes and be open-minded, caring, and understanding to all newcomers; that we should be a living example of the Statue of Liberty. He says that if we do this, our American Dream will continue.

O'Malley constructs his character as a patriotic American. He first shows his patriotism when he mentions the most important ideal that his parents taught him: "Every generation of American has the ability- and the sacred responsibility- to become great. And so we must. No matter how long the odds, no matter how large the challenge, and no matter how tough the fight." This ideal shows that O'Malley is dedicated to making every generation realize their potential, act on that potential, and achieve greatness, just as a true patriot would. He strives for everyone to help rebuild the American Dream to make it achievable for all, including new and old citizens. O'Malley also shows off his patriotism by proclaiming that "We the People still have the will to become great Americans. I believe we do. My decision is made." When he uses the phrase "We the People", which is found in the Constitution and marks the founding of our country, this reiterates his patriotism. By saying that he believes in America, he shows that he cares and wants to rebuild what has fallen apart. He guides us to the conclusion that we need a President, such as him, to protect us.

O'Malley uses words that inspire the audience to make changes to ensure the American Dream lives on. He says, "Together we can make our city safer . . . Together, we made our city believe again . . . Together, as one nation we must build an American economy that works again

for all of us.” By continuously saying that “together” we will make change, it evokes inspiration and unity amongst the audience because everyone would be working towards one ultimate goal: The American Dream. O’Malley also says, “We have saved the world before and we must save our country now- and we will do that by rebuilding the American Dream!” By stating that drastic changes have been made before and it is possible to do so again, he inspires the audience to go out and initiate change order to preserve our American Dream.

During Martin O’Malley’s announcement speech declaring his campaign for Presidency, he addresses the issue of immigration reform. This is an important issue to set on his agenda because it is currently a controversial topic. He stresses that we need to be welcoming to immigrants because our nation was founded upon immigrant and that our patriotism is about welcoming others to join in on the American Dream. He argues that all people have an equal chance to come to the United States regardless of race or religion. O’Malley plans to make change that will ensure our American Dreams stay alive.

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