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Fred Thompson Announcement Speech

My friends, I come to you today to tell you that I intend to run for President. I feel deeply that I am doing it for the right reasons. I love my country and I am concerned about its future. Just within the next few years, some very serious challenges are moving towards us that will present a difficult and dangerous time in the life of our nation. There are grave issues affecting the safety and security of the American people and our economic well being. I'm going to do my level best in this campaign to address these problems. I'm going to give this campaign all that I have to give, and I hope that you will join me.

My story is an American story – like one of many our country has produced – where a small town kid of modest means and modest goals grows up to realize that he has been a very lucky person. Lucky to have been born in America, lucky to have had the parents I had and lucky to have had a few people in my life who sometimes saw more in me than I saw in myself.

I have seen my country from a lot of different vantage points. I was a teenage husband and had three wonderful children early. I have worked for minimum wages, for salaries more than I ever thought I would make, and for everything in between. I have had dinners on the factory floor, while working the graveyard shift, and I have dined with world leaders in foreign capitals.

As a lawyer, I have been a federal prosecutor and a counsel for the Watergate Committee. In private practice a courageous woman and the jury trial that we had against a corrupt state administration resulted in a movie. I was asked to play myself, which started a most unlikely part time film career.

Then a Senate seat opened up in Tennessee. For me it represented an opportunity for public service, not for a new career as a politician. So I set aside my law practice and the movies, placed term limits on myself, and won two elections by 20 point margins in a state that President Clinton carried twice.

In 1994 when I first ran, I advocated the same common sense conservative positions that I hold today. They are based upon what I believe to be sound conservative First Principles – reflecting the nature of man and the wisdom of the ages. They are based upon the conviction that our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution are not outdated documents that have outlived their usefulness. It is a recognition that our basic rights come from God and not from government. That government should have its power divided, not only at the federal level but between the federal government and the states. Federalism is the belief that not every problem should have a federal solution. Essentially it's about freedom. A government that is big enough to do everything for us is powerful enough to do anything to us.

These principles lead me to believe in lower taxes, which foster growth and leave more power in the hands of the people. They also respect free markets, private property, and fair competition. They honor the sanctity of life – the great truth every life matters, and no person is beneath the protection of the law. These principles made our country great and we should rededicate ourselves to them, not abandon them.

Now to my Republican friends, I point out that in 1992 we were down after a Clinton victory. In 1994 our conservative principles led us to a comeback and majority control of the Congress. Now you don't want to have to come back from another Clinton victory. Our country needs us to win next year, and I am ready to lead that effort.

When I went to the Senate, I wanted to help accomplish certain things that I thought were necessary and achievable. I wanted to balance the budget, cut taxes, reform welfare, require Congress to live under the laws that they had imposed on others and I wanted to begin modernizing of our military. We were able to get those things done. I also took a leadership role in the passage of the homeland security bill, and blocked export control legislation that would have allowed the sale of our sensitive technology to unreliable countries. As Chairman of the Governmental Affairs Committee, I led an investigation and held hearings on the failure and shortcomings of our government. This resulted in a two volume work that I published in 2001, entitled "Government at the Brink" and still available on the Internet. It outlined these deficiencies and made recommendations to cut waste and save billions. Now these problems have only grown worse since that time. I served on the Intelligence Committee and saw close up the importance of improving our intelligence capabilities in our fight against terrorism and got a good sense of other troubles over the horizon.

In 2002 I announced that I would not run for re-election and I re-entered private life. While my television work on "Law & Order" got more attention, I stayed involved in national security issues including service as Chairman of the International Security Advisory Board at the State Department.

One of the most rewarding experiences I had was when President Bush asked me to assist now Chief Justice John Roberts through the Senate confirmation process. It is very important that the next President appoint federal judges who interpret the Constitution, not try to make it fit their own personal or political views. I have seen both kinds of judges, and I know the difference.

A guy can do a lot of things and travel the world but find that the most important things in life occur under his own roof. I married a wonderful lady during my last year in the Senate and the following year we found out that we were going to be parents. I knew from the moment I heard the news that we had been blessed. How true it was. Our little girl, Hayden, who will tell you she is three and three-quarters years old, now has a little brother. His name is Sammy and he is 10 months old. Earlier this year when I thought about whether I should enter this race, I kept coming back to 2 questions. First, what kind of country are our children and grandchildren going to grow up in and second, how many people have the opportunity to do something about it?

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decisions that will affect our lives and our families far into the future. We cannot allow ourselves to become a weaker, less prosperous and more divided nation. Today as in past generations, the fate of millions across the world depends on the unity and resolve of the American people.

The specter of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of our worst enemies continues to grow, and still we have yet to really come to terms with the nature and extent of the threat we are facing from radical Islamic terrorism. These extremists look at this war as a long struggle that has been going on for centuries; they are willing to take as long as necessary to bring the United States and our allies to our knees, while killing hundreds of thousands of innocent people, if possible. Iraq and Afghanistan are current fronts in this war and the world watches as our will is tested. Our courage as a people must match that of the brave men and women in uniform fighting for us. We must do everything in our power to achieve success and make sure that they and their families' sacrifices are not made in vain. They know that if we abandon our efforts or appear weak and divided, we will pay a heavy price for it in the future. Some of our leaders in Congress need to understand this as well.

In this broader war with this different kind of enemy, our success cannot always be measured by battlefield victories. Success will depend upon the determination of the American people and that's why we'll win. There is a courage that comes in unity. Now is the time to show that America united can overcome any danger, and America united can complete any mission.

Before the end of my senate service, in the year after 9/11, I saw the Congress of the United States at its best – alert to danger and focused on duty. We need to recover that clarity and conviction in matters of national security. The threat of catastrophic violence in America is real and the terrorists aren't going away of their own accord. We must deploy every resource including diplomacy, intelligence, and economic power to defend this nation and our national interests. If I am Commander in Chief, this country will never be left to the mercy of terror regimes or terror states.

We have challenges on the home front as well. Before long we will have spent the Social Security surplus and will see the "baby boomers" begin to retire. On our present course, deficit financing will saddle future generations with enormous taxes, jeopardize our economy and endanger our retirement programs. The Government Accountability Office, the Comptroller of the United States, and conservative and liberal economists alike, tell us that this path is economically unsustainable. Bipartisan leadership must address this issue as part of a national conversation, remembering that those yet to be born also have a seat at the table. After all, it's their money that we are spending, and it is economic security that's in the balance.

Other important issues face our country. Our dependence upon foreign oil, especially from trouble spots in the Middle East and elsewhere, endangers our national security as well as our economy. For 50 years nearly every recession has been associated with a spike in oil prices. What we need is another spike in American creativity and innovation. Over the past several years we have had revolutions in our communications, science, and medical fields. We need to revive that same American know-how for our energy security, along with a willingness to avail ourselves of the energy sources we already have right here at home.

In education, schools continue to fail our children and endanger America's future competitiveness. Increasing amounts of federal funding and government mandates have not resulted in real improvement. The federal government can assist state and localities through grants with fewer strings and less bureaucracy but should not take schools out of the hands of parents and local officials. We should encourage the rights of parents to choose the school and what's best for their child's education.

Rising health care costs are another major problem. We have the best health care in the world but we are paying more than we should for it. We have a massive bureaucracy in both the private and public health care sectors that controls costs by dictating what services we are allowed to get and when. Someone has to decide what costs are worth the money. It can be the government, the insurance company or it can be you. I think it is best if you, yourself decide what is best for you and your family, with insurance that doesn't have to depend on your employment – coverage that you can take with you if you change jobs; insurance that you may purchase from anywhere in the nation for the best value. This would be market driven and would make health insurance affordable for more Americans.

When we look to Washington, we see a bureaucratized government that is increasingly unable or unwilling to carry out basic governmental functions, including the fundamental responsibility of securing our borders against illegal immigration and enforcing our laws. A nation that can't protect its border will no longer be a sovereign nation. We see a Congress more politicized and divided than ever and disconnected from the American people. Is this the government that some would have play an even greater role in running our lives? We must do better.

I know that reform is possible in Washington because I have seen it done. I do not accept it as a fact of life beyond our power to change that the federal government must go on expanding more, taxing more, and spending more forever.

We, the American people, must assert ourselves. In times of stress and peril in this country's history, including world wars, a great depression, assassinations and attacks, other generations have put their differences aside, remembered their common beliefs and overcame great obstacles. And we have come out stronger and wiser for it. Now it's our turn. No one person, including the President, has the ability or wisdom to singlehandedly solve these problems. Nor does one party. But together the American people do. These problems will be dealt with when our leaders come together, as adults, and honestly seek solutions that extend past the next election cycle. That will happen when, and only when, the American people demand it. You can do that at the ballot box and no election is more important than the one for president. It demands a leader who understands this country, our people and what America's priorities ought to be.

Recently, I talked to a young Marine at Walter Reed Hospital. He had lost both legs in Iraq but was looking to the future. I asked him what he planned to do? He said he wanted to work with a nonprofit organization that was doing a lot to help people. Then he looked at me and said "I just thought it was time I gave something back."

That young man, who has given so much for America and yet still asks to give more, is typical of the men and women of the United States armed forces. Our country has shed more blood for the freedom of other people than all the other countries in the world combined. We are steeped in the tradition of honor and sacrifice for the greater good. We are proud of this heritage. I believe that Americans are once again ready to achieve this greater good: which is nothing less than the security, prosperity, and unity of our country.

That's the belief that this campaign is based upon. I'd appreciate your support of this cause and any contribution you're able to give. I'll try to make you proud that you did it.

Thank you and may God bless all of us.

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