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August 29, 2007



## Fred Thompson Addresses the Midwest Leadership Conference

Crowd: FRED! FRED! FRED!

Fred Thompson: Thank you very much, I appreciate it. Wow, thank you. Thank you for that warm reception and for who you are and what you're doing. I can't tell you how happy I am to be here. Steve Buyer, I wish I could claim a little credit for anything you have done my friend. I can't tell you how much that introduction means to me, but just tell me one thing, when Pat Leahy is making a bad face, how can you tell? I'm sure that will be taken in the spirit that it is given.

Steven thank you so much, you've meant so much to this state and this country. I want to thank Mike McDaniel, Rex Early, Chairman Ray Clark, and all the distinguished guests here this evening. My old friend Dan Burton, it seems like I run into folks from Indiana everywhere I go in my life. David McIntosh is now a great friend and great advisor, and he and his wife Ruthy being here means a whole lot to me. I want to mention my old friend Dan Coats, too.

I want to tell you, after I left the Senate, one of the most rewarding things that I got to do was, after President Bush called me up and help Chief Justice John Roberts get on the Supreme Court of the United States. Dan Coats helped Judge Alito. I don't know how Dan feels about it but I guess that he feels just the way I do, that this was one of the most important things we have done in our careers, put two new judges on the Supreme Court that decide cases and don't decide on causes. They decide two litigants based on the law and they'll be good solid conservative judges, I'm convinced, for the duration. We just need another one or two.

You know the last time I was here; I was so impressive that a scant ten years later I was invited back. I'm delighted to be back, my wife Jeri sends her regards. She's a DePaul grad. She's at home tonight with Hayden and Sammy and she sends her best regards. I'm happy to be here with people who have their priorities straight. That hasn't always been the case in my career. I remember when I first started in the United States Senate and giving my first speech on the floor of the Senate, I was talking about having Congress abide by the same laws as everyone else, which was a novel idea even back then, and with Senator Grassley we got it done. Took it on, made my first speech, of course there wasn't hardly anyone else on the Senate floor at the time, nobody listens to each other for these things, but there was one older gentleman listening who I will not name that was listening. Came up to me afterwards and said "Fred, that was a pretty good speech"

And I said "Why thank you Senator."

And he said "Well I just have one question." So I raised to my full stature with my little pocket constitution in my vest pocket, ready to answer anything he might have, and he said "Tell me, was that a real submarine you used in 'Hunt for Red October'?"

So I understood the priorities right off the bat, but I do remember my early days in the Senate fondly. In fact you can always tell new members of Congress because every once in awhile they slip up and accidentally spend some of their own money. They get over it.

I was at a little function earlier today, and a lady came up to me and told me that her son is coming home after 4 years in Iraq. And she says to me, "You know, you don't get a lot of recognition." But we're going to tonight. Everyone in the room, if you have a relative or a loved one serving their country in the Armed Forces, would you please stand up for a round of applause. (applause)

We need to be reminded every day that if we were not the land of the free, if we were not the home of the brave, we would not be the United States of America today, and we would not be the country that has shed more blood for the cause of freedom for other people than any other nation in the history of the world. And our detractors and critics need to remember that about our young people in this country.

I appreciate Steve going back in history a little bit, appreciate the introduction. You never know who knows you and who doesn't. How much you outta kind of bring people up to date on yourself. I talked to a lady at the airport the other day and it was five minutes before she realized I wasn't Dr. Phil.

But as he ran through that little historical journey for me, a lot of memories came back. My folks coming off the little country farm there, instead of going to school, they went to work. Best parents anyone could ever possibly have. I still have my mama back in Tennessee. And because of their appreciation for education allowed me to do the things that Steve talked about. And I still wonder what they were thinking as they watched their teenage kid go off and marry and start his own family, and work his way through school.

Wanted to go to the United States Senate, putting everything else aside. Wanted to balance the budget, cut taxes, wanted to reform welfare and for congress to live under the laws that everybody

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night against a popular incumbent congressman. Was able to carry Tennessee twice by 20 points in a state that Bill Clinton carried twice, and I feel pretty proud of that. But I feel even more proud to be a part of a team that was able to do the things that I talked about. But I put term limits on myself, and after 8 years I decided that it was time for me to move on. I could have run again consistent with my term limit pledge I could have run one more time but I decided not to. People asked me why in the world would you leave the United States Senate when you were unopposed after what it takes to get there? But I always tell people that after 8 years in Washington I longed for the realism and sincerity of Hollywood.

Got to co-sponsor the Homeland Security Bill and get that passed. Took two tries and had an election in the middle of it. The Democrats didn't want the President to have the flexibility in times of emergency to move people around and the Federal Employees Union fought it but we were finally able to get that done. I got to serve on the intelligence committee. Got to travel in various parts of the world and meet with world leaders. But sometimes the most important things in your life happen under your own roof. And shortly before I left the Senate I married a wonderful lady. And not too long after that we found out that we were going to be parents. And Jeri had never been married, never been a mother and my children were grown. And it was a little bit of a surprise, but I knew from the first instant that another wonderful chapter was opening in my life. You can't look at that first sonogram and ever be the same again.

So when all this politics talk started some time ago, and all the back and the forth and the process questions and the flak and all of that stuff, Jeri and I talked about it several times, and kept coming back to the question: What kind of question, what kind of world are these kids going to grow up in? What kind of country are they going to grow up in? And how many people get a chance to do something about it?

So that little journey kind of gives a background as to why I'm here tonight. Everybody has their own little journey, and we all have a lot in common. I don't know about the particulars but it all has to do with love of country and the kind of world they want to leave behind. The first obligation that every generation has is to leave this place a little bit better than when we found it. That's what our parents did. It's what our grandparents did. And it's above all what we've got to do. My friends, I feel like these next few years are going to bring decisions that we're going to have as a people; certainly on the President's desk but also on the people's desk, decisions that are going to effect the future of our country for many many generations to come. And I simply believe on our present course that we are going to be a weaker and more divided nation than what we have been. And I do not say that lightly, but I think it's the truth, and I think the American people are ready for the truth.

To me, there are a lot of issues. Goodness knows we are not deprived of issues or solutions that people have. There are about three things that underlie everything else. One of them is national security. Our country is in danger and its going to be that way for a long time to come. I do not think we have come together as a nation and come to terms with the length and duration and expense and commitment that it's going to take to meet the threat that we have in Islamic terrorism and radicalism. We are dealing with people who look upon this as something that has been going on for hundreds of years and they are plenty ready to have it go on for another couple hundred years to go on slaughtering innocent people in the process. They think they are on track.

The look historically at things and see that for 15-20 years they have been attacking us all over the world, our Embassies, the World Trade Center, the USS Cole, on and on with little response. And they've already defeated the toughest enemy, they say, and that is the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and things are just rocking along now. And they look on Iraq as a current front in the war, not the war, but something to be dealt with before they move on. We've got to do better, more committed, more united, more unified than we've ever been before. And yet you look at our responses some times as a people and that's not the message we're sending out. Whether you look at budget priorities, our situation in Iraq – which some people apparently think that's all there is, get out of there and our troubles will be over. Whether you look at our border situation and that we can't or won't stop illegal immigrants from coming across our border when in the past few years we've picked up thousands of people from terrorist states alone, when we only catch 1 out of 3. In the era of the suitcase bomb when a small amount of material could wreak havoc on this country. When you look at our court system which does not make a distinction between terrorists and an average criminal in the US court system. And warning them of their rights and you can't prosecute them unless you do, and have you telling them everything in open court and giving them discovery so they have access to and can take advantage to all that information. We are often times in our system not acting like we are serious.

The debate with regard to surveillance. Some people have a lot of problem with us surveilling international telephone conversations when Al Quada suspects are allegedly on the other end of the line. But yet it's done begrudgingly in increments with great debate and fanfare. It's an indication to friends and foes alike that our memory of 9/11 and of whets been happening to us for a long time has not had full impact yet.

The second thing that concerns me is that we are doing steady damage to our economy, and if we don't do things better it's going to result in economic disaster to future generations and we are going to leave this place weaker for future generations. And a breaking of that commitment to leave this place better. We are spending their money. We are spending lots of their money. And instead of having a conversation together, Democrats and Republicans together about what we can do, instead of using it as a battle in 30 second television ads, we ignore the most important part of that conversation – the people who can't be President, our grandchildren. The people who haven't been born yet. They don't have anyone speaking of them in many cases. Oh our economy is good now, there's no question about it, I think that's the greatest story never told and President Bush does not get enough credit for his persistence as far as tax cuts are concerned. If there's one thing that

should be agreed upon among everyone in this country is the growth effect of tax cuts. And you can't solve any of this without economic growth. Regardless of what administration you look at throughout history the result has always been the same. But, when you look down the road a little, you'll see that before very long we'll be using up the Social Security surplus, you know the one that's in the lock box that every politician in Washington has the keys to? That lock box. We're living off the fact that we're bringing in more in Social Security taxes than we're spending, but that's going to reverse itself.

At a time when the demographics will shift and there will be fewer and fewer workers, at a time when the cost of healthcare will likely continue to go up, all those things working together will inevitably lead us to an unsustainable situation. That's not my opinion, not original. Look at the writings of the GAO, a non-partisan organization, David Walker the comptroller has been going around the country with people from a Conservative think tank and a Liberal think tank, good people in both organizations, all three of them saying the same thing. And that is, what we're doing is unsustainable. And do you hear anybody talking about that? It's not going to happen before the next election.

These are things that cannot be settled or decided or cured by a President, cannot be settled, decided or cured by a political party. It's going to have to be done by the people, which leads me to my third point.

At a point when we need to be united, and come together with a little common sense and honest conversation about what the problem is, which everyone knows incidentally, have the guts enough to deal with it and say we won't use it as a political hatchet against each other. At this time we are probably more divided than we ever have been before, well in a long time. At a time when we're seeing a convergence in these problems and all the other chickens that are coming home to roost like energy like healthcare, and in Congress despite the great fortitude and work of some has the lowest approval ratings in history. You know, in order to have leadership you have to have somebody to follow. How do you have anyone follow if the people don't have any confidence in what's being said or who's saying it. We can't go down that road forever. And we see the government that is now incapable of doing some things that are common issues that government has to deal with.

We want a limited government. We want a government strong enough to protect us but we want a competent government that is able to do those things that government ought to be able to do. Time after time we're apparently unable to unwilling to do that anymore.

Just a couple of thoughts as we go on this journey together. The main thing I think that we need to think about, is what are the principles we are going to operate. You know a 15 or 20 point plan is great, aha I have a 30 point plan, I'm better than him! Alright that's great, but what are the underlying principles. When the plans go asunder, when you can't get agreement on them. I think we should remember our first principle, or what I call our first principles. I don't think the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are outmoded documents. The Declaration tells us that our rights come from God and not from government. The constitution has a framework that is set up not as some kind of result of bureaucratic handling but as something that is designed with Federalism. Federalism encourages limited national government, promotes experimentation and competition between the states and diffuses power and promotes freedom. Those are not outmoded thoughts. But you'll find every good idea that everyone has now has to be federalized. I'm proud that on 2 or 3 occasions there was 99-1 votes in the US Senate and I was the one, because I said this has been the states' purview for 200 years, why is the federal government involved in this when it can't do what it's supposed to be doing right?

And it's an adherence to the principles that underlie everything we do in this country. The rule of law, not something somebody makes up because they decide the social policy is not something to their liking, but the rule of law that people can rely upon. That's what it's supposed to all be about. Market, respect for private property, free trade, competition between our citizens, competition around the world. This works to our benefit. Not only has this made us the most prosperous nation in the world, but it's made us an example for every other nation in the world who's ever tried. Because nobody who has ever tried it has been unsuccessful in terms of prosperity for our country.

But mainly what we have to do is what others have done in times past. And that is to come together, recognize the problems, talk about improvements, work together, remember that there's more that unites us than divides us, and take on the tough jobs and get to the other side of the mountain wiser and stronger than when we started. We know how to do that; we've done that so many times before. And every time we've done it, we've been successful.

And in my final moment here, I know some might say, "Well Fred, you haven't done much talking about the Republican Party tonight."

My friends, that's exactly what I've been talking about. Because that's what I think the Republican Party believes, that's the tradition of what we have stood for, that's the kinds of things we must stand for. If we do that we will be successful we will deserve to lead this nation, we will lead this nation. And most important of all, it will make for a stronger, more secure, more prosperous United States of America.

I look forward to working with you, thank you very much.

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