



February 7, 2008

TRANSCRIPT

Mitt Romney Suspends Campaign

The following is a transcript of Mitt Romney's speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, D.C., during which he announced he is suspending his presidential campaign, as provided by CQ Transcriptions via The Associated Press.

FORMER GOV. ROMNEY DELIVERS REMARKS AT CPAC

FEBRUARY 7, 2008

SPEAKER: FORMER GOV. MITT ROMNEY, R-MASS.

ROMNEY: Thank you, guys. Thank you.

AUDIENCE: Mitt! Mitt! Mitt! Mitt!

ROMNEY: What an honor. What an honor to be here. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

Thank you so much. What a welcome. That is so fabulous. And it's such an honor to be introduced by Laura Ingraham.

You know, we have all the fun. The people in our party, they're gorgeous, they're brilliant. It's wonderful to have Laura Ingraham on our side. You know that? She is wonderful.

(APPLAUSE)

Thanks to her and all the talk radio for what they do to keep the conservative movement strong and alive and vibrant. And I appreciate her generous introduction.

And I love being introduced as the "conservatives' conservative." And that's exactly how I feel.

Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

I was also proud to be joined by my wife. You know my wife, Anne. She was here with me. And our five boys have been out campaigning. They're fabulous. It's been a family affair.

(APPLAUSE)

I want to begin today by thanking you. It was a real honor to be here last year. It's great to be here with you again. And I look forward to joining you many, many more times in the future.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, last year -- last year CPAC gave me the send-off I needed. At the time, I was in single digits in the polls, and I was facing household names in the Republican contest. As of today, more than 4 million people have given me their vote for president. That's good, yes.

(APPLAUSE)

That's, of course, less than Senator McCain's 4.7 million, but quite a statement, nonetheless.

Eleven states have given me their nod, compared to his 13. Thank you to those 11.

(APPLAUSE)

Of course, because size does matter, he's doing quite a bit better with the number of delegates he's got.

(LAUGHTER)

Now, to all of you, thank you, here, for caring enough about America to show up, to speak up, to stand up for conservative principles.

(APPLAUSE)

As I said to you last year, conservative principles are needed now more than ever. We face a new generation of challenges: challenges which threaten our prosperity, our security and our future.

I'm convinced that unless America changes course, we could become the France of the 21st century.

(BOOING)

ROMNEY: Still a great nation, but not the leader of the world, not the superpower. And to me that's unthinkable.

Look, it was a while ago Shimon Peres came to Boston for a visit. He was asked what he thought about the war in Iraq.

"First," he said, "I have to put something in context." He said, "America is unique in the history of the world. In the history of the world," he said, "whenever there's been conflict, the nation that wins takes land from the nation that loses. One nation in history, and this during the last century, laid down hundreds of thousands of lives and took no land: no land from Germany, no land from Korea, no land from Japan. America," he said, "is unique in the sacrifice it has made for liberty, for itself and for freedom-loving people around the world."

And Colin Powell added, "The only land we took after the last great conflict was enough land to bury our dead."

The best ally peace has ever known and will ever know is a strong America.

(APPLAUSE)

And that's why it is that we have to rise to the occasion, as we've always done before, to confront the challenge that are ahead of us.

Perhaps the most fundamental of the challenges that we face is the attack on America's culture.

Over the years my business took me to a lot of different countries, and I've been struck by the enormous differences in the wealth and the well-being of people from different nations. I've read a number of scholarly explanations for the disparities, and I've found the most convincing was written by a fellow named David Landes.

ROMNEY: He's a professor emeritus at Harvard University. I presume he's a liberal. I guess that's redundant.

(LAUGHTER)

And his work traces the coming and going of great civilizations throughout history. And after hundreds of pages of analysis, he concludes with this, and I quote: "If we learn anything from the history of economic development it is that culture makes all the difference." Culture makes all the difference.

What is it about America's culture that's led us to become the most powerful nation in the history of the world?

Well, we believe in hard work and education. We love opportunity. Almost all of us are immigrants or descendants of immigrants who came here for opportunity. Opportunity's in our DNA.

Americans love God, and those who don't have faith typically believe in something greater than themselves, a purpose-driven life, if you will.

And we sacrifice as Americans everything we have, even our lives, for our families, for our freedoms and for our country.

These values and beliefs of free American people are the source of the nation's strength, and they always will be.

(APPLAUSE)

The threat to our culture comes from within.

In the 1960s, there were welfare programs that created a culture of poverty in our country. Now, some people think we won that battle when we reformed welfare. But the liberals haven't given up.

At every turn, they tried to substitute government largess for individual responsibility. They fight to strip work requirements from welfare, to put more people on Medicaid, and remove more and more people from having to pay any income tax whatsoever.

Dependency is death to initiative, risk-taking and opportunity. Dependency is culture killing. It's a drug. We've got to fight it like the poison it is.

(APPLAUSE)

ROMNEY: The attack on faith and religion is no less relentless. And tolerance for pornography, even celebration of it, and sexual promiscuity, combined with the twisted incentives of government welfare, have led to today's grim realities: 68 percent of African- American kids born out of wedlock, 45 percent of Hispanic kids, 25 percent of white kids.

How much harder it is for these kids to succeed in school and in life. A nation built on the principles of the founding fathers cannot long stand when its children are raised without fathers in the home.

(APPLAUSE)

The development of a child is enhanced by having a mother and a father. Such a family is the ideal for the future of the child and for the strength of the nation.

I wonder how it is that unelected judges, like some in my state of Massachusetts, are so unaware of this reality, so oblivious to the millennia of recorded history.

It's time for the people of America to fortify marriage through a constitutional amendment, so that liberal judges cannot continue to attack it.

(APPLAUSE)

Europe -- Europe is facing a demographic disaster.

ROMNEY: That's the inevitable product of weakened faith in the Creator, failed families, disrespect for the sanctity of human life, and eroded morality.

Some reason that culture is merely an accessory to America's vitality. We know that it's the source of our strength. And we will not be dissuaded by the snickers and knowing glances when we stand up for family values and morality and culture. We will...

(APPLAUSE)

Conservatives here and conservatives across the country will always be honored to stand on principle and to stand for principles.

The attack on our culture is not the only a challenge that we face. We face economic competition unlike anything we have known before.

China, and Asia are emerging from centuries of poverty. Their people are plentiful, innovative and ambitious.

If we don't change course, Asia or China will pass us by as the economic superpower, just as we passed England and France during the last century.

The prosperity and security of our children and grandchildren depend on us.

Our prosperity and security also depend on finally acting to become energy-secure. Oil-producing states like Russia and Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and Iran are siphoning over \$400 billion out of our economy. That's almost what we spent annually for our national defense.

It is past time for us to invest in energy technology: nuclear power, clean coal, liquid coal, renewable resources, energy efficiency.

(APPLAUSE)

Simply put, America must never be held hostage by the likes of Putin, Chavez and Ahmadinejad.

(APPLAUSE)

ROMNEY: Our economy is also burdened by the inexorable ramping up of government spending.

And let's be careful: Let's not just focus on the pork alone, even though it is indeed irritating and shameful. Look also at the entitlements. They make up 60 percent of federal spending today. And by the end of the next president's second term they will total 70 percent.

Any conservative plan for the future has to include entitlement reform that solves the problem, not just acknowledges it.

(APPLAUSE)

You know, I've found that most politicians don't seem to understand the connection between our ability to compete and our national wealth and the wealth of our families. They act as if money just happens, that it just happens to be there.

But every dollar represents a good or service that's been produced in the private sector. If you depress the private sector you depress the well-being of all Americans.

That's exactly what happens with high taxes, over-regulation, tort windfalls, mandates, and overfed, overspending government.

Did you happen to see, by the way, that today government workers make more money than people who work in the private sector? Can you imagine what happens to an economy where the best opportunities are for bureaucrats?

It is high time to lower taxes, including corporate taxes, to take a weed whacker...

(APPLAUSE)

Get out -- get out that weed whacker and take it to regulations and reform entitlements and, by the way, stand up to the increasingly voracious appetite of the unions in our government.

(APPLAUSE)

And finally, let's consider the greatest challenge facing America, and for that matter facing the entire civilized world: the threat of radical, violent jihad.

(APPLAUSE)

As you know, in one wing of the world of Islam there's a conviction that all governments should be destroyed and replaced by a religious caliphate. These jihadists will battle any form of democracy because to them democracy is blasphemous, because it says that citizens, not God, shape the law.

ROMNEY: They find the idea of human equality to be equally offensive. They hate everything we believe about freedom just as we hate everything they believe about radical jihad.

To battle this threat, we've sent the most courageous and brave soldiers in the world.

(APPLAUSE)

But their numbers have been depleted by the Clinton years, when troops were reduced by 500,000, when almost 80 ships were retired from our Navy, and when our human intelligence was slashed by 25 percent.

We were told we were getting a peace dividend. We got the dividend; we didn't get the peace.

(APPLAUSE)

In the face of evil and radical jihad, and given the inevitable military ambitions of China, we must act to rebuild our military might, raise military spending to 4 percent of our GDP, purchase the most modern armament, reshape our fighting forces for the asymmetric demands we now face, and give the veterans the care they deserve.

(APPLAUSE)

Soon the face of liberalism in America will have a new name. Whether it's Barack or Hillary, the result would be the same if they were to be able to...

(BOOING)

... if they were to be able to win the presidency.

ROMNEY: The opponents of American culture would push the throttle, devising new justifications for judges to depart from the Constitution. And economic neophytes would layer heavier and heavier burdens on employers and families, slowing our economy, opening the way for foreign competition to further erode our lead.

Even though we face an uphill fight, I know that many in this room are fully behind my campaign.

(APPLAUSE)

AUDIENCE: Mitt! Mitt! Mitt! Mitt!

ROMNEY: You are with me all the way to the convention. Fight on, just like Ronald Reagan did in 1976.

(APPLAUSE)

But there is an important difference from 1976. Today we are a nation at war. And Barack and Hillary have made their intentions clear regarding Iraq and the war on terror: They would retreat, declare defeat.

And the consequence of that would be devastating. It would mean attacks on America, launched from safe havens that would make Afghanistan under the Taliban look like child's play. About this, I have no doubt.

Now, I disagree with Senator McCain on a number of issues, as you know.

But I agree with him on doing whatever it takes to be successful in Iraq, and finding and executing Osama bin Laden.

(APPLAUSE)

And I agree with him on eliminating Al Qaida and terror worldwide.

Now, if I fight on, in my campaign, all the way to the convention...

ROMNEY: ... I want you to know, I've given this a lot of thought -- I'd forestall the launch of a national campaign and, frankly, I'd make it easier for Senator Clinton or Obama to win.

Frankly, in this time of war, I simply cannot let my campaign be a part of aiding a surrender to terror.

(APPLAUSE)

This isn't an easy decision. I hate to lose.

My family, my friends, you, my supporters across the country, you've given a great deal to get me to where I have a shot to becoming president. If this were only about me, I'd go on. But it's never been only about me.

I entered this race -- I entered this race because I love America. And because I love America, in this time of war, I feel I have to now stand aside for our party and for our country.

AUDIENCE: No! No!

ROMNEY: You guys are great.

(APPLAUSE)

I will continue to stand for conservative principles. I'll fight alongside you for all the things we believe in. And one of the things we believe in is that we cannot allow the next president of the United States to retreat in the face of evil extremism.

(APPLAUSE)

It is the common task of each generation and the burden of liberty to preserve this country, expand its freedoms and renew its spirit, so that its noble past is prologue to its glorious future.

To this task, accepting this burden, we're all dedicated. And I firmly believe, by the providence of the Almighty, that we will succeed beyond our fondest hope.

America must always remain, as it has always been, the hope of the Earth.

Thank you so very much. I love you. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

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