

FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL

VOTER VALUES SUMMIT

**REMARKS BY
SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN (R-AZ),
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

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(Applause.)

SEN. MCCAIN: Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much for your warm welcome, thank you for the honor of speaking before this gathering, and thank you for the work you do in supporting the preservation of the family, the most basic and essential component of any civil society.

My friends, I know that before I can win your vote, I have to win your respect, and to do that, you expect me to be honest with you about what I believe. I'm a conservative Republican and proud of it. I'll match my record of defending conservative principles against any other candidate in this race. I know you may not always agree with me on every issue, but I hope you know I'm not going to con you.

One of the most important things we have in this life is our self-respect. I don't expect you to trade yours for empty promises, and I'm not going to trade mine for anyone's vote. I'm going to tell you what I believe and let the chips fall where they may.

Some people misunderstand voters who are concerned with something beyond their economic self-interest and believe that the demands of self-interest are best served by the priorities of the Democratic Party. I disagree. I believe Republican economic policies, our respect for the dynamism and growth of free markets have proved the surest way to help people earn and maintain prosperity.

Voting for whomever you believe will bring home the most pork to your state or district is neither in your self-interest nor does it respect the faith we have in a nation that was founded on ideals and not tribal or geographic identities.

That is why, for my entire political career, I have fought against wasteful spending, so that American families would have the freedom and means to make their own choices and to choose as I hope most would, as you have: to serve a cause greater than self-interest. I believe that is the perspective and priority of a values voter.

Values are the ideals we hold dear and are best protected by reviving virtues that are often in short supply in the political arena. Our Founding Fathers were informed by the respect for human life and dignity that is the foundation of the Judeo-Christian tradition. They're the self-evident truths proclaimed and defended in our founding documents: All people are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

For many of us, the meaningful pursuit of happiness compels us to defend these ideals, and in this hour that summons has never been more urgent, as America confronts challenges to its founding values, particularly the sanctity of human life, at home and abroad.

My friends, we're involved in a struggle against Islamic extremism and a struggle to protect America while preserving the values that make it worth protecting. Both of these struggles will demand courage and perseverance on our part and on the part of our leaders.

Many American generations have been called to confront evil. My father and grandfather fought fascism. My generation fought communism. Now we are summoned to confront the evil of radical Islamic extremism. There is no denying it is evil. How more evident could it be than in the means our enemies choose to confront us? Their terrorism is not only an assault on our political and economic interests, it is an act of war against our defining ideals. Sacrificing Muslim children in car bombs, beheading a reporter merely because he's Jewish and American, and broadcasting the atrocity -- these are the tactics of people who scorn life and dignity, and we are summoned to fight them not only by our just concern for our physical security but by the responsibility we have always accepted to support and defend values we believe to be universal.

We need a comprehensive strategy to succeed in this struggle. For nearly three decades, we watched as the threat built and did little to contain it until it could be no longer ignored after the terrible events of September 11, 2001. Since that time, we have joined the battle on many fronts, but we're at a crossroads in this global struggle and we'll need a president who has the credibility to lead, the experience to lead wisely and the strength of will to take the right path, even if it means walking a lonely road.

I have spoken elsewhere at length about the strategy I propose. We need a larger military, real intelligence reform, increased contributions from our civilian agencies and a commitment to victory in Iraq. And we need a comprehensive -- (cheers, applause) -- and we need a comprehensive legal and diplomatic strategy that allows us to battle effectively a modern threat without betraying our ideals. The world is watching, and we live in a time when the images we project cannot be easily erased.

Confining the threat of Islamic extremists is a battle against external forces but also involves a personal and social contest with our own fears. We will not surrender to the terrorists, and we must not surrender to our fear. We must resist at all costs the temptation to believe that we can protect America by sacrificing the values that make it worth protecting.

I am not naive. (Applause.) I am not naive. I know very well the tools some governments have resorted to when threatened -- indefinite detention without trial, torture of prisoners and a belief that anything is permissible in dark places, where power is the only law. But these tools are not American tools, and the easy way is not the American way. We must remain true to our ideals not in spite of the threats we face but because of them.

In the decades to come, our prosperity and security will depend in part on what people in distant corners of the globe see when they turn their eyes toward America. As president, I would do everything within my power to ensure that they continue to see what they have seen for over 200 years: A nation that remains fully worthy of Abraham Lincoln's belief that Americans hold in our hands not only the destiny of a single nation but the last, best hope of Earth.

It's not easy to preserve our ideals in the midst of a difficult struggle with those who despise every value we stand for. It's not easy to see the humanity of our enemies who refuse to acknowledge our humanity and whose cruelty is so wanton and so sickening. The Bible's call to do just that remains me of the saying, that Christianity has not been tried and found wanting so much as it has been found difficult and not tried. The consistent message of the Gospels calls us to recognize that all life is sacred because all human beings are created in the image of God, a truth -- (applause) -- a truth recognized as central in the founding documents of our nation.

We have gone to war to defend our security and our values, and that is an enterprise that always involves morally hazardous actions. It is a just war, and like all wars, it requires the sacrifice and taking of human life. But let us not abandon our humility in its prosecution. War is a terrible thing, but not the worst thing, but a terrible thing, nonetheless. And our humility, commanded by our faith and our ideals and in a just and loving God, gives us the strength to resist the unnecessary sacrifice of our faith in the necessary cause of defeating our enemies.

My friends, when I was a young man I thought glory was the highest ambition and all glory was self-glory. My parents and the Naval Academy tried to teach me otherwise, but it wasn't until I had to rely on others to an extent I never thought would be necessary that I understood the lesson. I had to have faith in something greater than myself, not only to survive, but to survive with my self-respect intact. Faith in my comrades, faith in my country and faith in my God.

That faith helped me not only to endure, but to understand and respect the values it encompassed. Thus, in a moment of unexpected compassion that God ordained, I could learn the most valuable lesson of all -- how to forgive and how to escape the bitterness that could have destroyed my life.

As you well remember, we didn't lose the Vietnam War on the battlefields of Vietnam, we lost it in the streets of Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C. And the North Vietnamese knew that very well and they tried very hard to get us to turn against our country and to make statements condemning our country and our cause. One of the tactics that they would use in order to try to get cooperation was to take ropes and tie them very tightly around your biceps, pull them back behind your back, loop the rope around your head and pull your head down between your legs, and leave you in that position for extended periods of time.

One evening I was in that condition in an interrogation room. It was late at night and the door to my cell opened, and in came an individual that I had seen around our prison camp but never had any relationship with. And he walked in. He was what we called a gun guard, a sentry who just was there for security reasons. He walked in, he put his finger to his lips, and he loosened the ropes that held me. About five hours later, which was obviously the end of his watch, he came back, tightened the ropes and left.

A couple months later was Christmas Day. Because it was Christmas Day, the Vietnamese, who kept us apart from each other, allowed us to stand outside of our cell for a few minutes.

I was standing outside of my cell, and who comes walking up and stood next to me but the gun guard. He stood next to me, and in the dirt of the courtyard where I was standing, with his

sandal he drew a cross on the ground. And he stood there. And then shortly thereafter he, with his sandal, rubbed out the cross and walked away. He's the one person that I've always wanted to have the opportunity to be with again.

My friends, if America stands for anything, it stands for the freedom to follow our own hearts, to determine our own relationship with God. Our Constitution did not establish a national religion, but neither did it banish any worship. Religious freedom does not require Americans to hide their faith from public view or that communities must refrain from publicly acknowledging the importance to them of faith.

Judges should not legislate from the bench and actually restrict religious freedom by banning its expression in the public square. (Applause.) And I am proud to have played a role, and a major role, in the confirmation of Judges Alito, Roberts and many others. (Applause.)

My friends, as we all know, wisdom is a virtue. Sometimes all wisdom asks of us is that we recognize common sense. Don't federalize issues not addressed in the Constitution. Don't constitutionalize issues -- (applause) -- don't constitutionalize issues where federalism has a chance to work. But sometimes wisdom, as do all other virtues, require courage.

Wisdom suggests we should be reluctant to change a definition of marriage that has existed for thousands of years, but it takes courage in this day and age to insist that a mother and a father have unique and complementary roles in the raising of children -- (applause) -- and that marriage reinforces public support for those roles.

Wisdom suggests that we should be willing to give an unborn child the same chance that our parents gave us, but it takes courage in this political climate to insist on the protection of unborn children who can't vote, have no choice -- (cheers, applause) -- and can't -- (applause continuing) -- and can't reward you with support and donations.

Wisdom suggests that when activist federal judges impose their social views on the citizens of every state, the result is going to distort our politics in terrible ways, but it takes courage to insist that the courts have to return to their proper role. I will appoint strict constructionist judges that won't legislate from the bench. (Applause.)

My friends, I have been pro-life my entire public career. I believe I am the only major candidate in either party who can make that claim.

I am pro-life -- (applause) -- I am pro-life because I know what it is like to live without human rights, where human life is accorded no inherent value. And I know that I have a personal obligation to advocate human rights wherever they are denied: in Burma, in Bosnia, in Cuba or the Middle East, and in our own country, when we fail to respect the inherent dignity of all human life, born or unborn. That is a -- (applause) -- my friends, that is a personal testament that you need not take on faith. You need only examine my public record to know that I won't change my position.

Humility is as important as wisdom in our public affairs. It not only assures our fidelity to a cause greater than ourselves -- a defense of our ideals -- but cautions us not to become so

complacent in our strength and virtue that we become arrogant in power. This is something that Americans have long understood and must continue to understand.

We must preserve room for economic freedom but recognize the possibility of corruption. We must recognize that government is necessary, but power corrupts. Americans have lost trust in their government. We must restore that trust. We must restore that trust by doing what is right for the American people and not just for the special interests.

My friends -- (applause) -- Ronald Reagan once said, freedom is the right to question and change the established way of doing things. It is the continuous revolution of the marketplace. It is the understanding that allows us to recognize shortcomings and seek solutions.

He spoke these words to university students in Moscow in 1988. It was a message they needed to hear in Russia then, and it is a message that we need to heed in Washington now. My friends -- (applause) -- President Reagan possessed an unshakable faith in America's spirit that was more doable than the prevailing political sentiments of his time, and he became president to prove it.

His confidence was a tonic to men who had come home eager to put the Vietnam War behind us, and for our country to do likewise.

His was a faith that shouted at tyrants, "Tear down this wall," and when walls were all I had for a world, his faith in our country gave me hope in a desolate place.

I'd like to close by telling you a brief story, if I may. In the last -- in the first years of imprisonment in Vietnam, the North Vietnamese kept us in solitary confinement or two or three to a cell. Thanks to the efforts of millions of Americans on our behalf that conditions were changed, and they moved us into cell of 25 or 30 in each cell. One of the men who moved into the cell with me was a young man by the name of Mike Christian (sp). Mike Christian came from a very poor family, a town near Selma, Alabama. He didn't wear a pair of shoes until he was 13 years of age. When he was 17, he joined the United States Navy and was shot down and captured not long before I was. Mike Christian had a great faith in our nation and a great appreciation for service to a cause greater than himself.

As part of the change in treatment, the North Vietnamese allowed us to have some packages from home occasionally with small articles of clothing. The uniform we wore in prison was a short-sleeved blue shirt and blue trousers, like pajama trousers, and sandals that were cut out of automobile tires. I recommend them very highly. One pair lasted me five-and-a-half years. (Laughter.) Mike Christian, with his blue shirt, fashioned himself a bamboo needle and got a piece of white cloth and a piece of red cloth and sewed on the inside of his shirt the American flag. Every evening in our cell before we would have our bowl of soup, we would take Mike Christian's (sp) flag and put on the wall of the cell and pledge our allegiance to our flag and country. (Applause.)

Now, I will freely admit to you that singing the pledge of allegiance many times is not the most important or meaningful part of our day. In that prison cell far away, some of those men who

had already been there for as long as seven years pledging our allegiance to our flag and our country was indeed the most important part of our day. One day the Vietnamese came to our cell, searched our cell, found Mike Christian's (sp) shirt with a flag in it and removed it. That evening they came to the door of the cell, opened the door of the cell and called for Mike to come out. They closed the door of the cell, and for the next hour or so beat him rather severely for the benefit of all of us; at the completion of which, they threw him inside -- back inside the cell. We tried to clean him up as well as we could. The cell in which we lived had a concrete slab on the center of it in which we slept and a light bulb in each corner of the cell, which shown dimly 24 hours a day.

As I said, we cleaned him up as well as we could. I went over to lie down to go to sleep, and as I did, I happened to look over, and in the corner of the cell beneath a dim lightbulb with a piece of white cloth and a piece of red cloth and his bamboo needle, with his eyes almost shut from the beating that he had received of course was my friend Mike Christian sewing another American flag. He wasn't -- (applause) -- he obviously wasn't doing that because it made him feel better, because he knew how important it was.

Now today, we have another generation of Mike Christians who are over there, fighting for someone else's freedom, putting it on the line every single day. And I am most proud -- I am most proud to tell you that they are the best, they are the very best America has ever produced.

Thank you for -- (applause) -- thank you for your support of them, thank you for your love of them and thank you for your prayers for them. God bless. Thank you. (Applause.)

(END)