

Speeches

Governor Mitt Romney's Remarks at the Frontiers Of Freedom Ronald Reagan Gala

Wednesday, Apr 18, 2007

As Prepared For Delivery

Thanks ... It is an honor to receive this award and to be associated in a small way with the legacy of President Reagan who fought tirelessly to lift the nation.

I'm sure he would be cheering the life affirming decision of the Supreme Court. The great issues of our times - the life and death issues - should be, as this court realizes, in the hands of the people and the democratic process.

But our hearts are more heavy than buoyant tonight. They are heavy with the awful weight that rests on them – the weight of lost lives, lost senselessly, purposelessly, inexplicably. As our pace slows, we can look beyond the tumult of daily living into the wells of deeper meaning, and perhaps we can learn one of life's solemn sermons.

Ann and I spent Monday at our home on a lake in New Hampshire. It was a grey day with record rainfall. The lake ice had still not entirely melted - but it was giving way to the waves and the rain. Inside, was toasty warm. Our entire family had gathered - all 22 of us. Parker Mitt is crawling; Owen just scoots. Eleven year old Allie reads better than a few of the adults. This new Romney generation has been planted in good homes.

A call from the office told me about the tragedy in Virginia. I went outside to let the news penetrate. I could see my family through the windows. I tried to imagine the sorrow I would feel in losing one of them. But I couldn't do it. It was simply beyond my imagination. There is a great deal in life, it seems, that can only be understood if it is actually experienced. My heart mourns for the parents and families of the fallen, even though I know I cannot fully comprehend the depth of their loss. I pray for them.

What are we to make of what happened at Virginia Tech? You may have already drawn your own lessons. Others will be added over days and weeks by both the thoughtful and the thoughtless. I hope that you will find what I have to offer tonight to be in the former category.

I picked up my Bible yesterday to re-read the account of the senseless murder of Abel by his brother. It's only one page after the Fall of Adam and Eve from the garden, where they were told by God that He would place what he called "enmity" on the earth. There is a lesson being

taught: evil and good have been here from the beginning.

Cain murdered his younger brother Abel because he was jealous of him, angry that he was more favored. Evil is not going to simply go away. We are going to have to learn to live in a world that has evil as well as good.

Perhaps that sounds obvious. I think it is. But when Hitler wrote of his genocidal plans, educated people simply couldn't believe that such evil was possible. The same is true of Ahmadinejad today - his evil is excused by those who cannot bring themselves to believe that evil like that actually exists in the heart of man.

Following the end of the Cold War, President Clinton began to dismantle our military. He reduced our forces by 500,000. He retired almost 80 ships. Our spending on national defense dropped from over 6% of GDP to 3.8% today. He called it a "peace dividend."

We got the dividend, but we didn't get the peace.

Charles Krauthammer called our blissful disarmament a "holiday from history." For history has plainly taught that evil is on earth and that there are evil people who will threaten the good, the peaceful and the free.

There is no question in my mind that if the opposition party had full reign in Washington, we would not only withdraw without regard to consequence from Iraq, we would also continue to reduce military spending to finance social programs. Some would celebrate, chanting that they are going to "give peace a chance." But peace has had many chances and it will have many more.

History teaches us this: the best ally of peace is a strong America.

As Ronald Reagan said: "Of the four wars in my lifetime, none came about because the U.S. was too strong."

And it was also President Reagan who labeled the Soviet Union an evil empire - much to the horror of foreign policy elites. Yet he was right.

Twenty years later, President Bush was criticized for labeling certain countries part of the "axis of evil." Again, foreign policy elites recoiled.

But what these elites fail to recognize is that radical Islam has as its intention the overthrow of all moderate Islamic governments ... caliphate ... collapse of the West and the US. Today, Iran is working to develop a nuclear bomb ... Iran, whose President denies the history of Holocaust

and calls for the destruction of the nation founded by its emaciated yet hopeful survivors. Evil indeed exists in the world.

The right course for America in a world where evil still exists is not acquiescence and weakness, it is assertiveness and strength. I would like to see us add at least 100,000 troops to our military, increase defense spending to at least 4% of our GDP, and re-organize our non-military resources to support moderate, modern Muslim people and nations.

Some of our citizens see the evil in the world, but argue that we should simply isolate ourselves from it. But one characteristic of evil is that it seeks domination over others, all others. Hitler was poised to conquer one last European island and Japan had attacked our Pacific fleet - there is no safe place if evil is unrestrained. The weak may hide, but they become weaker still, until at last they are discovered, and easily conquered. It is up to us to keep America strong.

And while we will always defend America on our own if ever called, we know our strength is amplified when it is combined with the strength of other nations. Whether diplomatic, economic, or military, America is stronger when we have friends standing with us.

I agree with former Prime Minister Aznar of Spain that we should build on the NATO alliance to defeat radical Islam. And further, if I were fortunate enough to be elected President, I would call for a Summit of Nations to create a new partnership - a Partnership for Hope and Prosperity.

This Partnership would assemble the resources of all the nations of the developed world to work to assure that Islamic states that are threatened with violent jihad have public schools, not Wahhabi madrases, micro credit and banking, the rule of law, human rights, basic healthcare, and competitive economic policies. The resources would be drawn from public and private institutions, and from volunteers and NGOs.

Together, we would be laying the groundwork of freedom and democracy.

Merely closing our eyes and hoping that radical Jihad will go away is not an acceptable answer. And American military action alone cannot change the hearts and minds of hundreds of millions of Muslims. Only Muslims will be able to defeat radical jihad.

But we can help them. And we must help them. For the consequences for America and for all nations of a radicalized Islamic world, possessing nuclear weapons, are unthinkable.

It is another attribute of evil to call *itself* good and to label the *good* as evil. It is stupefying to most Americans that Bin Laden and Ahmadinejad and Chavez call us, America, evil.

But millennia ago, Isaiah, a prophet of the Old Testament, said this: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

And so, we should not be terribly surprised when we are so widely scorned by these purveyors of hate. But we are not entirely without fault. We can – and should – do a better job to promote freedom. When Lebanon's new leadership was facing the test of democracy, we watched as Hezbollah brought the Lebanese people schools and healthcare.

Our resources could have helped but they are all housed in separate bureaucracies, intent on protecting their own powers and budgets and prerogatives. So guess who the people followed when conflict broke out? And so too for Hamas among the Palestinians.

The problem was just as evident in Iraq. While the military moved in rapid order to topple Saddam Hussein, our non-military resources moved like they were stuck in tar. They fight over which agency will pay the \$11.00 per diem cost of food at the same time that we are spending \$7 billion a month and taking human casualties.

It is high time to transform our civilian instruments of national power. Just as the military has divided the world into common regions with a single commander, our civilian agencies must now follow suit. With a single civilian leader, who like their military counterpart is fully empowered with authority, responsibility and resources, we can spread our great instruments of peace, like health care and the rule of law to nations everywhere.

It is time that we apply these American wonders to make the world, and in turn to make America, a safer, freer, and more prosperous place. And so, we can project America's strength and its goodness to the world. But we cannot project more strength and more goodness than we actually have. What is their source?

My liberal friends would say that America is great because of our great government.

It is a great government. But that is not the source of our strength. The source of America's strength is the American people - hard working, educated, risk taking, God-loving, family-oriented, sacrificing, patriotic, freedom-loving American people. They always have been the source of our strength and they always will be!

I have great faith in the American people. I have faith in our children, and in our grandchildren. But at the same time, I am deeply troubled by the culture that surrounds them today. Following the Columbine shootings, Peggy Noonan wrote an article describing what she called "the ocean in which our children swim." It was a cesspool of violence, sex, drugs, indolence, perversion. She said that the boys who did the shooting had "inhaled too deep the

ocean in which they swam."

I'd like to clean up the water in which our kids are swimming.

I'd like to keep pornography from coming up on kid's computers.

I'd like to keep drugs off the streets.

I'd like to see less violence and sex on TV and in movies and in video games.

If we get serious about this, we can do a great deal more to clean the swimming water.

But there's another thing I'd like to do as well.

I remember swimming one afternoon in Lake Huron, one of the Great Lakes. My friend Tommy McCaffrey and I were 11 or 12 as I recall. The lake was rough, with 4 foot waves breaking at the second sandbar. We were instructed to stay in close, but we wandered out too deep, and found ourselves being drawn beyond our resistance. Then suddenly Mrs. McCaffrey was there, grabbing us both by the arm. She had her dress on. And her face, it was serious. And it was set like a flint toward shore. I don't remember what she said. But I remember what I felt: thankful!

I'd like there to be a lot more Mrs. McCaffrey's. I believe that the most important work being done to strengthen America's future is the work that is being done within the 4 walls of the American home.

As a child swims through our increasingly polluted and turbulent waters, there is no help that is more sure than a loving mother and father. It is time that we say what we know: every child deserves a mother and a father.

I know that many people are pessimistic about the future. The new generation of challenges is daunting. Freedom confronts enemies on far-flung battlefields, and its children of promise must navigate the troubled waters at home.

Abigail Adams wrote to her son when he was concerned about the future of our democracy "great necessities, she said, bring forth great virtues." And so it is.

I see them in the American people as I travel across the country. I have seen them throughout my life.

On Monday we saw good and evil in stark contrast at a campus in Virginia. And while we'll always remember the evil, we must also remember the good.

Liviu Librescu, an engineering professor at Virginia Tech, was a Holocaust survivor.

It's fair to say that he had already experienced the worst evil imaginable. Yet on Monday he died while barring the classroom door with his body so his students could flee out of the windows to escape a brutal killer. As a posting on a website said, "Though not in height, he was in so many other ways a man of stature."

America is a nation of stature, thanks to men like Professor Librescu, thanks to brave and patriotic soldiers around the world, thanks to great and noble men and women across the country. It is why we know that America will rise to the occasion of today's challenges. It is why we can be confident that, in the words of one great American this nation, will always remain a "shining city on a hill".

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