

*Editor's Note: Asa Hutchinson's campaign released the following transcript ahead of the former Arkansas governor's official announcement of his 2024 presidential run, which began at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, April 26, in Bentonville.*



Thank you for joining Susan and me on this special day.

This is a day in which our nation's future . . . and my personal story comes together. Susan has been on this journey with me each step of the way. And Arkansas never had a better first lady.

Bentonville is a big part of my life story. But, so is Gravette where I grew up on a farm and learned the importance of family, faith, and community. I also learned hard work from my dad by cleaning out chicken houses and building fences. And my life story also includes Springdale, where I was inspired by teachers who pushed me to learn and it was in Springdale that my political awareness began with the nation's divide over the Vietnam War and the struggle for civil rights.

But, let's come back to Bentonville.

I was born in the old Bentonville Hospital; my first law office was across the square from where we stand today; I tried jury trials in this courthouse; I built Bentonville's first FM radio station; I served as Bentonville's City Attorney; and this is where Susan and I started our family and spent some of our happiest years living on 15 acres of rocks and hills west of town in a double-wide mobile home.

It was here on these steps, over 30 years ago, that I announced my run for the United States Senate. At that time Arkansas was a blue state and the Republican Party was pretty much non-existent. I stepped up to take on runaway federal spending; to fight for a strong national defense; to support the life of unborn children; and to unleash the private sector of our economy.

In other words, I ran as a conservative Republican when being a Republican was like having a career-ending handicap.

I continued to fight the establishment and over time . . . we won.

That was the beginning and since then I have been a consistent conservative through my time as leader of the party; in the U.S. Congress and as Governor.

And now, I bring that same vigor to fight another battle and that battle is for the future of our country and the soul of our party.

Today, I am announcing that I am a candidate for President of the United States.

In this campaign for President, I stand alone in terms of my experience, record, and leadership.

From Congress to DEA to Homeland Security, I have served our country in times of crisis.

As Governor of Arkansas, we cut taxes and created record surpluses.

We increased pay for teachers.

We reduced regulations; recruited industry, and the private sector grew by over 100,000 jobs.

My mettle has been tested.

It was tested when I put on a flak jacket and assisted the FBI Hostage Rescue Team in negotiating the surrender of an armed terrorist group.

My mettle was tested after the 9-11 attack when I was responsible for protecting the United States from another act of terrorism on U.S. soil.

And my mettle was tested once more as governor when I demonstrated how we can lead through a pandemic without closing down every business and shutting down schools.

When I had pressure from Washington and the national media to shelter in place, I said "no".

And the result was that our businesses survived and we had more days of in-classroom instruction during the pandemic than almost any other state. Yes, that's right . . . we beat Florida!

This campaign is about courage.

It is about making the tough decisions to rebuild our economy; to give peace a chance through America's strength, and to renew the American spirit of freedom . . .

Opportunity . . .

and the rule of law.

And we've got our work cut out for us. Let me offer some solutions.

First, we need to get our economy back on track.

The Biden Administration has turned its back on the American worker. To turn our economy around we have to stop the "break-the-bank" federal spending that has led to high inflation and rising interest rates.

Every hardworking American family gets a double hit from the Biden economy. Their paycheck doesn't go as far, and they are paying more on car loans and credit card debt because of the high-interest rates.

That is not acceptable.

I have been Chief Executive of our state for 8 years and that means I know how to balance a budget. I did it every single year.

And while I was in Congress, we balanced the federal budget and it is high time we did it again.

And that's just the beginning of what we must do together to bring out the best of America.

We must secure our Southern border. We need a pro-growth energy policy that is not focused on limits but on production. We should not limit American growth but rather we should unleash our energy producers.

And if America is to be the best; then we cannot yield to China in terms of global leadership.

When the Biden Administration conducted its disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, we left our friends abandoned and our allies confused.

America looked weak and that weakness was seen as an opportunity for Russia to invade Ukraine and then for China to threaten and be aggressive toward Taiwan.

Let me assure you that as President, I will bring out the best of America . . . we will stand with our allies and friends. We will not abandon our friends in times of need.

There are some who want the U.S. to disengage from the world and to isolate ourselves. Isolationism only leads to weakness and weakness leads to war. Americans want peace and the best way to secure and preserve peace is to have the most prepared military in the world.

Today's threat is the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I join with those who say we do not want an unending war in Ukraine, and the best way to avoid a long war is to help Ukraine win today.

As a nation, we have proven resilient in our democracy and we have endured through times of war and hardship. And I am confident we will even survive through the destructive policies of the Biden administration but the time for change is now. It is time to bring out the best of America.

As a nation, our democracy's resilience comes from our shared values and it comes from our willingness to sacrifice for the cause of freedom. We need leaders who understand the importance of democracy to our own freedoms and that with God's blessing, we set an example of liberty throughout the world.

America is democracy's lighthouse. We must not let the light be dimmed.

If freedom's light goes out in the United States then other countries will have their freedom shipwrecked on rocky shoals. Our democracy demands America's best and I will bring out America's best.

We will do this through leadership, economic growth, and respect for the rule of law.

The Biden Administration has stood on the sidelines and passively watched as rampant crime destroys our cities with smash-and-grab robberies and a flagrant disrespect for human dignity and the rule of law.

This must change.

What separates the United States from the rest of the world is our commitment to justice.

The rule of law is the foundation for peace in our communities. I am the only candidate running for President with a breadth of experience in law enforcement.

I will enforce the law and demand that local prosecutors do the same. Lawbreakers must be held accountable. Restoring respect for the law will not only reduce crime in our country; it will also bring out the best of America.

These are solutions that work for America.

The rule of law also applies to our southern border. I have three words that will work to protect our country from the human suffering that results from an open border. That is “enforce the law”.

I know how to do this because President George W. Bush tapped me to help lead the Department of Homeland Security. Our nation is a land of immigrants who make up the fabric of our democracy. In order to respect those who follow the legal path to come to this country, we must reform our asylum laws; devote more resources to support our border patrol; quickly remove those who come into our country illegally; and go after the cartels who are killing Americans with the deadly drug fentanyl. When fentanyl is the leading cause of death for those 18 to 49 then we are losing our sons and daughters way too soon.

There are a few misguided leaders who say we should defund the FBI. I am here today in support of our law enforcement heroes. The argument to defund police is designed to undermine our rule of law.

We should not defund the FBI, but we do need serious reform to refocus the core functions of our federal law enforcement.

As someone who has worked with all the federal law enforcement agencies, I know what needs to be done. We must make them more focused, more accountable, and successful in protecting our citizens.

The FBI needs to be trimmed down and focused on its number one duty . . . leading our counter-terrorism mission. And when we support our law enforcement and enforce the rule of law we bring out the best of America.

Growing up in these hills, I learned the value of work. I hauled hay; worked in four different factories; sacked groceries; and through college, I was a janitor cleaning campus buildings.

All to pay the bills and to get an education.

In law school, I benefitted from the federal student loan program. And, yes, I paid my loan off!

In order to bring out the best of America, we must once again embrace the dignity of work! Our federal government should not reward those who sit at home when they have the ability to work and provide for themselves.

As Governor, I turned down federal assistance that discouraged a return to work. But the Biden Administration paid people more benefits to stay home than they could make working.

This is wrong.

As President, I will open doors for more worker training and better pay and we will require work for able-bodied welfare recipients.

This will grow our manufacturing workforce and we will prove that we can still make things in the United States.

An important solution to this challenge is lifting the penalties for those who want to stay in the workforce after the age of 62.

Right now, if you retire on Social Security, you are penalized for continuing to work. You should be able to both claim social security and work. Remove the penalties and let those who want to work continue to do so without government penalties.

Right now we have nearly 10 million job openings in the U.S. and by making this change we will add millions to the labor pool and increase the income of retirees at the same time. Yes, this will help bring out the best of America!

And when it comes to those who depend upon Social Security and Medicare, I will assure the strength and reliability into the future.

Right now, Social Security is financially stable until 2033. Medicare is stable until 2028. As we have successfully done in the past, I will immediately convene an independent Commission to Assure the Future of Social Security and Medicare. This Commission will be modeled after the 1983 Commission that was chaired by Alan Greenspan. It led to legislation that successfully extended the life of these vital retirement programs for Americans.

Americans need to have confidence in their future and this action will stabilize and assure the future of a supplemental retirement program Americans depend upon.