



Remarks As Prepared for Delivery: Former U.S. Sen. Fred Thompson

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Xcel Energy Center

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Tonight our thoughts are still with our friends and fellow citizens in the Gulf Coast area, and our thanks go to those who have worked so hard to keep them safe. There can be no more important work than this.

But what we are doing at this convention is also important to our country.

We are going to nominate the next President and Vice President of the United States of America.

We do so while taking a different view of our country than that of the other party.

Listening to them you'd think that we were in the middle of a great depression; that we are down, disrespected and incapable of prevailing against challenges facing us.

We know that we have challenges ... always have, always will.

But we also know that we live in the freest, strongest, most generous and prosperous nation in the history of the world and we are thankful.

Speaking of the vice presidential nominee, what a breath of fresh air Governor Sarah Palin is.

She is from a small town, with small town values, but that's not good enough for those folks who are attacking her and her family.

Some Washington pundits and media big shots are in a frenzy over the selection of a woman who has actually governed rather than just talked a good game on the Sunday talk shows and hit the Washington cocktail circuit. Well, give me a tough Alaskan Governor who has taken on the political establishment in the largest state in the Union -- and won -- over the beltway business-as-usual crowd any day of the week.

Let's be clear ... the selection of Governor Palin has the other side and their friends in the media in a state of panic. She is a courageous, successful, reformer, who is not afraid to take on the establishment.

Sound like anyone else we know?

She has run a municipality and she has run a state.

And I can say without fear of contradiction that she is the only nominee in the history of either party who knows how to properly field dress a moose ... with the possible exception of Teddy Roosevelt.

She and John McCain are not going to care how much the alligators get irritated when they get to Washington, they're going to drain that swamp.

But tonight, I'd like to talk to you about the remarkable story of John McCain.

It's a story about character.

John McCain's character has been tested like no other presidential candidate in the history of this nation.

He comes from a military family whose service to our country goes back to the Revolutionary War.

The tradition continues.

As I speak, John and Cindy McCain have one son who's just finished his first tour in Iraq.

Another son is putting "Country First" and is attending the Naval Academy. We have a number of McCains in the audience tonight.

Also here tonight is John's 96-year-old mother, Roberta. All I've got to say is that if Roberta McCain had been the McCain captured by the North Vietnamese, they would have surrendered.

Now, John's father was a bit of a rebel, too.

In his first two semesters at the Naval Academy, he managed to earn 333 demerits.

Unfortunately, John later saw that as a record to be beaten.

A rebellious mother and a rebellious father - I guess you can see where this is going.

In high school and the Naval Academy, he earned a reputation as a troublemaker.

But as John points out, he wasn't just a troublemaker. He was the leader of the troublemakers.

Although loaded with demerits like his father, John was principled even in rebellion.

He never violated the honor code.

However, in flight school in Pensacola, he did drive a Corvette and date a girl who worked in a bar as an exotic dancer under the name of Marie, the Flame of Florida.

And the reason I'm telling you these things, is that, apparently, this mixture of rebellion and honor helped John McCain survive the next chapter of his life:

John McCain was preparing to take off from the USS Forrestal for his sixth mission over Vietnam, when a missile from another plane accidentally fired and hit his

plane.

The flight deck burst into a fireball of jet fuel.

John's flight suit caught fire.

He was hit by shrapnel.

It was a scene of horrible human devastation.

Men sacrificed their lives to save others that day. One kid, who John couldn't identify because he was burned beyond recognition, called out to John to ask if a certain pilot was OK.

John replied that, yes, he was.

The young sailor said, "Thank God"... and then he died.

These are the kind of men John McCain served with.

These are the men and women John McCain knows and understands and loves.

If you want to know who John McCain is, if you want to know what John McCain values, look to the men and women who wear America's uniform today.

The fire on the Forrestal burned for two days.

20 planes were destroyed.

134 sailors died.

John himself barely dodged death in the inferno and could've returned to the States with his ship.

Instead, he volunteered for combat on another carrier that was undermanned from losing so many pilots.

Stepping up.

Putting his "Country First."

Three months later John McCain was a Prisoner of War.

On October 26, 1967, on his 23rd mission over North Vietnam, a surface-to-air missile slammed into John's A-4 Skyhawk jet, blowing it out of the sky.

When John ejected, part of the plane hit him -- breaking his right knee, his left arm, his right arm in three places.

An angry mob got to him.

A rifle butt broke his shoulder.

A bayonet pierced his ankle and his groin.

They took him to the Hanoi Hilton, where he lapsed in and out of consciousness for days. He was offered medical care for his injuries if he would give up military information in return.

John McCain said "No".

After days of neglect, covered in grime, lying in his own waste in a filthy room, a doctor attempted to set John's right arm without success ... and without anesthesia.

His other broken bones and injuries were not treated. John developed a high fever, dysentery. He weighed barely a hundred pounds.

Expecting him to die, his captors placed him in a cell with two other POWs who also expected him to die.

But with their help, John McCain fought on.

He persevered.

So then they put him in solitary confinement...for over two years.

Isolation ... incredible heat beating on a tin roof. A light bulb in his cell burning 24 hours a day.

Boarded-up cell windows blocking any breath of fresh air.

The oppressive heat causing boils the size of baseballs under his arms.

The outside world limited to what he could see through a crack in a door.

We hear a lot of talk about hope.

John McCain knows about hope. That's all he had to survive on. For propaganda purposes, his captors offered to let him go home.

John McCain refused.

He refused to leave ahead of men who'd been there longer.

He refused to abandon his conscience and his honor, even for his freedom.

He refused, even though his captors warned him, "It will be very bad for you."

They were right.

It was.

The guards cracked ribs, broke teeth off at the gums. They cinched a rope around his arms and painfully drew his shoulders back.

Over four days, every two to three hours, the beatings resumed. During one especially fierce beating, he fell, again breaking his arm.

John was beaten for communicating with other prisoners.

He was beaten for NOT communicating with so-called "peace delegations."

He was beaten for not giving information during interrogations.

When his captors wanted the names of other pilots in his squadron, John gave them the names of the offensive line of the Green Bay Packers.

Whenever John was returned to his cell -- walking if he could, dragged if he couldn't -- as he passed his fellow POWs, he would call out to them.

He'd smile ... and give them a thumbs-up.

For five-and-a-half years this went on.

John McCain's bones may have been broken but his spirit never was.

Now, being a POW certainly doesn't qualify anyone to be President.

But it does reveal character.

This is the kind of character that civilizations from the beginning of history have sought in their leaders.

Strength.

Courage.

Humility.

Wisdom.

Duty.

Honor.

It's pretty clear there are two questions we will never have to ask ourselves, "Who is this man?" and "Can we trust this man with the Presidency?"

He has been to Iraq eight times since 2003.

He went seeking truth, not publicity.

When he travels abroad, he prefers quietly speaking to the troops amidst the heat and hardship of their daily lives.

And the same character that marked John McCain's military career has also marked his political career.

This man, John McCain is not intimidated by what the polls say or by what is politically safe or popular.

At a point when the war in Iraq was going badly and the public lost confidence, John stood up and called for more troops.

And now we are winning.

Ronald Reagan was John McCain's hero.

And President Reagan admired John tremendously.

But when the President proposed putting U.S. troops in Beirut, John McCain, a freshman Congressman, stood up and cast a vote against his hero because he thought the deployment was a mistake.

My friends ... that is character you can believe in.

For years, members of Congress, Republican and Democrat alike, have gouged the taxpayer with secret earmark spending.

Well, he has never sought an earmark.

I've experienced John's character first hand.

In 1993, when I was thinking of running for the Senate, I went to John for advice. He convinced me I could help make a difference for our country.

I won that election, and with Republican control of Congress, we reformed welfare.

We balanced the budget.

And we began rebuilding our military.

What I remember most about those years is sitting next to John on the Senate floor as he led battle after battle to change the acrimonious, pork barreling, self serving ways of Washington.

The Senate has always had more than its share of smooth talkers.

And big talkers.

It still has.

But while others were talking reform, John McCain led the effort to make reform happen -- always pressing, always moving for what he believed was right and necessary to restore the people's faith in their government.

Confronting when necessary, reaching across the aisle when possible, John personified why we came to Washington in the first place.

It didn't always set too well with some of his colleagues.

Some of those fights were losing efforts.

Some were not.

But a man who never quits is never defeated.

Because John McCain stood up our country is better off.

The respect he is given around the world is not because of a teleprompter speech designed to appeal to American critics abroad, but because of decades of clearly demonstrated character and statesmanship.

There has been no time in our nation's history, since we first pledged allegiance to the American flag, when the character, judgment and leadership of our President was more important.

Terrorists, rogue nations developing nuclear weapons, an increasingly belligerent Russia.

Intensifying competition from China.

Spending at home that threatens to bankrupt future generations. For decades an expanding government ... increasingly wasteful and too often incompetent.

To deal with these challenges the Democrats present a history making nominee for president.

History making in that he is the most liberal, most inexperienced nominee to ever run for President. Apparently they believe that he would match up well with the history making, Democrat controlled Congress. History making because it's the least accomplished and most unpopular Congress in our nation's history.

Together, they would take on these urgent challenges with protectionism, higher taxes and an even bigger bureaucracy.

And a Supreme Court that could be lost to liberalism for a generation.

This is not reform.

And it's certainly not change.

It is basically the same old stuff they've been peddling for years. America needs a President who understands the nature of the world we live in.

A President who feels no need to apologize for the United States of America.

We need a President who understands that you don't make citizens prosperous by making Washington richer, and you don't lift an economic downturn by imposing one of the largest tax increases in American history.

Now our opponents tell you not to worry about their tax increases.

They tell you they are not going to tax your family.

No, they're just going to tax "businesses"! So unless you buy something from a "business", like groceries or clothes or gasoline ... or unless you get a paycheck from a big or a small "business", don't worry ... it's not going to affect you.

They say they are not going to take any water out of your side of the bucket, just the "other" side of the bucket! That's their idea of tax reform.

My friends, we need a leader who stands on principle.

We need a President, and Vice President, who will take the federal bureaucracy by the scruff of the neck and give it a good shaking.

And we need a President who doesn't think that the protection of the unborn or a newly born baby is above his pay grade.

The man who will be that President is John McCain.

In the days ahead at this convention, you will hear much more about what John will do as president -- what he will do on the economy, on energy, on health care, the environment... It is not my role tonight to explain that vision.

My role is to help remind you of the man behind the vision. Because tonight our country is calling to all of us to step up, stand up, and put "Country First" with John McCain.

Tonight we are being called upon to do what is right for our country.

Tonight we are being called upon to stand up for a strong military ... a mature foreign policy ... a free and growing economy and for the values that bind us together and keep our nation free.

Tonight, we are being called upon to step up and stand up with John just as he has stood up for our country.

Our country is calling.

John McCain cannot raise his arms above his shoulders.

He cannot salute the flag of the country for which he sacrificed so much. Tonight, as we begin this convention week, yes, we stand with him.

And we salute him.

We salute his character and his courage.

His spirit of independence, and his drive for reform.

His vision to bring security and peace in our time, and continued prosperity for America and all her citizens.

For our own good and our children's, let us celebrate that vision, that belief, that faith so we can keep America the greatest country the world has ever seen.

God bless John McCain and God bless America.

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