

Majority Leader Bill Frist's Remarks at the 2004 CPAC Reagan Banquet

Thank you, Art, for your generous introduction, and for the privilege of being with you tonight.

I'm profoundly grateful to stand before not only fellow conservatives, not only fellow patriots, but also friends who believe that one of the great presidents in American history was Ronald Wilson Reagan.

I'm here tonight because I believe in you. Because I believe in the ideas we share as conservatives. Because I recognize the vital role of our cause in the glorious past and even more glorious future of America.

And because I -- as Majority Leader of the United States Senate -- want our ideas, our cause, and our concerns heard in the United States Senate.

You have listened to many distinguished speakers these past two days: the Vice President, cabinet secretaries, senators, and members of the House. Each plays a unique role in our democracy.

But just so you know that I understand the real role I play, I want to read to you the most accurate description I've heard of my job as Majority Leader.

This is from Alan Murray -- the host of CNBC's Capital Report: "Being Senate Majority Leader is akin to being groundskeeper at a cemetery: you have a lot of people under you, but they aren't paying much attention."

This is a decisive time for America. Our nation stands at a crossroads. And with the upcoming elections in November, we will soon choose a path: either we will adopt the pessimism and negativity of the Democratic contenders for president, or we will affirm the bold and positive leadership of President George W. Bush.

Tonight, I want to touch upon three issues that will be at stake in this election and concern our cause: the protection of human dignity, the family as the bedrock of a healthy society, and the defense of liberty.

C.S. Lewis saw decades ago the dangers facing human dignity. In his essay, the Abolition of Man, he warned that in conquering nature, nature is actually conquering mankind.

The question facing us in this post-modern era is: "Are we eternal souls made in God's image or just flesh and blood with only darkness at the end of our lives on Earth?"

If human beings are special -- if we are truly sacred -- then we must devote ourselves to a better world. But we must not do evil to bring about good.

My own profession is medicine. And a good physician must, I fundamentally believe, also be a very good scientist.

I can tell you from my own experiences that without revolutionary advances in medical science and technology, my own heart transplant patients of a decade ago simply wouldn't be alive today.

Indeed, we reject an irrational fear of technological advance.

But the secret of human dignity is living within limits -- ethical limits, moral limits that don't hamper human advances, but preserve them and promote them.

We strongly support ethical stem cell research. But we reject the cloning or the patenting of human beings.

The practice of brutalizing a baby the very moment she is ready to emerge into the world is an affront to my whole medical and surgical experience. And even more profoundly, it is an affront to values that America has held so dearly for more than two and a quarter centuries.

For almost a decade we worked to ban this brutal, barbaric, and morally offensive procedure -- partial birth abortion. But our opponents blocked us. It's hard to imagine they tried to block us right up to the very end in the Senate.

After years of hard work, we elected a Republican Senate, a Republican House, and a Republican President. And we FINALLY banned the gruesome procedure of partial birth abortion.

Thank you my fellow conservatives for keeping the faith. And thank you, President George W. Bush.

That's what happens when you work to align the stars and get good people together to accomplish a great goal.

And that's why I'm so excited to be with you tonight. The stars really are aligned in the executive and legislative branches to make great things happen.

But I think we must all admit we've not done as well with the courts. It's the courts that have put a hold on banning Partial Birth Abortion. Maybe that's also why Democrats have launched the unprecedented filibuster of the President's judicial nominees -- to retain control of the third branch of government.

For the first time in our history, a minority of Senators -- all Democrats -- have used the filibuster to deny a bipartisan majority the opportunity to vote up or down -- yes or no, for or against -- the President's nominees.

A minority is denying the majority its constitutional duty to give "advice and consent."

This is wrong.

It is wrong to apply religious or ideological litmus tests to qualified nominees. It is wrong to use the confirmation process to curry favor with special interest groups. It is wrong for Senate Democrats to verbally assassinate the President's nominees.

President Bush, thank you for courageously standing up to Senate Democrats and appointing Judge Charles Pickering to the bench.

Let me assure you: our party will stand its ground until the Senate does its duty. We will not cut a deal. We will not blink. And we will not back down. The President's judicial nominees will get the vote they deserve.

To further preserve human dignity, the Senate will soon take up the Unborn Victims of Violence Act. This bill recognizes that when a criminal attacks a pregnant woman and kills her unborn child, he has claimed not just one, but two precious human lives. And it ensures that those who prey upon a pregnant woman and her child will pay a heavy price.

There's a second critical question facing our nation: "What is family?"

Our Founders assumed the answer was obvious. They didn't write into the Constitution the definition of family, because it wasn't even an open question. For them, and for all of us here today, we know the strength of our society rests on the foundation of strong families.

But the issue before us today is that activist judges in Massachusetts are intent on destroying the traditional definition of family.

It's true that respect for marriage has seen better days. That's all the more reason not to abandon or radically redefine the God-ordained institution of marriage.

I do want to be very clear: we reject hatred and intolerance. We must treat all our fellow citizens with kindness and civility. But marriage should not be redefined by activist judges. And we won't let it.

Marriage should remain the union of a man and a woman. We will do whatever it takes to protect, preserve, and strengthen the institution of marriage against activist judges. If that means we must amend the Constitution, we will do it.

The President has announced a bold initiative to promote healthy marriage in the welfare reauthorization bill. We promote home ownership to reduce poverty and stabilize communities. We should do no less for marriage.

There's a third pressing issue facing our nation, and that is the defense of liberty.

America is a peaceful nation. We do not want war. We abhor it. But there are times when justice and freedom are so threatened, that we must act -- and we must act with overwhelming force.

As we have come to realize as a nation, we have a choice: either we take the battle to terrorists on their soil and on our terms, or the terrorists will bring the battle to us on our soil and on their terms. Baghdad or Boston? Kabul or Kansas City? The choice is ours.

As long as George W. Bush is President, America will take the battle to the terrorists.

Yes, we will search every cave, raid every safe house, destroy every training camp, and freeze every bank account that terrorists may use to plot their evil ways. We will make the world safe from terrorists because terrorists will no longer feel safe in the world.

The question of defending liberty is not just about taking up arms, but also about creating a vibrant economy.

Upon taking office, President Bush immediately went to work to revive our economy. We've cut taxes every year he has been in office. Combined, the President's tax cuts are the largest in American history.

Have they produced results? All across America businesses are investing now more than ever. Housing starts are at their highest level in 20 years. Worker productivity is at an all-time high. The stock market has broken through the 10 thousand point barrier. And the unemployment rate has dropped to a 14-month low.

This is the fastest growing economy since Ronald Reagan was president. And that, my friends, is no coincidence.

Tax cuts are not just about the size of government, but the size of our freedom. More government leads to less freedom. We must preserve freedom. We must make the American people's tax cuts permanent.

We must also curb frivolous lawsuits that stifle economic growth. We'll begin with class action reform and then rapidly move to medical liability reform. Americans are already spending too much money for health care. They don't need reckless trial lawyers pushing huge awards to pad their own pockets.

On spending, Congress has heard you loud and clear. We must reduce the deficit.

Beating back more than a trillion dollars of Democratic amendments last year is not enough. The President understands this. Republicans in Congress understand this.

We must tame the explosive growth of government spending. And we will.

Liberty is also more than just restraining government growth.

Edmund Burke, the father of our movement, wrote: "Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains on their own appetites."

George Washington said much the same in his Farewell Address, when he noted: "...religion and morality are indispensable supports" for a healthy society.

We are a pluralist nation, as we should be. But it was our Framers who believed that our Constitution was designed for a virtuous people.

Government can't make people religious or devout, but it can and must get out of the way and let religion flourish. Attempts to denude the public square of all religious expression betray a misunderstanding of the role of religion in a pluralist nation.

The Founders intended a form of separation of church and state. But they did not intend any form of separation of God and state.

When it comes to education, many parents do not have the same freedoms wealthier parents have. In Washington D.C. and other places around our nation, too many of our kids are trapped in troubled schools.

And too many of my liberal colleagues are willing to tolerate this disparity. They oppose school choice in our nation's Capital while they send their own children to private school.

This is about to change. Yesterday the Senate passed -- and today the President signed -- legislation to give Opportunity Scholarships to thousands of the poorest students in failing DC schools.

This will change thousands of lives forever. And it will give children a down payment on hope.

It is true that America stands at a crossroads.

The election next November is about more than just which party controls the White House and the Congress. It's about human dignity. It's about the family as the bedrock of our society. And it's about the liberty endowed upon us all by God.

While these issues go to the foundation of who we are as a people, they will find expression in the leaders we choose . . . and those we reject.

I can tell you that George Bush is a man of character, courage, and moral clarity. He is the clear choice, the best choice and, for me, the only choice to lead our nation.

As Americans, we must faithfully serve the cause of freedom. It is our duty. Did the hundreds of thousands of patriots who have laid down their lives, so that we may live free, do so in vain?

I'm confident that Americans have found a new love and respect for our freedom since September 11th. We have learned anew what too many had forgotten, that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

At the Normandy commemoration in 1984, President Reagan vowed: "We will always remember. We will always be proud. We will always be prepared, so we may always be free."

Together, let us protect human dignity, let us preserve family, let us promote liberty, and let us, my fellow conservatives, press on to win the prize.

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