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September 7, 2007



Fred Thompson's Des Moines Speech

Thank you.

Wow!

I appreciate you being here.

Thank you, Mack, for that wonderful introduction. As far as I'm concerned it is Mack's world. What do you think?

That video brings back a lot of old memories. All you young fellas out there with that good-looking head of hair it may not always be there. Enjoy it while you can.

This is a wonderful turnout. I can't tell you how much I appreciate it. We've got Jeri's parents, Ron and Vicki Keller here from Naperville, IL over here. I want to thank my in-laws for coming, make sure I do this right. And Aunt Diane and Cousin Jesse from Omaha. So we took this opportunity to have a Midwestern family reunion right here.

I want to tell you how special this day is for us. Special for me. Special for my family. This is the first event of the first day of our campaign for the President of the United States. How special does that get?

And it is so appropriate that we're right here. Because in case some person somewhere in the United States of America doesn't know this it all begins in Iowa, and that's where we wanted to be today.

My friends, I'm not here today because I have had a lifelong ambition to hold the office of the Presidency. Nor do I think I have all the answers for the problems that face this country. I don't think any person does. But I am a man who loves his country, who is concerned about her future, and knows that in the next years it's going to require strong leadership. Decisions are going to be made on this next President's watch that's going to determine the course of our country for many years to come. And I am determined that we make the decisions that will leave us a stronger nation, a more prosperous nation, and a more united nation. And that's why I'm running for the Presidency of the United States.

[APPLAUSE]

This whole process for us started around our kitchen table just a few months ago. Now we've got a lot of process talk about "oh, you can't run for President of the United States unless, you know, run for years, unless you raise—I think some of the pundits said—raise \$100 million this calendar year." No possibility of that. But the more we looked at it the more I thought that something special was going on in this country. The more I looked around my house the more it occurred to me what kind of world these kids are going to grow up in. These kids are my grandkids. What kind of country are they going to have when they get a little older? Then I thought, "How often does a man have a chance to do something about that?" So we tested the waters just like we said. We went out to make sure what I was feeling was actually there, and I think it is my friends. I think that the American people have opened up a door of opportunity. There have been doors as you can see from my background all along my way because I was so fortunate to have a wonderful family, wonderful parents, and wonderful people who often times saw more in me than I saw in myself all along my way. And those doors occasionally would open up. And occasionally I'd walk through one because it was a challenge: sometimes a personal one; sometimes for my state; sometimes one for my country.

I feel this is another door to serve the country that I love. So the pre-season is over. Let's get on with it.

[APPLAUSE]

Now folks, there are many serious issues that are facing this country, and it's time for some serious conversation about it. I think the American people are ready for that. I think they're ready for frank conversation. I think they're ready for forthright conversation, and that's exactly what we're going to do. We don't know how to do it any other way. It's not worth doing any other way unless you can do it that way. And we're going to make sure that at the end of the day if the good Lord is willing we'll be victorious. But there's one thing I think we can guarantee and that is at the end of this campaign by doing that we will have done something good for our nation, and our country will be better off for this campaign. And I hope you will help me do that. That is my goal in life.

[APPLAUSE]

As you have seen in this little video—I thought about just running that video again instead of making a speech to tell you the truth; I kind of like that. But my story is an American story, one that's happened to many times across this great nation of ours. where a kid of modest means from a little

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people of this country.

I've seen it from a lot of different standpoints. I've seen it from the factory floor when I was working the graveyard shift and we'd have lunch there on the change of the shifts and I'd be ankle-deep in water at the Murray Ohio Bicycle plant where I was running a machine that was so loud I couldn't hear myself yell if I wanted to. And I've had the opportunity to dine with foreign leaders in foreign capitals around the world and just about everything in between.

And one of the things I focused on kind of early was what I considered to be the most important thing having to do with my country and my country's future. And as the years passed by unfortunately it gets more and more important. That is our nation's safety. That is the men, women, and children of this country and where it's going to be a few years from now.

We're living in the era of the suitcase bomb. We're living in an era of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, where a small amount of material getting into the wrong hands can do destruction that we never thought possible before. And they're more likely than ever to fall into the hands of our worse enemy.

Radical Islam has declared war upon us. Some years ago people didn't pay much attention to it. We didn't even recognize the fact that it happened, but we know it now.

They look upon it as something that's been going on for hundreds of years and as far as they're concerned they're willing to take it another hundred years as they methodically move forward massacring innocent people. Bringing the Soviet Union to its knees, who they considered the tougher opponent, and now they're upon us and all those who would befriend us around the world.

Iraq is a part of that conflict but Iraq is not that conflict. That conflict will be with us unfortunately long after Iraq is in our rear view mirror, and the whole world watches and waits as the determination of the American people is tested.

My friends, if we show weakness and division we will pay a heavy price for it in the future. We must show the determination that we are going to be united as an American people and do whatever is necessary to prevail not only in Iraq but in the worldwide conflict that lies beyond Iraq.

[APPLAUSE]

We have the bravest young people in the world fighting for us, and we have to match their commitment and determination here at home. You talk to them in these hospitals, the ones who have been grievously wounded, their biggest concern is getting back to the folks that they left back and concerned that their wounds are so great that they might not be allowed to do that. It's magnificent, and every waking moment of a commander-in-chief should be to make sure that people like that's efforts are and their family's sacrifices are not made in vain. And I don't intend that to be.

[APPLAUSE]

Meanwhile, back at home the politicians have been quite busy, quite busy spending the next generation's money. Pretty soon we will have spent the Social Security surplus and the Baby Boomers will start retiring just in a few years from now on the next President's watch. And of course it sky-rockets from there, and it will result in astronomically-high deficits, a tax burden on the next generation and generations to come, and a ruination of our economy. Every economist who's looked at this including our own government officials who are the watchdog agencies such as the Government Accountability Office says that this path is unsustainable. Everybody in Washington knows it.

You know one of the arguments against term limits—you know I put term limits on myself when I went to the United States Senate and I still think it's a pretty good idea to tell you the truth—but one of the arguments against that is look at all the expertise you'd lose if you had term limits. Is it expertise that we're lacking or is it lack of will to do the right thing? I think it is the latter.

[APPLAUSE]

Yet the politicians kick the can down the road until presumably their own retirement—somebody else's problem. I wonder if our little kids and our grandchildren and those yet to be born had a seat at the table what they'd say about it, wonder what they'd say to us. I wonder what they'd think about us. My friends, we need to deliver a message to Washington that we're better than that. And you can start delivering that message by electing a President who will blow the whistle on this lack of responsibility, and I'm the guy who will do that.

[APPLAUSE: "GO FRED GO!"]

Now there are a lot of issues that we'll have a chance to talk about all across Iowa in large groups and small, I hope. No way in one speech to touch on all of them. I think one thing is important to point out though in my estimation. That is there are going to be issues regardless of what we come up with in terms of an issue list that the next President cannot foresee; that we can't foresee. Some we know about will still be with us, but there will be new ones. I think it's very important the people understand a man's principles, what he measures things by, what will be the standards that he applies as issues come before him. As far as I'm concerned I still have the same commonsense conservative beliefs I did when I ran in 1994.

We were able to win that election going from one end of that state to the other; talking about the sanctity of life, talking about lower taxes, talking about less regulation, talking about the market economy, talking about free competition, talking about respect for private property rights in this country, talking about free and fair trade and all those things that make America great, and if I said then if we just stick with that, the American people agree with these things, we'll just stick with that,

not only will we be successful, but we'll continue to be prosperous in this country, we've been a beacon for all those countries out there who've applied those same principles they've all been successful.

The American people said yes, '94 was successful, and surprised a lot of people remember? Clinton kind of cleaned our clock there for a little, we came back strong and got a mandate, cut taxes, balanced the budget, passed welfare reform, and made Congress live under the same laws as everyone else. [It] was the first thing I did with Chuck Grassley was get that bill passed, under his tutelage, not a bad guy to learn from.

[Applause]

So I'm that same guy, I haven't changed from those principles anywhere along the way. I'm the same guy with the same principles that I had when I went back to Lawrenceburg and started the first republican club when I got out of law school in 1968.

I'm the same guy I was when I came out over the years here campaigning for Republican candidates because I thought it was a good thing for my party and a good thing for my country; and I still think that way. But these positions are based upon certain principles. I call them first principles, I call them the principles that our country was founded upon, many years ago. They're based upon the notion that some things in this changing world just don't change. It's based upon an appreciation of human nature. It's based upon the wisdom of the ages. It's based upon the believe that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are not outmoded documents that can be cast aside,

[Applause]

We still get our basic rights from God and not from government.

[Applause]

We still have a government where power is divided, not just at the federal level but between federal and state level, federalism is about freedom, it's about individual freedom, it's about political freedom, it's about economic freedom. It's about an understanding that a government powerful enough to give you everything, can take away from you, anything.

[Applause]

It's based upon the notion that we want a government that is limited to the powers delegated to it in the Constitution, but a government that is strong enough to protect our people and a government that is competent enough to do the things a government is supposed to be doing, yet more and more we see that is not true. When I was chairman of the Government Affairs Committee in 2001, I put out a report called "Government at the Brink," a two volume report, and I pointed out just how hopelessly messed up the bureaucracy in our federal government was; and how many billions of dollars we were wasting. The fact was that we couldn't get computers to talk to each other, we couldn't get government agencies or the government itself to really pass an audit, couldn't live up to the standards we put on private business at all. An outmoded civil service system, we weren't getting enough people in that we needed with the high tech requirements that the future was going to bring us. We made it virtually impossible to get rid of people who weren't doing their job, on, and on, and on, and on. That was my opinion then and folks I haven't changed my mind a bit. It's even worse than it was before.

It's going to require strong leadership to do something about it because now we see it's affecting national security, now we see it as an excuse for not even enforcing our borders against illegal immigration and we can't tolerate that in this country because we know that a country who cannot secure its own borders ultimately will not remain a sovereign nation.

[Applause]

That battle in Congress over that last immigration bill is the latest in several pieces of evidence that demonstrate without a shadow of a doubt that there is a major disconnect between Washington DC and the American people. Because we look to congress we see division, acrimony, disruption, looking to everything to the next election and not the next generation, short sided political opportunism, here and there.

Is this the government that our Democratic friends say should play a larger role in all of our lives? I don't think so. It's kind of ironic, that the Democrats are moving more and more toward the western European system of higher taxes, more regulation, and larger government, when countries like France and Germany are moving more our way, you know they ought to read the newspapers once in awhile, some good things are happening over there now based upon our traditional principles.

Principles that understand that the rule of law underlies everything else in this country; people can go in and get a fair shot, and a fair hearing in a fair court, based upon the law of the Constitution. Unfortunately the rule of law is violated more by judges themselves more than anyone else.

[Applause]

That's why I was so happy to stand by Chief Justice John Roberts' side, he's a great Chief Justice, but he needs some help. We need another one or two.

[Applause]

If I'm elected president of the United States I will appoint judges who will follow the constitution, not shape the constitution to fit their own political or personal notions about how society ought to operate.

[Applause]

I've seen both kinds of judges up close, and I know the difference, I don't need anybody to point that out to me.

My friends this is what I believe, and have believed, and will continue to as best for our country. I think it's what you believe. I think that's what the American people believe. Just as when I first started out in politics. I don't think their opinions about the basics have changed. It might look like our side's opinion every once and awhile has changed. But the American Peoples' haven't. Whatever the issues are that we face, whether we're talking about health care, or education, or energy, all those important things, the application of those first principles, the application of those common sense conservative beliefs will result in a stronger and stronger nation.

That's what this is all about, that's why I'm here today, and that's why you're here today. We are citizens of the greatest nation on earth, and that makes us the luckiest people on earth. That carries with it certain obligations, obligations to do everything that we can that it remains the greatest nation on earth and that we leave this place little better than we came into it. That's what it's all about.

You know you look back over our history, and it doesn't take you long to realize that our people have shed more blood for other peoples' liberty than any other combination of nations in the history of the world.

[Applause]

Frankly I'm a little tired of other peoples' need to apologize for it. I don't think we have anything to apologize for. We are steeped in the tradition of honor and sacrifice for the greater good.

We are proud of that heritage, I think this time in America's history Americans are once again ready to do the things necessary to achieve that greater good. That greater good is nothing less than the security, prosperity and unity of the greatest nation in the world. I think most American's still share those ideals and principles, and if we apply them and stay true, it doesn't matter what the pundits say today, we will win next year when it counts.

[Applause]

My friends, our country needs us to win, our country needs us to win; I am ready to lead that fight, let us do it together.

[Applause]

Thank you very much for being here today,

Thank you

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