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Thank you for that introduction, and for your invitation to join you today. I haven't done much public speaking since the election. I haven't done any, in fact. But over five months have passed since the election, and in gratitude for your contributions to our party and out of concern for its future success, I appreciate this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you about the direction I hope our party takes as it seeks to recover the support and trust of the American people.

To state the obvious: the Republican Party needs to grow. A review of the exit polls and current demographic trends in the United States should make it clear to all but the most determined optimist that our coalition is shrinking, and losing ground with segments of the population that are growing. Whether it's with suburban voters, working class voters, college educated voters, Hispanics or left handed Albanian psychics, the percentage voting Republican has declined. Perhaps, the most alarming of these various and generally worrying results of the last election is the huge margin by which we lost voters under 30.

Having said that, it is not a foregone conclusion these are long term trends or even trends at all. They might just be the results of two lost elections, although I doubt it. And even if they do represent movement toward a center left political realignment, unanticipated events could arrest or begin to reverse them even in the near term.

Political scientists and campaign consultants tend not to account for contingency when they are busy predicting the future. The McCain campaign, for instance, initially thought our most difficult problem would be the war in Iraq, an assumption we made based on exit polls from the 2006 mid term elections. Obviously, we guessed wrong, thanks in part, paradoxically, to Senator McCain's statesmanship as an early advocate of the surge.

We had many environmental challenges that made our campaign an uphill struggle from start to finish. In addition to the President's unpopularity and two wars the country had tired of, we had historic wrong track numbers, record high gas prices, an unprecedented resource disadvantage, and a disparity in press coverage. While we worried about these and many other challenges in 2007 and early 2008, we never believed the election was unwinnable, and had by early September managed to fight our way to a rough tie, and even a very small lead. None of us, however, expected a global financial crisis to be one of them. I'm pretty confident, President Obama's campaign didn't anticipate one either. It was the last obstacle imposed on a very challenged campaign. It proved to be insurmountable. And no one had really seen it coming.

Should the recession grow deeper or linger longer; should President Obama's hugely expensive domestic policies begin to worry swing voters more than they are reassured by his skill at promoting them; should some national security disaster happen or any number of other contingencies occur, the advances made by Democrats in the last two elections might be short-lived.

But no one should take comfort from knowing our Party's success could come at the expense of the country or must rely on blunders by the Administration and the Democratic Congress. Moreover, while I think projections of a political re-alignment are premature based on the results of two elections, I would rather be in the Democrats' shoes than ours. Their coalition is expanding. Ours is shrinking. Their vote share is increasing among voter segments that are growing. Ours is not. The rapid growth of the Hispanic-American population, for instance, could soon cost Republicans the entire Southwest if we don't recover our previous share of their vote. Had Senator McCain not been the Republican nominee in 2008, I'm convinced we would have lost Arizona. It's very hard to see how we put together 270 electoral votes without the Southwest.

As a percentage of the total vote, younger voters didn't really increase in the last election. But the Democrats' margin with those voters certainly did. In short, we were crushed by the Obama campaign with voters under 30. President Obama was a uniquely attractive candidate to younger voters, in matters of style as much as substance. And maybe as those voters grow older and acquire greater responsibilities they will develop a better

appreciation for Republican values of limited government, fiscal discipline, low taxes and a strong defense. That has happened in the past.

But even if they do, I doubt they will abandon social attributes that distinguish them from older voters; among them, a greater acceptance of people who find happiness in relationships with members of the same sex. And I believe Republicans should re-examine the extent to which we are being defined by positions on issues that I don't believe are among our core values, and that put us at odds with what I expect will become over time, if not a consensus view, then the view of a substantial majority of voters.

Of course, a party cannot grow if it subtracts while it tries to add. Social conservatives remain an indispensable part of the Republican coalition. I don't subscribe to the notion that social conservatives are a monolithic bloc of close minded people who would tread on the rights of Americans who disagree with them. Nor do I think conservatism will or should abandon its reluctance to change or abandon social conventions that are important to the strength and stability of our society.

The institution of marriage is the foundation of society and alterations to its definitions shouldn't be lightly undertaken. It has always been defined as the legal union of a man and a woman, and it's understandable that many Americans are apprehensive about making a definitional change to so profoundly an important institution. But it is a tradition, not a creed, or, at least, not a national creed. It is not how we define ourselves as Americans. And while we shouldn't carelessly dismiss the importance of enduring traditions, we should understand that traditions do change over time in every society. And as long as those changes do not conflict with the tenets of our national creed then they can, and inevitably will, be modified by a society that has come to view them as inequitable.

Our national creed is a declaration of natural rights not a compact for the preservation of social customs, as important as many of those customs are. It was precisely and elegantly defined 233 years ago as adherence to certain self-evident truths. All are created equal and endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Americans' fidelity to that creed ended the tradition of slavery because it was understood that slavery denied to the slave the universal rights America was founded in blood to protect. Women were constitutionally

disenfranchised. But in time that injustice was rectified because the nation realized such discrimination violated our national creed.

The argument of the pro-life community acquires its moral force because it holds that the life of the unborn is not distinct in its dignity from the life of the born, and, thus, possesses a God-given right to be protected. The same protection cannot be argued to extend to the institutional definition of marriage as exclusively the union of persons of the opposite sex.

It can be argued, although I disagree, that marriage should remain the legal union of a man and a woman because changing it to admit same sex unions would undermine the most basic institution of a well ordered society. It can be argued according to the creeds and convictions of religious belief, which I respect. But it cannot be argued that marriage between people of the same sex is un-American or threatens the rights of others. On the contrary, it seems to me that denying two consenting adults of the same sex the right to form a lawful union that is protected and respected by the state denies them two of the most basic natural rights affirmed in the preamble of our Declaration of Independence – liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, I believe, gives the argument of same sex marriage proponents its moral force.

I know mine is a minority view among Republicans, and I don't honestly expect our party will reverse in the very near term its opposition to same sex marriage. Nor do I yet see support for it from a strong majority of the general public. And, I do believe that such a highly charged political question such as this should be settled by the freely expressed will of the people, and not by the courts. That doesn't relieve advocates of the responsibility to make their case urgently. I understand how tired many Americans are of being admonished to be patient to right what they believe is an injustice. But I'm confident American public opinion will continue to move on the question toward majority support, and sooner or later the Republican Party will catch up to it. And I believe the nation's acceptance of same sex unions as lawful marriage would provide a far more secure guarantee that the change made to this profoundly important social institution will be permanent than would judicial fiat.

If we cannot achieve a consensus today on recognizing the marriages of gay couples, surely, in simple justice, we can respect their human dignity by protecting their rights to assign unique privileges and responsibilities to another person. Whether you are for or against same sex marriages, every

Republican ought to value the right of people to make such personal decisions for themselves. As former Vice President Cheney observed, freedom means freedom for everybody. And I think Republicans should always be on the side of freedom and equal rights.

I, and I believe most people, believe you are born with your sexuality. It is not a choice. It should offend us as Republicans and Americans when gays are denigrated as degenerates or un-American or undeserving of the government's protection of their rights. And the Republican Party should give voice to genuine outrage when anyone belittles the humanity of another person. It is offensive in the extreme to the values of this nation, and we should be in the forefront of rejecting such truly un-American prejudice. Moreover, if you believe we are born with our sexual orientation, it is hard to deny the inequality under the law that exists when people of one sexual orientation are allowed to marry and people of another are not.

Even though a majority of Republicans remain opposed to it, we must respect dissent on the subject within the party and encourage debate over it, and should not reject out of hand and on specious grounds the question that the party might be in the wrong on the question. We should publicly affirm that gays are entitled to the same respect and protections we accord heterosexuals to be secure from discrimination in their employment and the places they choose to live; to enter into contractual relationships with another person that grant them the same benefits and privileges allowed married couples, such as tax advantages accorded married couples or the responsibilities to make end of life decisions for one another.

There's nothing inherently objectionable about debating whether same sex marriage would undermine the institution and, by extension, society. Some people believe strongly that it would. I argue that it wouldn't. But that debate should be conducted with respect for the dignity of all parties involved. Opponents to giving women the vote argued such a change would undermine marriage and other social institutions. I think the institution would be strengthened by the inclusion of more couples who are genuinely committed to each other. But even if you believe marriage would be changed for the worse by same sex unions, I'm not sure it's a compelling argument for their exclusion. We don't forbid divorce, a more proven and prevalent threat to the health of our society.

As I said, I respect the opinions of Americans who oppose marriage for gay couples on religious grounds. I may disagree, but if you sincerely believe God's revealed truth objects to it then it is perfectly honorable to oppose it. But those are not the grounds on which a political party should take or argue a position. If you put public policy issues to a religious test you risk becoming a religious party, and in a free country, a political party cannot remain viable in the long term if it is seen as sectarian.

Last February, an opponent of same sex marriage, David Blankenhorn, and an advocate, Jonathan Rauch, suggested in a New York Times op-ed a compromise that could serve the interests and values of both. They wrote that Congress should grant federal civil union status to same sex marriages and civil unions licensed at the state level as long as those states recognized religious conscience exceptions for religious organizations that do not want to recognize same sex unions.

I think that idea makes a lot sense. While it might not satisfy either side completely, it respects and values the rights of both, and would go a long way to correct the existing inequality.

Some Republicans believe the period of self-examination within the party necessitated by the loss of our majority status is mostly a question of whether the party should become more moderate or conservative. I think that's a false choice. We need to grow our coalition, but as I said, that's hard to do if we lose some votes while gaining others.

There is a sound conservative argument to be made for same sex marriage. I believe conservatives, more than liberals, insist that rights come with responsibilities. No other exercise of one's liberty comes with greater responsibilities than marriage. In a marriage, two people are completely responsible to and for each other. If you are not willing to accept and faithfully discharge those responsibilities, you shouldn't enter the state of matrimony, and it doesn't make a damn bit of difference if you're straight or gay. It is a responsibility like no other, which can and should make marriage an association between two human beings more fulfilling than any other.

Many studies have shown that married people are generally happier than unmarried people. Marriage gives greater purpose to life, and, to borrow from Pastor Warren, the more purpose driven your life is, the happier it is. Marriage does not or should not depend on transitory emotions. It is a

partnership in all aspects of life that changes the way not just society, but the individual perceives him or herself, and gives greater incentive to an individual to live a good and virtuous life because the happiness, not just momentary pleasure, but the lasting happiness, of others depends on it. Marriage can be a profoundly gratifying state that strengthens the virtue of individuals and societies, and increases the measure and quality of the happiness we enjoy. It seems to me a terrible inequity that any person should be denied that responsibility, and the emotional enrichment it can provide. And I cannot in good conscience exclude anyone who is prepared for such a commitment from the prospect of such happiness.

In closing, I'll return to our national creed, what Lincoln called the inestimable jewel of American history, and offer my respect for and urge my fellow Republicans to respect every human being's rights to liberty and the pursuit of happiness as much as they cherish their own.

Customs change. Societies change. People change. But that creed must never change. It is the foundation upon which the success of not just of our party, but our country rests. If you do not impede my pursuit of happiness, I must not impede yours, but stand with you, as fellow Americans, lovers of liberty, to defend your natural right to seek happiness in life and love according to dictates of your heart and your heart alone.

Thank you, again, for your welcome here and for your many, valuable contributions to our party and our country.