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Fred Thompson Addresses Lincoln Club 45th Annual Dinner

Thank you, appreciate it. Thank you very much Rich for that introduction and your little traipse through my personal history... I've obviously had some trouble keeping a job over the years.

But it's great to be here with so many old friends. It's great to be back with so many old friends.

I hope you've enjoyed your dinner; I've spent most of my time trying to keep Bob Novak from seeing my notes. And Jason, I enjoyed your film work. I'm always glad to make the acquaintance of another filmmaker. If this politics thing doesn't work out I'd like to talk to you after this show also.

I've enjoyed my entire stay here, I came in last night... it could have been a little better, it happens to me all the time. I was in the airport lounge and this lady came up to me very nice and, gleam in her eye, and said, "We watch you on television all the time, my husband and I are such big fans, could we have your autograph?"

And I said sure, sure, and asked her where she wanted me to sign, and she said "Do you shoot the show out here Dr. Phil?"

I'm glad you think that was funny... I kept the pen...

You know our paths have crossed a time or two. Years ago I came out; you were kind enough to have me then. You've been an inspiration to me and millions of people. Not just because the things you've done that were listed awhile that everyone is aware of. Everybody interested in good government and low taxes and sound governmental principles, but just a group of private individuals that realize that government is too important to leave up to the government. And you came together and saw a list of things that needed to be righted, and you did it. And you did it for everybody.

Not the least of which was your support for a fellow named Ronald Reagan, who in turn inspired so many of us, including me. Our journey really started together, you and me, with him. I was a 26 year old lawyer a couple of years out of law school in my hometown of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, just being a country lawyer and enjoying life, and they had a hopeless congressional campaign and they couldn't get anyone to manage it, so naturally I volunteered. And Ronald Reagan was coming in to speak for my guy and some others at a bigger town down the road, so because of my lofty position with the campaign I was able to sit backstage with Governor Reagan. And he was the most unassuming important man I have ever met.

We sat back there and talked and he asked me a bit about the crowd, and finally asked me "What do you think I ought to say to them?"

I mumbled out a few things I guess. He went out there and gave a stirring speech to those people, and included almost the very words that I had given to him. He had me for life.

And later on he had me for a lot more important reasons than that. We've gone through a lot together. You mentioned the Watergate days, and my finding myself asking a man named Alexander Butterfield, "Mr. Butterfield, is there a taping system in the White House?"

We lived through the aftermath of that. We lived through the sweep of 1994, which I got to be a part of. We came in before long and were able to balance the budget, pass welfare reform, and do some other good things.

I'll never forget my first Senate speech when I got there. It was about having Congress abide by the laws that everyone else must abide by. It was a novel concept at the time but we were able to eventually pass that legislation.

But I made my maiden speech, of course the chamber was just about empty as always, but there was one old timer there who, I won't call his name, but he'd been there for many years, and he listened to the speech and I was quite taken with that. And he came up to me afterwards and said "Fred, good speech."

And I said "Thank you"

And he said "Can I ask you a question... Was that a real submarine they used in Hunt for Red October?"

I learned right off what people's priorities were as far as I was concerned. Of course my foray into the movie business brought me out to California from time to time. I try to tell people that I actually shot more movies in North Carolina than in California, but nobody will believe that so I gave up on that.

I was a fan of Arnold Schwarzenegger from the very beginning. I gave a speech in Tennessee where I said some good things about him when he was first running. And the next day I got a call from Arnold in my home thanking me for the

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beef was all those movies he made garnering hundreds of millions of dollars, it looks like he could've had some work for me somewhere in there. But Arnold always played the hero so it's probably just as well, I can't imagine what role I would've wound up with in one of his movies.

One of my biggest regrets from that business is that I never met John Wayne. But I understand many of you did, right in the next room there. So we've had our ups and our downs together, and I bet you agree with me that as we look back on those up times, we probably were never as up as we thought we were. And certainly as we look at those down times we never were quite as down as we thought we were.

And that's probably a good thing for us to remember tonight. Because Americans are expressing a lot of concern these days about the direction their country is going, there is some concern that maybe we're slipping away like all the great powers have. We're hearing a bit of that old malaise talk we used to hear all about. Part of it is Iraq, certainly. Part of it is the economy, believe it or not. The wonderful economy and economic news you continue to hear, the greatest story never told as some people call it, yet people are talking about the threats of globalization and the disparity of income. And my friends I really believe that some people's proposals as to how we should react to these things are much more dangerous than the problems that are perceived in and of themselves.

Some people are saying that in effect after this war in Iraq is over we need to come back home and close the doors and lock them and pull down the shades and build up walls of protection and trade protection and raise taxes and redistribute the income. That's their solution. They're wrong then, they've been wrong throughout history, and that will not happen. And we have to defend the sound policies that have worked for us so often and so effectively throughout history. You wouldn't think you'd have to make the lower tax case again, but you have to make it every day in Washington DC.

It looks like we would've come to the conclusion a long time ago that things that promote savings, investment and risk are good things. And when you read the history books and you see the boom that happened after Kennedy lowered taxes in the 1960's, and you see in 1981 when Ronald Reagan lowered taxes and turned malaise into prosperity, and you see the same thing when George Bush in 2001 did the same thing again took a declining economy which he inherited and turned it around into a good thing, into a positive economy despite 9/11, despite what was going on on Wall Street, and the bursting of the NASDAQ bubble and all the scandals that were there. Overcame all of that and gave us a situation today where the government is collecting more revenue than at any time in history.

We live in a country where 5% of the people pay over half the taxes and 40% of the people pay no taxes at all and yet that seems to be the focus and the solution for the liberals in Washington; just adjust that a little bit and everything will be alright. Of course, we're talking about once again, targeting the rich. My advice for anybody in the middle class: don't stand anywhere near the target.

Wouldn't it be nice instead of arguing again about how to divide the pie up again in this country that we could talk about how to make the pie a little bit larger? Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing to do? On globalization we aren't afraid of America; it's a good thing for America. We do more things better than anybody else. We have more innovation; we invest more in innovation in this country and in our service economy than anybody in the world. Free trade and free prosperity have done more things and caused more prosperity in the world than anything any central planner ever could have come up with and America is the best example of that.

If we want to help our friends in South America and Africa for example and other places, we need to lower our trade barriers, we need to have more trade. Democracy is a good thing, sometimes though we need to focus on the basics on which Democracy can operate. Democracy sometimes means one vote, one time and it's over with. We need to promote things like the rule of law, open market, and free trade. Any country that has ever tried that has prospered, any country that hasn't, has not.

So we're doing some things right in this country, we need to think about that and be proud of that fact and proud of our country. We also need to be big enough to acknowledge that some things are going wrong in this country. Back in 2001 I was Chairman of the Governmental Affairs Committee and I was watching something that developed in this country for a long time. We were getting to a place where some very important functions in this government were becoming almost inoperable. Getting fraught with mismanagement and lack of accountability. I wrote about a 60 page report called Government at the Brink, documenting the waste, fraud, abuse, mismanagement, and lack of accountability that was affecting government at that time. I handed that off to Mitch Daniels who was head of OMB at that time and later became Governor of Indiana and we started discussing what we were going to do about that.

Shortly after that 9/11 happened, refocused everyone's attention for a period of time, with a pretty good result I might add. The fact that we haven't been attacked again in this country is no accident.

But we have to get back to refocus on the reality that is now presenting problems for us in terms of national security. And a lot of it has once again to do with the growth of government. Every bureaucracy that stays long enough grows. And every new bureaucracy that's created, one is created beneath it. Good people, coming into Washington to head an agency, head a department for awhile; they're usually from around the country. Bring them in for a confirmation process that costs them a fortune in accounting fees, in lawyer fees, and 9 months before some committee arguing about them. And finally when they get there to serve, they want to do something important for their country, they want to operate and engage in broad policy issues that they came to Washington to address, not to fight their own bureaucracy, not to spend all their time in civil service proceedings on somebody that they thought needed to be fired.

And so it goes on and on, and after awhile we end up with departments that can't pass an audit, computer systems that can't talk to each other after spending hundreds of millions of dollars, intelligence systems that are failing, and people in over their heads. And yet throughout all of this, we have a lot of people still in Washington today, sad to say not all of one party, that when they get a good idea they want to federalize things that have been under the state purview for years and years. Depriving the nation of the experimentation and diversity that's out there in the states. That's how we got welfare reform, because of state activity that worked so it was picked up and used.

I think our attitude ought to be in the federal government to do what you're supposed to do and do it competently, and then maybe we'll give you something else to do.

One of those things is border security. The immigration problem has to do with immigration, but it in large part has to do with national security. We live in a world now; we have inherited a world that is watching the attempted marriage between radical Islamic fundamentalism and nuclear technology. We live in a world where 40 countries have fissile materials sufficient to make a nuclear weapon, and the bad guys are trying their best to get their hands on it. And we live in a country with porous borders and porous ports, and it doesn't take a genius to put all that together and see the problem that we've got in this country. And I think people are going to demand that we address that first. I don't think the 12 million illegal aliens that are here are as much a concern as the next 12 million and the next 12 million on infinitum.

We were told before that there was a solution to this if we would only pass a bill, but we did that in 1986 and now we're coming back with the same old stuff, so I don't think that people are going to respond to it until that border situation is addressed. Then I think people of goodwill ought to sit down and work out the rest of it together.

We have a good problem in this country, and that is we have the best medical system in the world. It's too expensive; we need to do something about it. There needs to be a lot of conversation about it. But in the meantime, we need to ensure we don't destroy the best of something that man has ever created that is keeping so many people alive so much longer. We're growing older as a society, thank goodness, thank God. But we're not producing enough young people in the workforce to pay for the retirement plans that we have in this country, to pay for our Social Security and Medicare obligations. It's simply a matter of demographics. And if we continue on the present pace before too long, it will sap all the revenues of the government, and our government will be nothing more than a transfer agent, transferring wealth from one generation to the next. And the taxes necessary to fill that gap are going to be so backbreaking and astronomical that young people trying to start out, buy that first home and pay their mortgage, that it will absolutely ruin our economy. Now, most of the folks in Washington, all of the folks know about it, it's not a matter of lack of expertise, lack of knowledge, it's a matter of lack of will. And for the professional politician there is nothing more dangerous than uncertainty and possibly doing something that somebody doesn't like. And it never occurred to any of them to explain to people the necessity to do something for the country might work. They operate on the basis that this generation is too greedy to do anything for the next generation, and the next generation after that.

I think that's the exact opposite of the truth. I think if a credible case is made to the American people that mom and dad and grandmom and granddad will be more than happy to make the adjustments necessary to protect their kids and their grandkids in the next generation, if they're just given a chance. Why in the world would you want to be in politics if you can't make a difference, everyone says they want to do that. Here you can make a difference not only with this generation but the next one after that and the next one after that. What kind of legacy people could leave.

They're within our control. The problems we have should not depress us, they are in our control. Obviously when you've got close numbers you're going to need a certain amount of bipartisanship to get things done. You need that anyway. It is sorely lacking. We do have some good people who are willing to do that, not enough, but willing to do that. But we need to understand the basis for bipartisanship. It doesn't come with additional photo-ops or additional nice statements that always happen with a new Congress and a new President before they can get in mutual corners and pull out the knives, it happens with the American people. That's the only thing that will derive the political leaders in Congress to do the right thing, because they'll be afraid not to because the people will be on the other side.

I am hopeful that after this next election, the good people, the people who are reform-minded and change-minded in the good way, and the next President of the United States can go to the American people and just say this, in effect: We've got a new situation on our hands now, and we're living in a new era. We're going to be tested in many ways, may even be under attack, maybe for a long time. But it's time to be honest with ourselves, we need to do some things better, and we need to do some things differently. Here's what we need to do, and here's why we need to do it. Now that you've been called upon, and you understand I know that you'll respond for the sake of your nation and the next generation, because you always have. And when we get the response that I think we'll get from the American people from that it'll shake the capital and you'll have your bipartisanship.

I don't think there's a question that if we leave Iraq before there is some semblance of stability in that nation, so those brave people there have a chance to make their government and democracy work, that the world is going to be a more dangerous place. And as long as we have any chance there, as long as those brave people on the front lines who are making our sacrifices for us, and doing so much as long as they have a chance and they say they have a chance, we need to give them the opportunity to make that work there.

My own feeling is that under the worst circumstances there that we're going to leave a new haven for terrorists and we're going to leave an area of the world that becomes more and more nuclear. That those civilian nations surrounding Iraq will respond to what Iran is doing to their nuclear program and that the whole place will be nuclearized and that will be bad for us in many respects.

There is something else that we need to start thinking about with all of this attention and all of the headlines, that there is going to be a day after. Even if we leave in the best of circumstances, even if we're able to assist in restoring stability there and give that government a chance to work, we're going to be out of there eventually. And when we do, we're going to find ourselves in a world that is still very dangerous. We're going to find Iran doing what it's doing, North Korea doing what it's doing in proving itself to be a danger to the world. Al Qaeda is not going to go anywhere good, it's still going to be there trying to get the United States.

George Tenet just came out with a book, and a lot of people are of course concentrating on the who shot John and who did what to whom, and they're probably right, I haven't read it, it's probably just another attempt to answer critics and place blame on somebody else, but I did see this. It's something we need to pay attention to, he's been there. It says there's no question on my mind that Al Qaeda is already here, they're intent, patient, and intend to put a mushroom cloud over an American city no matter how long it takes. That's the kind of world we're going to wake up to after Iraq is

way in our rear view mirror.

We're going to find a China and a Russia both with military build ups. We're going to see a China with hundreds of missiles pointed towards Taiwan, a country we pledge to defend. We're seeing both of those countries playing dangerous, aggressive international energy politics all over the world. In turn we see our Allies and NATO spending less and less on their own militaries to even defend themselves. Unable apparently to keep their commitments to Afghanistan despite it being what they call "the good war."

So I ask you, even though we won't be going around in the woods trying to find any bears to kill, sometimes the bear visits you whether you're looking for it or not. And when that time comes, and hopefully the people on the forces of civilization, realize they're fighting the forces of destruction and darkness, who is going to need to stand firm and stand strong and stand united, if it's not the United States of America?

We've been there before though my friends; this is not our first rodeo. We went through a Great Depression in this country before and came out the most prosperous country in the world. We went through a bloody civil war and 2 world wars and came out the most powerful nation in the world and for the world. And we joined hands on a bipartisan basis and went through a several year period of time in our history together during the Cold War and saw the end of the Soviet Union. So what do we do now? Not wring our hands. We do what we've always done before. There's a model for what we do, we created it. We had strong bipartisan leadership during that time.

Do you ever wonder why when our problems seem to be getting larger; our politicians seem to be getting smaller? I pulled out an old clipping, I'm a clipper, I see things I like I'm always tearing it out of the newspaper, can't figure out why it's more difficult horizontally than it is vertically, but this I came across the other day from about a year ago. Thomas Sowell, who many of you have come to read on a regular basis, in a couple of instances he said when Wendell Wilke got defeated against Franklin Roosevelt, he didn't go around criticizing him, he went to work for him. Became an ambassador to Winston Churchill for him. Neville Chamberlain, a lot of historians said he was an appeaser and brought on World War 2 faster than otherwise would've happened, while all the time ignoring the pained pleads of Winston Churchill, but when Chamberlain died, Churchill spoke his eulogy. Said he was a good man. And he said, no matter how the fates may play, those who do their best for their country always march in the ranks of honor, and Neville Chamberlain marched in the ranks of honor.

Compare that magnanimity with what we see today. You would hope that in this time of difficulty in our country and uncertainty in many ways, that we could have an adult discussion about our future and that we could spend a little more time thinking about the things that unite us and bring us together, such as our common heritage.

I'll leave you with this one more little story. On Monday of this week, because I'd gotten a call from a friend of mine, I drove into Washington and met with a 6th grade class from the Oakwood School, North Hollywood. The father of one of those little girls there, his name is Roger Love, is a friend of mine and asked me to come down and talk to the kids, and so I did. And we talked about various things and I told them some of my stories and some of the things that they might take away in terms of doors opening and being prepared and things of that nature. And a little boy asked me when it was time to wrap up, why are you interested in politics, why are you interested in government?

And of course I could've talked for hours, as I have proved here tonight, but I know I had to put it in a very few words, and send them on their way. So I heard myself saying this, that when I was a young man I was interested in politics because I was interested in the debate, and the winning and the losing. But as I became older I became interested in what politics was supposed to do such as protect our liberties. And even then in reading world history and looking at other governments and watching the news, I began to appreciate how very unique this place was, that I had been lucky to be born here.

And how a handful of intellectuals and a group of people that were far from intellectuals, average people some with run-ins with the law and servants and whatnot, came over here and carved out a country, eventually writing a constitution that was the enemy of the world and still is today, elected a President who could have been king but instead after 8 years of service got on his horse and rode out of town and as far as can be told never came back to Washington to even visit. And how 70 or 80 years later, another great President who we honor here tonight, spoke at Gettysburg, and he wondered aloud whether or not average people could come together and form a government and endure when the going really got tough. And he knew that it could. And it did.

And before and since that time, every generation has done its part to ensure that it did endure with the sacrifices they made. And now it's our turn. It took those kids to draw me back in and think about that common heritage. Maybe we ought to talk to the kids more often.

Thank you very much for having me here.

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