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MITT ROMNEY

2008 & 2012 Presidential Candidate: Governor-MA

Remarks to the Conservative Political Action Conference

February 10, 2012

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This year, here at CPAC, we've got a great crowd. It's been a great conference. For that I suppose we should acknowledge President Obama, the conservative movement's top recruiter. Turns out, he really is a great community organizer. Although, I don't think we were the community he had in mind.

Today we are poised for a great victory in November. The pundits and the pollsters tell us we can win this election. But we must tell the nation why we should win. It is up to us to prove that we are truly ready to step forward and lead this country. This election is not just about getting more votes. Defeating Barack Obama is only one step toward our greater goal of saving America.

Of course we can defeat Barack Obama! That's the easy part! Believe me, November 6th will be the easiest day our next President will face.

This country we love is in jeopardy. It's more than the economic statistics we read, it's the pain we feel in our hearts. For three years we have suffered through the failures not only of a weak leader, but of a bankrupt ideology. I am convinced that if we do our job, if we lead with conviction and integrity, that history will record the Obama Presidency as the last gasp of liberalism's great failure and a turning point for a new conservative era.

But it's not enough to show how they have failed. We must prove we deserve to lead. I am here today to ask you to stand with me shoulder to shoulder as we go forward to fight for America.

As we step forward together, now is the time to reaffirm what it means to be a conservative and why this must be our greatest hour. America is like no other country in history. At the very heart of our American conservatism is the conviction that the principles embodied in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence are uniquely powerful, foundational, and defining. Some see the hand of Providence in their authorship. Others credit the brilliance of the Founders. Many of us see both. But conservatives all agree that departing from these founding principles is a departure from the greatness of America-- from our mission, from our freedom, from our prosperity, and from our purpose.

I know this President will never get it, but we conservatives aren't just proud to cling to our guns and to our religion. We are also proud to cling to our Constitution!

The wisdom of our founding documents is that they see the nation's prosperity not as a product of government, but as the product of individual citizens, each pursuing happiness. This is key to the success of the American experiment. America does not just exist for the people, it has been made exceptional by the people.

A free people, pursuing their own dreams and achieving success in their own ways — that is what has propelled America and made us the most prosperous and powerful nation in the world. Many politicians on both sides of the aisle have forgotten that — if they ever really understood it at all. They have fallen under the spell of Washington.

Politicians are routinely elected on promises to change Washington, but when they come here, they become creatures of Washington. They begin to see government as the answer to every challenge and the solution for every problem. At every turn, they try to substitute the heavy hand of the federal government for free citizens and free enterprise. They think government knows better — and can do better — than a free people exercising their free will. And this President is the worst offender. Barack Obama is the poster child for the arrogance of government.

This election really is a battle for the soul of America. And it's going to come down to a choice between whether we want to be a nation of and by Washington ... or a nation of and by a free people.

As conservatives, we are united by a set of core commitments. But not everyone has taken the same path to get here. There are college students at this conference who are reading Burke and Hayek. When I was your age, you could have told me they were infielders for the Detroit Tigers. Some of you work in think tanks or follow the writings of prominent leaders. Some of you have worked in government or labored on the front lines of conservative causes. I salute you all.

My path to conservatism came from my family, my faith, and my life's work.

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I was raised in a home shaped by and rooted in conservative values. My mother's father — my grandfather — came to America from England. As a teenager, he was alone in a new country, but he risked it all for a chance at religious liberty and economic opportunity.

You've probably heard how proud I am of my father. He was born to American parents living in Mexico. When he was five, they moved back to the United States. His dad was a builder who went bust more than once. My Dad grew up poor and never had a chance to finish his college degree. But he believed in a country where the circumstances of one's birth were not a barrier to achievement. And with hard work, he became the head of a car company and the Governor of the great state of Michigan.

The values that allowed my parents to achieve their dreams are the same values they instilled in my siblings and me. Those aren't values I just talk about; they are values that I live every day. My 42-year marriage to my wife, Ann; the life we've built with our five sons; and the faith that sustains us — these conservative constants have shaped my life.

In business, if you're not fiscally conservative, you're bankrupt. I spent 25 years balancing budgets, eliminating waste, and keeping as far away from government as was humanly possible. I did things conservatism is designed for — I started new businesses and turned around broken ones. And I am not ashamed to say that I was very successful at it.

I know conservatism because I have lived conservatism.

As governor of Massachusetts, I had the unique experience of defending our conservative principles in the most liberal state in our union.

When I took office, I was facing a \$3 billion budget deficit and an economy in a tailspin.

Even with a legislature that was 85% Democrat, I cut taxes 19 times and balanced the budget all four years. I cast over 800 vetoes and cut entire programs. I erased a \$3 billion budget shortfall and left office with a \$2 billion rainy day fund. If there was a program, an agency, or a department that needed cutting, we cut it. In fact, a commentator once said that I didn't just go after the sacred cows, I went after the whole herd. And I can't wait to get my hands on Washington.

During my tenure, our conservative values also came under attack. Less than a year after I took office, the state's supreme court inexplicably found a right to same-sex marriage in our constitution. I pushed for a stay of the decision, fought for a marriage amendment to our constitution, and successfully prohibited out-of-state couples from coming to our state to get married and then go home. On my watch, we fought hard and prevented Massachusetts from becoming the Las Vegas of gay marriage. When I am President, I will preserve the Defense of Marriage Act and I will fight for a federal amendment defining marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman.

During my time in office, I stood up to those who wanted to call into question the very definition of life. I vetoed a bill that would have opened the door to cloning and embryo farming. I vetoed a bill that would have allowed young girls to gain access to abortion-inducing drugs. I fought for abstinence education in our public schools. And I defended the Catholic Church's right to serve their community in ways that were consistent with their conscience through adoption programs that placed children in a home with a mom and a dad.

I was a conservative governor. I fought against long odds in a deep blue state. I understand the battles that we, as conservatives, must fight because I have been on the front lines.

Here at CPAC, I know you understand this. This gathering has always welcomed me. And you have consistently supported me — not because of my rhetoric, but because of my record.

Over the course of this conference, several candidates either have been — or will come — before you seeking to lead our country out of these troubled times. What distinguishes us from one another is not our opposition to President Obama or even our support for conservative convictions. What distinguishes us is the nature of our experience, our perspective, and our judgment.

This election will ultimately be about two very different visions for America. But our more immediate choice will be between candidates from two very different backgrounds.

I spent 25 years in business, starting at the bottom and going on to help create a great American success story. I led an Olympics out of the shadows of scandal and turned around a state crying out for leadership.

In each of these endeavors, I worked with many talented people, but I was the Chief Executive. Success or failure lay on my shoulders. When tough decisions had to be made, I made them.

Leadership as a Chief Executive isn't about getting a bill out of subcommittee or giving a speech — it's about setting clear goals and overcoming constant adversity. It's about sharing credit when times are good and taking responsibility for failure.

I am the only candidate in this race, Republican or Democrat, who has never worked a day in Washington. I don't have old scores to settle or decades of cloakroom deals to defend.

As conservatives, you've learned to be skeptical of this city and its politicians and right you are.

My wife and I raised five boys and one of the lessons you learn is that when you hear an excuse that just doesn't make

sense... it's because it doesn't make sense. And let me tell you, any politician who tries to convince you that they hated Washington so much that they just couldn't leave, well, that's the same politician who will try to sell you a Bridge to Nowhere.

This is a moment when our country needs serious change and real reform. So, let me tell you exactly what kind of President I will be.

To get America back on track and get Americans back to work, we need bold and sweeping reforms. These are not managerial issues of changing this department or that agency. To change Washington, we must change the relationship between government and citizen. These are moral choices that will define us for generations to come.

Today we borrow almost forty cents of every dollar we spend. That is unconscionable. It's unsustainable. It's reckless. It's immoral. And, if I am President, it will end.

I will approach every spending decision by asking a few important questions: Can we afford it? And, if not, is it worth borrowing money from China to pay for it?

As President, I will not just slow the growth of government, I will cut it. I will not just freeze government's share of the total economy, I will reduce it. And, without raising taxes or sacrificing America's military superiority, I will finally balance the budget.

And that will start with the easiest cut of all — I will eliminate Obamacare.

I will dramatically reduce the size of the federal workforce. And, for the first time ever, we will tie the compensation and benefits of federal workers to those in the private sector. The principle here is simple: public servants should not get a better deal than the citizens they serve.

But cutting spending and bureaucracy alone won't be enough. In their current form, Social Security and Medicare are unsustainable. And we cannot afford to avoid our entitlement challenges any longer.

I am the only candidate for President who has offered a sweeping, specific plan to save Social Security and reform Medicare. There are those who say you can't talk straight to the American people on these key issues and still win an election. I say we can, we must, and I will!

These are sensible and critical reforms. Under my plan, no one at or near the retirement age will see any changes. And tax hikes are off the table.

We will slowly and gradually raise the retirement age for Social Security — and, we will slow the growth in benefits for our nation's higher-income retirees.

When it comes to Medicare, tomorrow's seniors should have the freedom to choose between traditional Medicare and a range of private plans. If these future seniors choose a more expensive plan, they would bear the additional cost.

I know this President and his liberal allies will attack me for leading where he has failed. So be it. I will stand and fight — and we will win.

He will attack us with the usual fear tactics, but we will remind Americans that during this President's term we have seen record high job losses and record home foreclosures. We will not be lectured to on values by the man whose ineptitude and failure has created so much unnecessary pain for our fellow Americans.

Ours will not be the easy course. But it will be the right course. And I am confident that Americans are yearning for a President to do what is needed, not what is expedient.

And let me be clear: Mine will be a pro-life presidency.

On day one, I will reinstate the Mexico City policy.

I will cut off funding for the United Nations Population Fund, which supports China's barbaric One Child Policy.

I will ensure that organizations like Planned Parenthood get no federal support.

And I will reverse every single Obama regulation that attacks our religious liberty and threatens innocent life.

The Presidency is more than a public office; it is a sacred trust. As President, I will honor that trust by assuring that America remains the greatest military power on the face of the earth. This is very simple: If you do not want America to be the strongest nation on earth, I am not your President. You have that President today.

This election is a defining moment for our generation and for the conservative movement. Make no mistake — we have an opportunity for Greatness but with that opportunity comes defining responsibility. We cannot use this election to refight past battles or reward our friends. I know that the fundamental change this moment demands will take fresh, bold conservative leadership with real world solutions based on real world experience.

I will come to Washington, and, with your help and guidance and prayers, I will change Washington. And then I will leave Washington and go back to the life and family I love.

I believe this is a moment that demands we return to our basic values and first principals. This is our moment. This is why we are conservatives. The task before us now is to reaffirm the convictions that unite us and go forward shoulder to shoulder to secure the victory America deserves.

Thank you and God bless.

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