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Speaker: [Michael D. 'Mike' Huckabee \(NA\)](#)

Title: Remarks by Former Governor Mike Huckabee (R-AR) to the Conservative Political Action Conference

Date: 2007-03-02

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Speech

REMARKS BY FORMER GOVERNOR MIKE HUCKABEE (R-AR) TO THE CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL ACTION CONFERENCE

(Applause.)

MR. HUCKABEE: Thank you very much.

When I first got involved in politics in Arkansas, being a Republican in a state where 86 percent of the elected officials are Democrat, I tell people it was a lot like being a fire hydrant in a neighborhood full of dogs -- (laughter) -- and not the most popular position from which to start.

And I'd just been elected lieutenant governor, and I was invited to speak to the Stuttgart, Arkansas, Rotary Club. So I drove over, and I got there just a little early. And I wanted to make sure I was at the right place. I got out of the car and was on my way up to the building. An elderly gentleman was coming out of the building on the way to the parking lot. We passed, and as we did, I said to him, in part to just make small talk and partly because I felt like it would be just important to make sure I was at the right place -- I said, "Excuse me, sir, but is this where the Rotary Club meets?" Now, he obviously either didn't recognize me or didn't care, because as we passed, he said, "Yeah, it is, but you sure picked a bad day to visit. The lieutenant governor's going to talk today." (Laughter, groans.)

My great hope is that you don't sit here today and say, "Boy, I picked a bad day to come to the CPAC conference." (Soft laughter.)

A lot of people ask me why on Earth have I entered into the race for president, and I want to share with you it is not because of my ego. It really is because of my country. I think that's why you are here. I believe it's why conservatives are genuinely interested in what's happening in this process and perhaps in many ways very concerned as to whether or not as a conservative movement we will be in fact driving the political force in the '08 election cycle.

I became a Republican in the 1960s, which wasn't exactly prime time to become a Republican as a teenager. And the reason I did -- it wasn't really because of names that you might expect, though they were influential, names like Lincoln or Goldwater. It actually was a person you've never heard of. My becoming a Republican as a teenager was because of a gentleman whose name was Haskell Jones.

He was the manager at the Hope, Arkansas, radio station. When I was 14 years old, Haskell Jones gave me a job. He put his trust in me. I worked hard for him. I did my best to prove that I would be reliable. And he, in turn, gave me unlimited opportunity -- much like this country has given people like you and me unlimited opportunity.

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Haskell Jones was one of the few Republicans in Hope, Arkansas. There weren't many, and most people said there weren't any except the ones who had either moved in or had been messed with. (Laughter.) Well, Haskell had moved in; I got messed with. (Laughter.) Messed with in the sense that I came to realize that it's about individual responsibility; and that we are far better off as a nation when we understand that our strength is not who we are because of some group that we didn't have any choice about belonging to, it's about what we do with our God-given freedom and whether or not we stand on our own two feet, and whether we use the resources that are around us and make things happen, and whether we believe that in this country anything is possible with people who do their very best to remember that every right that we have has to be balanced with the responsibility to achieve and to be honest.

Haskell Jones turned a radio station over to a kid. And I want you to think about this. He gave me the key to a radio station at age 14, and I would go and unlock it, do sports, weather, play records, all sorts of things. I look back, and I'm thinking I wouldn't give the keys to a 14-year-old to about unlock a broom closet, much less operate a radio station.

But he rubbed off on me in more ways than just giving me a job. He was the ultimate American patriot, a hard-core, solid conservative and Republican who believed that this country was worth fighting for, worth standing up for, and that the principles that made it great were the principles of faith, family, freedom.

When I graduated high school, I was the first male in my entire family lineage to even do that. For me to go on to college meant working 40 hours a week in a radio station and carrying as many class hours as I could so I could get through in two and a half years rather than four, because I couldn't afford to stay there four.

I don't tell you that because I want you to say, "Gosh, what a story." I want to tell you that because I want you to say, "Gosh, what a country. What a place where a kid like me growing up in a town, where my father didn't have a seat on the stock exchange; he had a seat on a fire truck."

When I was 8 years old, he took me to meet the governor of the state. He was coming to Hope to dedicate a lake, and he said, "Son, I'm going to take you down where the governor is going to talk because you may live your whole life and you may never get the meet the governor." (Laughter.) Little did he know that his boy would become the governor of the state. (Applause.)

That's why I love this country, and it's why I believe that the conservative movement must stand clear, firm, consistent and authentic in making sure that we preserve not just winning an election but keeping a country.

This conference is called CPAC, and maybe this weekend it might be renamed the Conservative Presidential Anxiety Conference. (Laughter.) The theme might be, "Dude, where's my candidate?" (Laughter.) Well, I'd like to think that maybe he's standing in front of you.

I believe this -- that if we're going to really help America be the best it can be for its future, if we believe that the greatest generation is not the generation behind us but the generation who's yet to even be born, then we have to have leaders who understand that being a leader is about being a thermostat, not a thermometer. The thermometer can read the temperature, and in fact it does and reports what the ambient temperature of the room is. It's constantly changing, depending on the temperature. And I guess in global warming, it gets warmer -- (laughter) -- and then we have an Ice Age, it gets cooler. But we don't need thermometers; we need thermostats. And a thermostat can read the temperature and understands what it is, but the sole purpose of a thermostat is to adjust the temperature for what it ought to be, not simply to reflect what it already is.

We can't afford to elect people who simply reflect a culture and reflect a common view but don't necessarily believe it. We need thermostats who understand what the prevailing winds are but also understand what the prevailing winds and the prevailing principles must be if this great republic of ours is going to survive and come to its greatest possible opportunities. (Applause.)

I hear people say that well, the only thing that's going to matter in this election is celebrity and money -- who has the most familiar name, and who's raised the most money. My dear friend, may I say to you that if celebrity and money are the criteria to be president of the United States, then Paris Hilton might be our next president. (Laughter, applause.)

Today, we hear a lot about those who have had what's often called a -- "Road to Damascus experiences," on every issue from guns and same-sex marriage to the sanctity of life and taxes. In fact, some folks have had so many Road to Damascus experiences, they've had more than a Syrian camel driver. (Laughter.) What matters is that there is some consistency, not in just what we've said but in what we've done.

I want to speak to you for a few moments this morning on the kind of conservative that I believe America is still looking for. And it's the kind of conservative that I think will lead this country not, as I often say, just horizontally. Because Americans -- not those of us who are activists, not those of us who run for office necessarily, but the average American sitting around the dinner table tonight does not think as much in horizontal terms -- left and right, liberal, conservative, Republican and Democrat -- as they do in vertical terms. They want to know, will this person lift our nation up or will this person take our nation down? Will this person lead our children's future to its greatest possibility, or will this person take our children downward to their worst nightmares?

I believe that it does matter what kind of principles we take to our candidacies and to public office, and it starts with someone who is a fiscal conservative. And I want to share with you -- you may hear some talk that I'm not really one, but I would want to differ with that. As a 10-and-a-half year governor in a state where, overwhelmingly, nearly 90 percent of the people are Democrats who are elected to public office, I led and signed the first ever broad-based tax cut in the history of my state in my first year as governor.

In 10-and-a-half years, we passed over 90 different tax cuts. We eliminated the marriage penalty; we doubled the child care tax credit; we indexed the income tax for inflation so that people didn't get into bracket creep and pay rates they shouldn't have been paying. We cut the capital gains tax. I supported the Bush tax cuts in 2001; I still support them today. They ought to be permanent not because of politics, but because of the principle that you shouldn't tax people's taxes over and over and over again. That's why they should be kept. (Cheers, applause.)

We launched an 800 hotline in Arkansas to report fraud, waste and abuse.

We thought we'd get a few calls. We had over a thousand. The net result was there were indictments, there were charges, there were convictions. And it got to be where the five most-feared words of an Arkansas politician became: Will the defendant please rise? (Laughter.)

I believe a fiscal conservative is a person who truly understands that it's not a problem in the federal government that our taxes are too low, it's a problem that our spending is too high and out of control. (Cheers, applause.) And let me further end some speculation. I plan later today to deliver to Grover Norquist a signed pledge that I will be supporting a no-tax pledge as president of the United States, that we will not raise the marginal taxes on income in this country. (Applause.)

If you'll check the record, you'll find that my consistency as a fiscal conservative is genuine. But I believe it's not just about being a fiscal conservative that's going to win the election and, frankly, win the future of this country, it's also about being a family conservative. It means to choose a guardian for your children, should something happen to you, you'd be asking this question: What kind of person would I want to entrust my children in the terms of their future and how they would be raised? Let me just ask you, what kind of criteria would you look for in a person that you would ask to be the guardian of your own children? My guess is that it's not just what kind of house they have or what kind of car they drive or where they vacation or what kind of education they had or what country club they belonged to. My guess is that what you'd really want to know is what kind of character do these people possess. Yes, character does still matter. And most of us in the conservative movement believes that mothers and fathers still raise better kids than governments do, and that the most important single thing in the fabric of this nation is the institution that God himself created before there was a government, before there was even a church, and that was there was a marriage, a family. (Applause.) That's the first, foremost, and most important institution in our culture. (Continued applause.)

I want to make something clear; this country is strong because it is a culture of life. (Applause.) What separates us from the Islamic fascists is that we are a civilization who celebrates and elevates life, as opposed to those who are our mortal enemies who celebrate death. We would not conceive of strapping a bomb to the belly of our own child and marching him into a room of innocent people to blow them up and to consider that a great point of honor that our child has died for martyrdom.

We would value a human life to the point that when the Sago mine disaster happened and those 13 miners were trapped, we spared no expense, and we moved heaven and Earth to try to find a way to save those miners. And when only one could be saved, Randal McCloy, and the others were unfortunately found to have perished, we collectively wept because we value every single human life, whether it's a hiker on Mount Hood -- (light applause) -- a miner in the Sago mine, or whether it's an unborn child in the womb of its mother. (Extended applause.)

Please don't count me among those who think that this is a peripheral issue, because I believe it's a defining issue in terms of how we view each other as human beings. And please understand that while I am unapologetically and unalterably pro-life, I also have said that pro-life has to mean that we not only believe life begins at conception, but that it continues after birth. As a pro-life community, let us fight for safe neighborhoods for children, for better schools that mean something when we spend tax dollars on education. Let it mean that we want our children to grow up in freedom, that we're not just concerned about the child through that period of nine months in the mother's womb. But it also must mean that we do not neglect the idea that life does begin at conception, and that shouldn't be difficult or confusing.

And frankly, I'm a little troubled when I hear people say, "Well, I hate abortion, but I don't believe that we ought to regulate it." Or here's one I hear quite a bit: when people say that "I hate abortion, but I support the right for people to go ahead and do it." Let me just tell you, it would be like a Hindu friend of mine saying that "I really don't care for the slaughter of beef, but I'm going to buy a steak house."

Now, something is just irreconcilable in that very concept. (Scattered applause.) It's wrong for us to say that somehow we can tinker with that definition, just as I would believe it is inconsistent with the conservative movement to somehow believe that we can redefine marriage to mean anything other than what it has always meant for all of the over 5,000 years of recorded human history. And until Moses himself comes down with two

tablets of stone postmarked "Brokeback Mountain," telling us the rules have changed -- (laughter) -- marriage ought to mean what it always has meant, nothing else and nothing but. (Cheers, applause.)

I hear people say that, well, we shouldn't redefine it in a federal marriage amendment because we shouldn't tinker with something so sacred as the Constitution. My dear friend, let me remind you, our Constitution -- the genius of it is that it can be amended, and that's why we have a First and a Second and a Third and a Fourth and all the other amendments which have helped to redefine and maybe clarify those basic rights in the Constitution.

Here's what I don't understand. For those who say we shouldn't amend the Constitution, they seem to be more than willing to amend the Holy Bible, the Koran as well as the Talmud. I'm not sure why we would take a sacred biblical text and amend it and not be willing to amend the Constitution to be consistent with the very text upon which that Constitution was based. That's why it is important to be a family conservative. (Applause.)

Let me suggest that a conservative must be a free-market conservative. If we have overtaxation, overregulation and too much litigation, the result is a job migration. And what's happening in America today is that many fathers are going to work on Friday and getting a pink slip and finding that their job has gone somewhere, and it's never coming back. And it's because -- not that the father's work is no longer quality, not that he's not educated or willing to learn new skills; it's that too much taxation, too much regulation, too much litigation has resulted in his job migration, and we need to make sure that we have a free enterprise system, where our economy works. (Applause.)

The purpose of government is not to complicate free enterprise, it's to facilitate it so that entrepreneurs and innovators and people with imaginations can come up with the ideas that can help create jobs, because after all, it's the private sector that creates jobs, not governments. People sometimes think that it's what government does that creates a job, it's what government gets out of the way and doing that really creates the jobs and allows people to be creative and think and innovate. Our free enterprise system was designed to be just that -- free.

We hear a lot today about free trade. Well, free trade is a great thing if it's fair trade. But if our country doesn't enforce the WTO and doesn't put the same type of mandates upon the Chinese and the Indians and the others as it does impose upon ourselves, then we're not engaged in fair trade and therefore it isn't free trade. Free must be free but it must be fair, and to make sure that we protect American jobs from an unfair disadvantage, the best thing to do is to make sure that we're all playing by the same rules.

Give us the rules, Americans can not only compete, but they can also win. But take the rules from us, make it impossible for us to play on a fair, level playing field, and it becomes impossible, to say the least.

A free-enterprise conservative means that we believe that an education system ought to really prepare people for a workplace. I've got a friend in New Hampshire with a revolutionary idea about education that would cost us less money in the long term but empower students to take control of their own choices. Today many kids are told you're going to go this direction or that, without any real idea of whether that student is making a good, sound decision.

The idea that New Hampshire is working on, that ought to be exported across the country, is that a student would help design a curriculum based on what he or she was interested in. And if a student wanted to learn how to work on a car, rather than just take a shop class, where the technology and the methods of learning how to fix a car might be so antiquated as to be completely useless, that student would actually go to the car dealership and would be mentored on the automobiles that he or she might work on. And

the after-school job could become credit points. The same thing could be true for a music student, who might play in a rock band but would get music credits. Or a student who's involved in dance could get art credits. It's a revolutionary concept, in which there would be more ways to generate the kind of activity among students.

But let me be very clear, our education system has to have high standards, it has to have clear measuring to find out how we're doing against those standards, and it has to have accountability. When we started that in Arkansas, we did that when I first became governor, and now we're one of only the few states in this country who have seen a significant uptick in our test scores.

If Hillary Clinton is the nominee for president, I can't wait to show the results of education in my 10 years as governor versus the 12 years she and her husband had the educational system. Let's measure the results between those two times, and let's find out whose ideas about education improve it for the students, and whose focus is on the kids and not just the institutions of the teachers unions. (Applause.) That would be a wonderful comparison for us to have in this country.

I also believe that a conservative must be a freedom conservative. And let me share with you what I mean by that. We all understand we are in an unconventional war. I have said, and I believe with all my heart, we are not on the brink of, we are in the midst of a world war three. The Islamic fascists who have declared enmity against us are not interested in settling the types of lines of demarcation that normally settle wars, because this is not a war about property, this is not a war about personalities, this is not a war even about power.

What makes this so unusual is that the radical Islamic fascist -- not representative of the entire Muslim religion -- but the radical Islamic fascists who have declared war on us do so not from a political perspective, but from a theological perspective. And a lot of people I don't think understand that when that is the basis, there can be no negotiation, because while one may be able to negotiate with diplomats, one does not negotiate with God. When they declare that their sole purpose is the destruction of Israel, the United States and anything that resembles us, let us be clear: They are not interested in detente, they're not interested in some type of peaceful coexistence. They are not just interested, they are solely determined for one and only one thing, and that is not our decline, it is our ultimate and absolute annihilation and destruction. This is a war we cannot and must not lose, because it doesn't mean that we have a shranked border, it means that we have a nonexistence.

They are not marching under the banner of a flag and wearing the uniforms of soldiers and carrying the banner of a country. It is an unconventional war, and I am convinced it will require an unconventional response through unconventional means with special operations and heavy use of intelligence and a different kind of approach to fight it and to win it. But the one thing that we must be committed to as a nation -- be we liberal, conservative, Democrat, Republican, urban or rural -- is that we understand the nature of this enemy and we understand that at stake is not simply higher taxes, changed lifestyles, but existence itself as a people and as a civilization. We must win this war. (Applause.)

Freedom conservatives believes that we ought to have a secure border. Now let me be very clear. I tell people this immigration debate has become a real hot-button issue. People are passionate about it, angry about it. I thank God every day when I get on my knees before going to bed that I still live in a country that people are trying to break into, rather than a country people are trying to break out of.

I'm grateful for that. (Cheers, applause.)

But I want you to know that every time I get on an airplane in Little Rock, Arkansas, every person in that airport who works there pretty much knows who I am. They all call me by name, whether it's the skycap taking my luggage at the curbside check, or it's the TSA agent, or it's the ticket people, or it's the gate agent, or it's just the other passengers. And yet I still pull out my photo ID, I put my wallet and my laptop and my shoes and my jacket in those little plastic tubs. I take every piece of metal out of my pocket; I take my belt off. Sometimes I think I'm going to be just about stripped to my skivvies when I walk through the checkpoint like all of us feel sometimes.

But you know something? They know who I am. They know I don't pose a real threat to the airplane. But because I walk through those layers of security, I still have to provide those authentications of who I am. And I am not offended by that because that's the law; those are the rules.

If as a taxpaying, office-holding American citizen, I have to pass through several layers of security and prove who I am when they know who I am, it is not unreasonable that we have a secure border, and that people who cross that border should have to prove who they are, where they are, why they're coming here, that they don't have a communicable disease, that they don't have a criminal background, and that we know that we can trust them to do only what they do, and that there's a limited number of seats on the plane when they cross the border. Folks, that's common sense. (Applause.)

And a freedom conservative is a person who understands that the purpose of the Second Amendment is not about duck hunting and deer hunting, though I love both of them, and I'm a lifetime member of Ducks Unlimited, and I'm not a latecomer to the NRA. I was the first governor in America to have a concealed carry permit, so don't mess with me. (Laughter, cheers, applause.)

But I'm always amused if not amazed when some political candidate tries to tell me that the purpose of the Second Amendment is largely about hunting. My friend, the purpose of the Second Amendment is to preserve our very freedom, and our Founding Fathers understood it clearly. (Cheers, applause.) They understood that an unarmed -- a disarmed citizenry is one tyrant away from the loss of their freedom.

And while that may seem a little uncomfortable in the 21st century to talk about, let's never kid ourselves that we do have a right to protect our persons, our property and the future of our freedom. Our Founding Fathers understood it. They built it into the Constitution, and no one should tinker with it.

And it shouldn't be geographical. When I hear somebody say, "Well, Second Amendment rights are different in one state than they are another," let me be clear: The Constitution does not have changes of authority just when you change an address. If it works in one part of America, it ought to work in every part of America. A freedom conservative understands that and will be consistent with it. (Applause.)

I know my time is limited. And I have a website -- explorehuckabee.com -- so there's the commercial, I'll give it to you. I hope you'll check it out.

Folks, I stand here today knowing full-well I'm probably not the first choice to be president on Wall Street. I probably am not the first choice to be president among the people on K Street. I know darn sure I'm not the first choice to be president among the crowd on Sunset Boulevard and Rodeo Drive. (Laughter.) I just want to be the first choice for the people who live on Main Street out there in the heartland of America, who shop Wal-Mart, who go to church, who hunt, who fish, who drive pickup trucks, who listen to country music, who follow NASCAR -- (cheers) -- and the kind of people who are tired of politicians telling them what they want to hear, rather than what the politician truly believes.

I may not make it with everybody. I may not "sell" to some folks. I may not raise all the money that other people are going to have or raise. I may not have the celebrity status others have. But if you want to check me out to my teenage years when Haskill Jones (sp) gave me a job and helped to instill in me a love of this country and an understanding that a poor kid like me, coming out of a family that barely could pay their rent on a little rent house on 2nd Street in Hope, Arkansas, could rise to be governor and aspire to be president, then I'm telling you that this is a country where kids like me still believe anything is possible.

And I understand why we have our freedoms, and I realize that the politicians didn't give it to us. I understand that freedom isn't really free after all.

I have a friend who's a school teacher at the Robinson High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Her name is Martha Cothren. She's a social studies teacher, and a coach on the side. Back in September of 2005, on the first day of school, Martha Cothren did something that I'll never forget. Martha, on the first day of school, with permission of the school superintendent, the principal, and the building supervisor, took all of the desks out of the classroom. When the kids came into first period, they wanted in, there were no desks. They obviously looked around and said, "Ms. Cothren, where's our desk?" And she said, "You can't have a desk until you tell me how you earn them." They thought well maybe it's our grades. No, she said. Maybe it's our behavior. And she told them no, that it's not even your behavior.

And so they came and went in the first period, still no desks in the classroom. Second period, same thing; third period -- by early afternoon, television news crews had gathered in Ms. Cothren's class to find out about this crazy teacher who had taken all the desks out of the classroom.

The last period of the day, Martha Cothren gathered her class. They were at this time sitting on the floor around the sides of the room, and she says throughout the day, no one has really understood how you earn the desks that sit in this classroom ordinarily. She said, now I'm going to tell you.

Martha Cothren went over to the door of her classroom and opened it, and as she did, 27 U.S. veterans wearing their uniforms walked into that classroom, each one carrying a school desk. And they placed those school desks in rows and then stood along the wall. And by the time they had finished placing those desks, those kids for the first time I think perhaps in their lives understood how they earned those desks. Martha said, "You don't have to earn those desks; these guys did it for you. They've put them out there for you, but it's up to you to sit here responsibly to learn, to be good students and good citizens, because they paid a price for you to have that desk and don't ever forget it."

My friend, I think sometimes we forget that the freedoms that we have are freedoms not because of celebrities. The freedoms are because of ordinary people who did extraordinary things, who love this country more than life itself and who not only earned a school desk for a kid at Robinson High School in Little Rock but had earned a seat for you and me to enjoy this great land we call home, this wonderful nation that we'd better love enough to protect and preserve with the kind of conservative, solid values and principles that made us a great nation.

God bless you and God bless the preservation of this great United States. Thank you very much. (Cheers, applause.)

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