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Fred Thompson Speaks to the Value Voters Summit

Thank you very much. Well, thank you for that kind introduction. And I'm glad we were able to get our little girl Hayden off the stage. We were campaigning in Iowa recently, and we were talking to a large group of people, and Hayden just kind of walked out on to the stage there and put her arm around my leg. And everybody kind of got a kick of that, but she stayed. And about five minutes into it and so forth, you know, it was wonderful, but it was a little disconcerting -- (laughter) -- about five minutes into it. You know, I said, "Honey --" I said -- "do you want to go" -- thought I'd shame her a little bit maybe -- "do you want to go over here and sit back down with your mama or you just want to stay out here in the limelight?" She thought for a second and says, "I'll just stay in the limelight." (Laughter.) And she stood there the rest of my talk with me. It was the most unusual, wonderful experience I've ever had in my life. Thank you all very much. Thank you for what you're doing, who you are, being here today, that warm welcome for me and giving me an opportunity to spend a few minutes with you.

You know, someone said once upon a time, after you become president of the United States, you don't make any new friends. That's certainly not true with regard to running for president of the United States, because I have made several new friends, several new wonderful friends, several people who have reached out to me not just from a political standpoint but from a personal standpoint to Jeri and me. And we know that regardless of anything else, we have made some lifelong friends. And I have had some conversations with people that -- about things that I haven't talked about a lot in some years, and they were good for me, and I'm a better man for it. And those individuals know who I'm talking about, and I just want to tell you how much I appreciate that and how much it's meant to me.

We've been together for a long time. We have not always agreed on the -- precisely the right approach to absolutely everything, but our goal has always been the same, and that is to leave this country better off than when we came into it, just like our ancestors have done generation after generation for us.

We live in the greatest country in the history of the world. Our obligation is to do everything that we can to keep it that way -- (applause) -- and to improve it. And in order to do that, we'd best know how we got here and what we did right along the way.

We were blessed from the very beginning in so many different ways. We had a group of Founding Fathers who knew the scriptures, who knew the wisdom of the ages, who knew that there was such a thing as human nature, who knew that man was prone to err and government ought to be constructed on the basis of that knowledge, but that man could rise to great heights when inspired and when given the opportunity. They put forth a Declaration of Independence and announced to the entire world that we believe and we acknowledge and we know in this country that our basic rights come from God and not from any government. (Applause.)

We were given a Constitution based upon those concepts, not too much power in any -- in too few hands. Power divided not only at the federal level, between the federal and the state level, all based on the notion that not all solutions to all problems emanate from Washington, D.C. That was our system of federalism that we put forth to the world and became a beacon of hope and inspiration for all mankind who love freedom. When we started out this thing, there were no democracies in the world, and now, depending on exactly how you define them, most of the countries in the world are, in large part because of the inspiration and the dedication of the United States of America.

Our people have shed more blood for the liberty of other people than any other nation in the history of the world, and we're proud of that. (Applause.) In this country we are steeped in the tradition of honor and sacrifice for the greater good, and we are proud of that heritage. And from time to time citizens step forth to serve their country in different ways. In 1994, I felt it was my time, and I joined many others in putting aside the things that we were doing and stepping up and doing the things that we thought were necessary for the betterment of our country. And I'm proud to say that over eight years on national issues, I was a consistent conservative -- cutting taxes, balancing the budget, reducing regulation, promoting welfare reform, fighting for good conservative judges with a hundred percent pro-life voting record, and I'm proud of that record. (Applause.) That's who I was then, that's who I am today, and that's the kind of president I would be.

We had an opportunity during the time that I was in the United States Senate to vote several times on abortion-related issues. There were funding issues. There was the so-called partial-birth abortion issue, which, of course -- Senator Moynihan had it correctly -- it's more like infanticide than it is so-called abortion. We had parental rights notification issues, where we had a bill that prohibited interstate transportation of young girls to defeat the parental notification rights of states. We had cloning issues, stem cell issues. My position on that was very simple: You don't create life in order to destroy it. (Applause.)

My political record and my head was always there, always has been there, but I must say that it took life's experiences for me to absorb the real importance of it all. I've been blessed early in my life with children when I was very young, and I have been blessed at a time when I'm not so young anymore. I have experienced along the way the ultimate tragedy that a father can have and the ultimate blessing that a father can have.

And with regard to Miss Hayden, I can only say that after, for the first time in my life, seeing a sonogram of my own child, I will never think the same exactly again. I guess, more appropriately stated, I will never feel exactly the same again, because my heart now is fully engaged with my head. (Applause.) As president of the United States, no legislation will pass my desk, that funds or supports this procedure, without my veto. (Applause.)

Our country is based upon the rule of law. We talk about democracy; we promote democracy. We know that the

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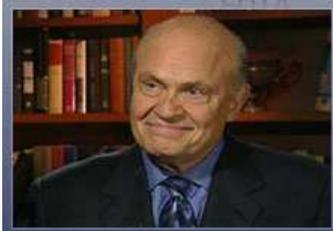

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It is a shame that too often it is the judicial branch of government that violates our own rule of law. They are engaged oftentimes in making social and political policy that would have amazed our founding fathers. There's no better example of that than *Roe v. Wade*. Justice White called it an act of raw judicial power, which is exactly what it was. The latest example of that has to do with the same-sex marriage issue, where judges have taken it upon themselves to take something that has been the case since the dawn of civilization, and that is the recognition that marriage is between a man and a woman -- turned it on its head. (Applause.)

When I was in the Senate, we fought for the Defense of Marriage Act, passed that act, basically defining marriage as between a man and a woman, and saying one state, if they do such a thing, does not have to be recognized by another state when someone moves to that new state.

This is a totally judicially created problem. I propose a constitutional amendment which will stop this particular brand of judicial activism in its tracks. (Applause.)

This is -- I had all this brought home to me again, the importance of -- not only of these issues but of judicial restraint, when I had the opportunity to receive a call from the president of the United States, who asked me to help Judge John Roberts, now Chief Justice John Roberts, get confirmed through the Senate for the United States Supreme Court. I believe he will go down as one of the great chief justices. We just need more of them. (Applause.)

And it caused me to think back through a bit of our history, some of which we've all lived through, where our good presidents have nominated people they thought would be good judges and have been disappointed. And too often the criteria has been confirmability. Well, obviously you got to have confirmability. Judge Roberts proved that quality will win out in the end. And it brought home to me again the necessity, I think, for a president of the United States in the future, if he is confronted with an increasingly partisan bitter reaction to good people who are nominated for this position, and they reject that nomination, you ought to send another one up just like it and have the fight all over again. (Applause.)

That's a fight we can have with the American people -- before the American people all day long. And we will win in the end if we are persistent and we stay with it. (Applause.)

I have seen good judges and I have seen bad ones. I have appeared before them. I have helped them get confirmed. I've sat on the Judiciary Committee and worked there, trying to get good ones. I know the difference between a good one and a bad one, and we need somebody in the presidency of the United States who doesn't have to call his lawyers in order to know the difference between a good judge and a bad judge. (Applause.)

There are a variety of issues facing us today. I don't think that my friend Senator Coburn of Oklahoma will mind if I disclose a private conversation I had with him a while back. He said, "You know, one of the great moral issues of this day is the fact that we're bankrupting the next generation." Our economy is going fine now. We've had 22 successive quarters of growth because of the tax cuts and because of the strong economy and because of the free market that we operate in, and we're thankful for that. Not enough credit is given for that and why it's coming about.

But if you look down the road a little bit, we understand that all of the economists from the left or the right, including the comptroller of the United States and the head of the Government Accountability Office, everyone, says that our path with regard to entitlement programs is unsustainable; it will not work.

We're going to run out, and we are now borrowing against and we'll be increasingly borrowing against the next generation. And those who are too small or those who are yet to be born do not have a seat at this table as we kick the can down the road and wait for somebody else to take care of the problem, when it'll be much worse and much more difficult to take care of, when those benefits for the retired people start being slashed or those taxes are raised substantially on young working people who will be funding these programs, just as they're going out and getting married and trying to start their own family. That's not right. That is a moral issue, too. And we have to blow the whistle on this irresponsibility, and that's exactly what I intend to do. (Applause.)

So I have talked about Social Security. People don't like to talk about things like that. Politicians don't because it's dangerous. They say it's the third rail of politics. I've set out what I consider to be kind of a modest proposal where we could start, along the line of responsibility and start doing the right things before we have to hurt anybody; instead of waiting until we have to hurt everybody; instead of waiting for this blessing of longer life to turn into a curse for the next generation. We can't do that -- pit one generation against another. If you can't tell the truth, you shouldn't be running for president of the United States. (Cheers, applause.)

We have not yet come to terms with the fact that we're in a global conflict with radical Islam. A lot of people give lip service to it and fail to recognize that Iraq is the current front in that battle. And it's probably going to be a long battle, and we're going to have to be resolute. And we're going to have to show will. You know, a fellow by the name of Roberts wrote a book not too long ago called, "The History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900," and there's one thing in there that stuck out to me that I remember and that is, he says, "The will of a people is at least as important as their military might in overcoming an enemy." (Applause.)

So I look at the kind of world that we live in and think about the future, think about the country we're going to grow up in. And it's not all pessimistic. I wouldn't be here if I was pessimistic about it. But optimism doesn't come from what we see or what we feel; you know, my daddy always told me that a man that went around with a smile on his face all the time probably just didn't know what was going on. (Laughter.) But it doesn't come from what we see. Our optimism comes from the faith that we can do something about it, that we can do something about it. You're doing something about it. I'm going to try my best to do something about it. I'm running for president of the United States; that's what I'm going to do about it. (Applause.)

In many respects, we're at a crossroads in this country and will be next year when voters make a decision as to which direction we want to go in. It's going to affect our security and our prosperity and the unity that we need to go forward in this country. It's going to require leadership, and it's going to require a knowledge and an understanding of our glorious past, a willingness to lead on tough issues today and also an understanding of the greatness of America's future if we do the right thing.

But while we are a great nation, we must also continue to strive to be a good nation. Of course we must have good laws; we must do our best to stop bad laws. But we must also recognize the element of personal responsibility for every American in this country. And when we see local authorities giving birth control to 11- and 12-year-olds, we know

that some values are seriously messed up in this country. (Applause.) The federal government can't cure everything that's wrong and shouldn't even try.

But we all have a pulpit. We all have a pulpit, and the greatest pulpit of them all is the presidency of the United States, and I will not be afraid to use it. (Applause.)

Finally my friends, every once in a while I'm asked, as others are, you know, what would you do in your first 100 days as president? What are the circumstances going to be over a year from now? You know, with the changing world we live in and all, you know, it's pure speculation as to the nature of the confrontation, the challenges, both from a security standpoint and from an economic standpoint.

But I shared with my wife something after I was asked that question about the second or third time. I said, I don't really know what I would do in my first 100 days; it depends on the circumstances; I know what my priorities are, and I'm talking a lot about them. But I know the first -- what I would do -- I know what I would do the first hour that I was president. I would go into the Oval Office and close the door and pray for the wisdom to know what was right. (Cheers, applause.) And I would pray for the strength to do what is right. (Applause.)

May we all -- may God give us all that strength and wisdom to do what is right for our country. Thank you very much.

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