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Protecting the American Dream

by Rep. Jeb Hensarling (more by this author)

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The following speech was delivered by Rep. Jeb Hensarling (R.-Tex.) on March 1, 2007 at the 34th annual Conservative Political Action Conference. Hensarling is chairman of the conservative Republican Study Committee.

I want to thank Bill for that overly generous introduction. And although I may not be worthy of it, I wouldn't mind hearing it one more time.

I come before you today at a challenging time for our movement. The Democrats have now taken control of both Houses of Congress. Many of my friends ask me how I have adjusted. I tell them that I have adjusted better than some of Republican colleagues. I remind them that as a conservative, not too many of my legislative proposals ever passed anyway. And somehow shockingly, we find ourselves here.

Although the chairmanship of the RSC is a challenging one, I feel I come to it with some important experience. I have been a student and an aide to U.S. Senator Phil Gramm. I have been a small businessman who has risked capital and signed the front of a pay check. I am a husband and father. I have been a conservative activist ever since my mom took me by the hand as a child to go door to door for Barry Goldwater. And finally, I have cleaned out chicken houses. That's right, as the son and grandson of poultry farmers, I've cleaned out chicken houses. It is there that I learned a most valuable lesson for my service in Congress. I learned that one does not clean up overnight what took many years to accumulate. Much cleaning remains for all of us.

Seriously though, please know that I am humbled to come before you today. I know that within this room are some of the most dedicated workers within our Republican party. And I want to thank you for everything that you do to help the Conservative cause and give back to our great nation.

We are gathered here today at the 34th annual C-PAC convention as America again faces great challenges. As Republicans, we are here in the wake of the worst election in a quarter century.

Though there were many facets to the 2006 Elections, there certainly has been no shortage of analysis showing that Republicans lost the Majority because as a party, we lost our conservative brand. Voters – perhaps many of you – made up their

minds that we no longer shared their fervor for a less intrusive government, fiscal responsibility, and reform. And although we had lots of help from our opponents, we gave Americans far too many reasons to draw those conclusions. First the voters lost their trust in us, then they chose not to renew our contract.

Let us be clear in that the American people didn't find themselves agreeing with a liberal Democrat agenda. They didn't choose to hire them, they chose to fire us.

Today, there are conservatives in every district in America that, just like yourself, are longing for Republicans who will stand and fight on behalf of the legacy left by Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, Phil Gramm, Newt Gingrich, and the drafters of the Contract with America. Like you, they are searching for those who are well grounded in the past yet looking ever forward, ready to translate our core principles into a 21st Century agenda of conservative reform.

So let us loudly and clearly rededicate ourselves to a noble cause – nothing less than the preservation of the American Dream. It is a dream that I believe relies on four cornerstones.

The first cornerstone of the American dream is faith. Our Declaration of Independence says that we are endowed by our Creator with unalienable rights.

Faith is the very foundation of our freedom. Our freedoms come from something higher than a secular, earthly entity. And it's faith that promotes values and virtues without which, the foundation of a free society begins to crumble.

Family is the next cornerstone of the American dream. President Reagan once said, "It is our families, not our government, that can best nurture our children, care for our elderly, perpetuate our values, and preserve our heritage." Strong families make strong nations. And let me tell you, since becoming a father 5 years ago, I have learned, with no apologies to Senator Clinton, it takes a family to raise a child, not a village. I was taught by my parents to work hard, love the Lord, and to dream big dreams, because by the grace of God, I was born an American. And my wife and I are working to raise our 2 children in the same fashion.

The third cornerstone of the American Dream is Free Enterprise. Winston Churchill once said, "Some regard private enterprise as if it were a predatory tiger to be shot. Others look upon it as a cow that they can milk. Only a handful see it for what it really is - the strong horse that pulls the whole cart."

We know that free enterprise is all about rolling up your sleeves, working hard, risking your savings, and perhaps one day starting your own business - to compete, to succeed, or even fail, all based on your own merits. It also includes your neighbor's right to choose what they buy in a competitive market place – regardless of whether that competition comes from the next company, the next county or the next country. It gives us real jobs, with real futures. And as history as my witness, there has never been a more successful housing program, health

care program, or nutrition program than the American free enterprise system.

Freedom is the final – and most unique – cornerstone of the American dream. Nowhere in time and space have human beings found more freedom and enjoyed it more abundantly than in America. Generations of our forefathers have taken up arms, fought for it, and found it worthy of the sacrifice of their very lives. Freedom has allowed us to be limited only by the size of our dreams. And even today, Americans continue to dream big dreams. With our firm resolve and the grace of the Almighty, may it always be so.

Again, our liberty and our freedom face a number of threats today, both foreign and domestic. For those of us in this room, it is our sacred duty is to keep the flame of liberty burning bright for the next generation. So, we must dedicate ourselves to ensuring that America conquers three very different threats.

The first and greatest threat that we face today is global terrorism. And make no mistake, our War on Terror is predominantly a war with radical Islam. Contrary to common perception, the threat is not new. Can anyone in the audience identify who said the following?

“The ambassador answered us that [the right] was founded on the Laws of the Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have answered their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as prisoners, and that every Mussulman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise.”

That quote was given by Thomas Jefferson in 1786 when he was the Ambassador to France.

He was describing to Congress the answer he was given by Ambassador Sidi Haji Abdrahaman when asked what justification the Barbary Pirates had to wage what was then a war of terror upon shippers. Jefferson argued for 10 years that concession to the radical pirates would only inspire more attacks.

Over 200 years ago, one of our most celebrated founding fathers of freedom – Thomas Jefferson – couldn’t comprehend a radical Ambassador’s religious justification to wage war against a nation that had done him no harm. But he knew that appeasement would only lead to more attacks. And he was right. What has changed today?

America has become the world’s shining city on a hill, a beacon of hope, and a global superpower. And yet again, we find ourselves under attack from radical Islam. Yet again we find ourselves at war. Only now, the weapons are more vile and the stakes are higher.

All Americans today are no doubt disappointed in our progress in Iraq. Yet, many

of us remain hopeful for the new strategy. We all know that fighting this war is costly. Like many members of Congress, I have met with the mothers of fallen soldiers. Their burden and sacrifice is solemn and profound. But as costly as it is to fight in Iraq, I never, never, never want to meet with the mothers whose children may perish in the next 9/11 if we accept defeat in Iraq.

Iraq must be seen in the larger context of this war with jihadism, with radical Islam. Whether we like it or not, Iraq is where the battle lines are drawn today. Don't take my word for it, listen to the jihadists. Osama bin Laden has said, "The epicenter of these wars is Baghdad. Success in Baghdad will be success for the United States. Failure in Iraq is the failure of the United States. Their defeat in Iraq will mean defeat in all their wars."

Let's soberly reflect on the challenge that we face. Listen to Ayman Al-Zawahri, Osama bin Laden's number two in command, "Al Qaeda has the right to kill four million Americans—two million of them children." Listen to Iraqi Ayatollah Ahmad Hussein. "Even if this means using biological, chemical, and bacterial weapons- we will conquer the world." And finally, read an edition of last year's London Telegraph, which reported that "a husband and wife arrested in the British terror raids allegedly planned to take their six-month old baby on a mid-air suicide mission." This is the enemy we face. And we face him foremost in Iraq.

The consequences of failure in Iraq are immense. Don't take my word for it. Read the report of the Iraq Study Group. Read the National Intelligence Estimate. We surely would see the beginning of a Sunni-Shi'ia clash as American troop convoys fled the country. The battle for Baghdad will undoubtedly spill over to the entire country. Shiites will most likely win. They will draw in Jordan and Saudi Arabia to the defense of Sunni Iraqis. Iran will rise to the defense of the Shi'ia Iraqis. An entire regional war could easily ensue, and what's left of Iraq would become what Afghanistan once was—a safe haven for the recruitment, training, financing and sanctuary of radical Islamists bent on attacking our nation and families. We cannot wish it away. We cannot hope it away and we cannot dream it away. There will be no greater event to empower radical Islam than our defeat or retreat from Iraq.

And despite the severity of the consequences of retreat or defeat, many, if not most, of my Democrat colleagues in the House want to cut off funding for our troops and withdraw from Iraq. This is well known.

Rep. John Murtha and other neo-isolationists want to begin a "Slow Bleed Policy" that would gradually choke off funding for the men and women of our armed forces in Iraq. Others want to somehow go back in time to rewrite the War Authorization that Congress passed in 2002 so that it no longer authorizes war.

Think about that. They want to edit their decision to go to authorize war. Somewhere Emperor Hirohito must be slapping himself thinking, "If only I had thought of that!!"

Each moment that the Democrat majority spends wondering whether cutting off funding or erasing history is a better strategy, a soldier in Iraq awaits any sign of confidence from a Congress that authorized his mission.

Somewhere over in Baghdad right now is a brave soldier who is tired. He's about to search another safe house for a terrorist insurgent. He is resolute, he has dirt on his face. He carries a picture of his family. They pray for him every day. But you know what? He volunteered. He loves America. He loves his freedom. And he fights for the freedom he has enjoyed to be passed on to his children.

I recently heard from one of them. Allow me to read you his letter:

Dear Congressman Hensarling,

I proudly served with the U.S. Army's 10th Special Forces Group on two deployments to Iraq - the first in Northern Iraq with the Kurds fighting Ansar al-Islam and later in the Suimi Triangle killing and capturing high level Saddam loyalists and foreign fighters. I know the price of war well - From the months I have spent away from my wife and daughter to the minutes I have spent applying direct pressure to the mortal wound of one of my brothers. I have prayed for peace in away that few Americans can muster. Fighting a war is never pleasant—it is a difficult business—but fighting this war and winning this war is absolutely crucial to protecting the freedoms we enjoy. Our enemies know that, and so must we.

Sir, I think you should know that without exception, every house in Iraq I raided had propaganda from Syria, an Imam their named Aba Kaka was the most common, along with training videos from Afghanistan and Chechnya. I believe the enemy view Iraq as key terrain in achieving their goal of establishing a new Islamic Caliphate

However, the war in Iraq—and more broadly, the war against radical, militant Islam— will not be lost in the sands of the Middle East. It will be lost in the halls of Congress and on the air waves as public officials and talking heads slowly erode the will of the American people to press on towards victory.

Congressman, for your part, never fail to make the case for victory in Iraq. Do it loudly and do it often. I was promoted to Major and my son was born at the beginning of this month. I gladly accept this increased responsibility for my country and my family. My young family willingly and knowingly stands on the barricade for freedom.

Please, please Sir, continue to encourage those with whom you serve to do the same. The American people have shown a great capacity to overcome in moments like these. But they must believe, and they cannot believe until our leaders stand, united for victory - not withdrawal. Thank you for serving our great nation.

Respectfully,

Nick Dotti
MAJ, United States Army Special Forces Command

WHAT MEMBER OF CONGRESS can look that soldier, or any soldier, in the eye and say, "You know what? I don't believe in your mission. I don't believe you can succeed. I don't believe you can win, and I am going to oppose reinforcements. And Guess what? I have the power to bring you home, but I am just not willing to do it. Because if I do, I have to take responsibility, and I am just not willing to face the political consequences." No 'profiles in courage' can be found among this group in Congress.

This is where we are today. There will simply be no greater event to empower radical Islam than our defeat in Iraq.

What do we in this room do? How can we help? It may never be our role to pick up arms and go door to door in Iraq. But if you believe, like I do, that the threat of Radical Islam represents the greatest threat upon liberty since the Soviet Union, it is our duty to make that case. Explain it to your friends, talk about it with your family. Work to support our armed forces. Send care packages to them and their families. Pray for them. Together, let us not disappoint Nick Dotti. Let's rise to the call of our nation and seize the moment.

A far more subtle and encroaching challenge to our liberty is the exponential growth of the size, scope, power and expense of the federal government. It begs the question, 'how much government is enough?' 'Can we ever have enough?' It seems many in Congress would say no.

The Founding Fathers disagreed. They knew that as government grew, liberty yielded. Listen to their first statement of principle:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the PURSUIT of Happiness."

Listen closely to those last three words, "Pursuit of Happiness." PURSUE... Permit me to point out that the founders did not say "endowed by a government with an ENTITLEMENT to happiness, an APPROPRIATION for happiness, or even a FEDERAL DEPARTMENT of happiness.

No, instead they believed in limited government. They knew that true happiness only comes from freedom and opportunity. And the Federal budget—the fuel line of big government— has grown out of control. And as government grows, liberty yields.

For only the fourth time in history, the Federal Government is now spending over

\$20,000 per household. This figure is up from just 5 years ago of \$16,000 per household, representing the largest expansion of government in 50 years. As government grows, liberty yields.

In the last 10 years, almost every major Department of government has grown precipitously way beyond the rate of inflation. Foreign aid is up 93 percent; agriculture is up 165 percent; transportation 78 percent; education 95 percent, and the list goes on and on. As government grows, liberty yields.

Everytime we increase the federal budget, we have to take away from some family budget.

One of those family budgets belongs to Eddie Alexander of Henderson County, Texas. Like most Americans, he has to work from January 1st to July 12th—over half the year—to pay for the cost of government on all three levels.

What opportunities are lost to Eddie and his neighbors in those first 193 days? How many small businesses existed only in their minds' eye and were soon jettisoned because government took too much of their savings? How many teaching, nursing and engineering degrees were denied their children? How many of them could not afford to buy their first home? In short, far too many to be commensurate with a free society.

Unfortunately, the situation is due to get worse. The express federal debt has grown from \$5.5 trillion to 8 trillion in just 5 years – and that is before you add in government's unfunded liabilities. The total unfunded liability of the federal government is now \$43 trillion, principally due to the exponential and unsustainable growth of Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. That is a staggering figure. It amounts to more than \$350,000 for every full-time worker.

The Congressional Budget Office, the Office of Management and Budget, the Federal Reserve, the Dept. of Treasury and anyone else who has looked at this challenge, have all come to the roughly the same conclusion. Without courageous action, the next generation may face a future where either their taxes must be doubled, or their federal government will consist of little more than Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. According to the Comptroller General, we are on the verge of being the first generation in American history to leave the next generation with less opportunity and a lower standard of living. As the father of a 5 year old and a 3 year old, I will not sit idly by and let that happen.

It is time to be courageous. Here is how:

- 1) Commit ourselves to once again balancing the budget without raising taxes. America needs a Constitutional Amendment that will force Congress to limit spending, abide by its budgets, and be honest with the American people about the true cost of government. In 1798, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "I wish it were possible to obtain a single amendment to our Constitution. I would be willing to depend on

that alone for the reduction of the administration of our government to the genuine principles of its Constitution. I mean an additional article, taking from the federal government the power of borrowing." Friends, it is time to obtain that single amendment.

2) Ensure that not a dime of the Social Security surplus is used to balance the budget by subsidizing other government programs. Over the last 70 years, politicians have raided the Social Security surplus 52 times, a practice that the late Democrat Senator, Daniel Patrick Moynihan termed "embezzlement." This dishonest practice must end, both to protect seniors who have been taxed their entire lives to have something in retirement and to shut off an important spigot for big government.

3) Force the federal government to live within its means by placing a cap on total spending so that it cannot exceed the growth in the family budget. I, for one, believe we can achieve better retirement security and better health care for our nation at a more reasonable cost. There are hundreds of ideas and countless innovations that we can turn to. But Congress will never try them as long as it has the easy option of spending more on today's political constituencies and sending the bill to future generations. If we will occasionally say "no" to those making a claim on the federal treasury today, we might just be able to say "yes" to our children tomorrow.

The third threat to our liberty that I wanted to talk to you about today is the left's relentless attack on God in the public square. As I have just discussed, the size and scope of the "public square" has increased dramatically with the growth of government. And as the public square has grown, any mention of God's presence within it has been simultaneously greatly diminished.

Whether the attack has come from liberal judge, liberal activist group, or liberal legislator, God the Creator – who has endowed us with unalienable rights – faces a constant barrage from secularists. They seemingly will not rest until He is completely barred from public view. Make no mistake about it, this is an attack on our liberty.

As Jefferson so eloquently wrote in 1785, "Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?" You will find these very words inscribed on the walls of the Jefferson memorial just across the Potomac. Yet there are those who seek to functionally sandblast them from that hallowed shrine not to mention remove them from the minds and memories of our countrymen.

Most recently and famously the attack on God in the public square has manifested itself in the 9th Circuit decision that the phrase, "One nation under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance runs afoul of the establishment clause. I don't know about San Francisco, California, but in Terrell, Texas, and I suspect wherever you are from, it is still, "One Nation Under God."

Ladies and gentlemen, there is simply no reading of American history, our Declaration of Independence or Constitution that would permit, condone or sanction the judiciary's assault of God in the public square.

Reflect upon your history. More than any other reason, huddled masses came to our shores to seek freedom – economic freedom, political freedom, and yes, religious freedom. Quakers in Pennsylvania, Catholics in Maryland and Puritans in Massachusetts all sought a new land to find freedom of religion, not freedom from religion. Read our founding document which publicly acknowledges God, not the Christian God, the Muslim God, the Jewish God or Hindu God – but God the Creator, broadly defined and worshipped in many faiths and traditions.

Listen to the words of other founding fathers. Alexander Hamilton wrote that our sacred rights, "are written, as with a sunbeam, in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of divinity itself; and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power," John Adams stated that, "Our constitution was made for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Recall that the first Continental Congress began each session with prayer, a tradition that remains up to this day.

The purpose of government is to ensure freedom, not to impede it. We must never forget that freedom is a gift of God and that it is not secure unless this fact is acknowledged by a virtuous society. These were commonly accepted views up until about 60 years ago. Then in 1947, in *Everson v. Board of Education* the Supreme Court announced that the First Amendment had somehow erected a wall between church and state.

Look at how courts and local governments have since acted. It has been held in a number of cases that freedom of speech and the press are guaranteed to students and teachers – unless the subject is religious in nature at which time the speech loses its constitutional protections. A school song has been held unconstitutional because it promoted values such as honesty, truth, courage and faith but was in the form of a prayer. It has been found unconstitutional for a kindergarten class to ask whose birthday is celebrated by Christmas. Some states have refused to print such words as "Thank God" and "Pray" on vanity license tags ordered by private citizens.

So what do we do about this unbridled attack on liberty, and our faith?

Sometimes I feel that the tendency of people of faith is to throw up our hands and lament that it's just getting worse and there's nothing to do but pray. Well, first, we all know that prayer is far more than nothing – it's the most effective tool we can employ. But we cannot stop there.

Every one of you – and certainly myself included as a legislator and a citizen – is personally responsible for confronting these situations when they occur. We must explain to our fellow citizens why these seemingly small individual defeats – on

parental rights, on God in the Pledge, on display of the Ten Commandments – are a concerted effort by the opposition to dissolve any remaining moral foundation for our liberty.

Some speak of the necessity of an independent judiciary. I agree, but what does “independent judiciary” actually mean? In the proper Constitutional and historical context, it means that the judiciary must operate within the framework of the three branches of government, and one is no less and no more powerful than the others. The judiciary is the “check and balance” of the legislative and executive branch, but what serves as the checks and balances for the judiciary? It must and is the legislature, the executive branch (regardless of the party of power), and the people of this Nation. We must continually articulate the case that limiting or removing jurisdiction from a court gone astray is not only prudent, but is fundamentally a Constitutional responsibility and imperative when the court is out of balance. We must argue our case on every single issue, each time our liberty is threatened in every venue across the country.

And this debate must not just occur within the bounds of the District of Columbia on federal legislation and Supreme Court cases, but in every city and small town in America, at every school board meeting that attempts to restrict a parent’s rights, at every state legislature that imposes condom distribution, and in every county courtroom that even thinks of taking down their Ten Commandments plaque due to the threat of a lawsuit.

In your local public square, sound the alarm at the slightest offense of your ability to practice your faith and liberty as God and our Constitution allows. Take early and often umbrage at the slightest indignity to your God, and sound the clarion call to every neighbor you have that if it has not affected their liberty yet, it will very soon.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these are the three great challenges that our nation faces. Yet, there is still much hope across our great land. Today, in America, a child awoke secure in his mother’s arms because the Congress has not cut off funding to our brave men and women in uniform fighting terrorism. Today in America, a family was able to make a down payment on their first home, because Congress has not raised taxes again on the American people. Today in America, a prisoner has been paroled, because he turned around his life while incarcerated because he enrolled in a faith based ministry that has not been ruled unconstitutional by a federal judge.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is much hope in America today. And one of the reasons that I have hope for America is because of each and every one of you in this room. You are the torchbearers of liberty for the next generation.

As a Member of Congress, I serve in a body that still too often focuses on the next election and not the next generation. I serve in a body where it is easier to know the right thing than to do the right thing. I myself have struggled with this from

time to time. However, I now have an approach which guides me through times of doubt. Whenever I think about doing the easy thing instead of the right thing, or the courageous thing, here's what I do.

I take out a picture of my children and place it on my desk. I think about how fleeting the moment of satisfaction is when some Republican colleague calls me a "good team player," or a Democrat hails my bi-partisanship, or my local newspaper calls me a statesman. All for doing that something that in my gut, I know is not right. Then I look at that picture of Claire and Travis and think about how lasting and painful the moment of having to say "no" to their future dreams in the years to come. When I compare the two moments, I usually find the courage to do the right thing.

Let us all be of good courage and resolve to do all in our power to save what President Reagan called "man's last best hope on Earth - America."

God Bless you and God Bless America.

Mr. Hensarling represents the 5th District of Texas. He is chairman of the [Republican Study Committee](#).

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