



SPEECH

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Lieutenant Governor Ramsey ... Speaker Naifeh ... Chief Justice Barker ... Members of the General Assembly ... Constitutional Officers ... Justices ... Distinguished Members of Tennessee's Congressional Delegation ... Former Governors ... Family and Friends ... Fellow Tennesseans ...

Welcome.

I stand before you, having just taken my oath of office for the second time.

Our journey together is far from over, but today is a milestone, and on such an occasion I want to speak plainly, and I want to speak from my heart.

As I begin, please allow me a personal moment to thank a few special people:

First, my wife, Andrea Conte.

Andrea told me after our first inauguration that she wanted to do something to call attention to and help abused children.

At first I thought she had in mind a luncheon or two at the residence; perhaps a press conference.

I was wrong.

What she had in mind ... and did ... was to spend 49 hot, cold, rainy and always long days walking more than 600 miles across our state, visiting churches and schools and courthouses along the way.

Andrea, thank you. Not only for 32 years of love and friendship, but for being an amazing and compassionate First Lady of Tennessee.

I want to recognize our son Ben and his new wife Dru. Their five month anniversary will be coming soon; we are both so proud of the two of you as you start your own adventure together.

And I want to acknowledge my mother, Norma Bredesen.

It's been a tough year, Mom, but one in which you continued to teach me your strength and your common sense.

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And to my father, Phil Bredesen Sr., thank you for your help over the years and for being here today.

Andrea and I had between us two brothers and a sister who were with us on this platform four years ago, but have since passed away ... my brother Dean, and Andrea's sister Carol, and her brother, Nick.

We miss you today, and you remind us at milestones like this that our time on this earth is limited and precious.

I stood before you four years ago, on a cold day, and spoke about a different approach to governing.

I spoke about putting aside stale and predictable debates, and instead finding new ways to reach common ground and move our state forward.

I called it a "Third Way."

I'm here today to say to you: that approach has worked. We've solved some tough problems together and we've started some fine new things together as well.

Four years ago, my mandate from Tennessee's voters was modest. Today I stand before you with a far stronger one. I believe voters expressed confidence in my leadership, but not in my always having all the answers.

As I begin my second term as Governor, I will lead in the way that has proven successful already; to seek not conflict but common ground, to reach out and embrace good ideas from whatever quarter they come; to be the Governor of all of the people of Tennessee.

I've been your Governor for four years now, and some of the things about the job were what I expected.

I knew there would be budget issues, I knew TennCare would be a challenge, I knew I wanted to accomplish big things in education and job growth and in protecting our environment.

I knew that problems would come to light and have their moment of fame and get solved and go away. I expected all this.

What I didn't expect was the ever-present sense of being a part of the flow of Tennessee's history.

I go to work every morning in that beautiful and historical building behind me. I walk down the corridor hung with portraits of former governors, and I feel a part of the flow of things that have happened, and that will happen, there. In that respect, this work is unlike any other thing I've ever done.

What that sense of history does is help keep you focused on the real stuff, on what is actually important, in the clutter of the day.

That building says to me every day: "Phil, you're not here all that long, you're called "governor" for a few years and then your portrait's up on the wall with the others and you're gone. But right now, it is your turn; what are you going to do with it?"

I have a simple political ... and personal ... philosophy: I believe that the most important work of every adult is to make things a little better for the next generation. When you're grown, and out of school, and established ... and I'm all of those things ... then you turn your attention to helping the ones coming behind you.

My mother, sitting right over there, taught me that. It's been a part of the genius of our nation: each generation standing on the shoulders of the one before, and in turn providing shoulders of their own.

To do this, the place you start is family.

Families are the building blocks ... the atoms of our world. I believe that God made us to come into full being, to come closest to Him, through our families.

There is an often-quoted African proverb that says. "It takes a village to raise a child." Perhaps. I'd say it differently though; at the heart of things, it takes a family to raise a child.

Government can't, Tennessee can't raise our children, or for that matter, provide fulfillment to adults. Even if it could, who would want to live in a world like that?

But neither can we just leave every family to fend for itself.

We don't live on self-sufficient plots of land with a rifle over the mantel anymore; we live in a complex and interrelated society, and there are things that are vital to families that are also beyond their individual reach. That's what government at its best does: It works every day to help strengthen families.

We work to create a world in which families can prosper. We work to create communities in which they are safe, to help them if they fall ill, to improve their choice of jobs. And most important ... our biggest responsibility ... we work to help them make things better for the next generation by doing our part to educate children.

Education.

We usually talk about it in terms of getting a good job; I do that myself. Education is in part about jobs, without question. There's hardly anyone who doesn't know that with each passing year a good education becomes more and more the key to a good job.

I want to say to you today, though, that public education is also about a lot more than jobs; it's also about citizenship and it's about the future of our nation.

Thomas Jefferson believed that democracy could not survive without an educated citizenry, and that is even truer today than it was over two centuries ago. Whether standing to speak in a local community meeting, or casting your vote for President, knowledge and context and the ability to think critically are what allow us to govern ourselves.

Hear me now: I am rolling up my sleeves. I want these next four years to be the time when we set Tennessee on the path of truly putting our children and their education at the head of the list.

Lots of things are important: health care and jobs and social services, but education needs to head the list because it is the most important way government pulls its weight to make things a little better for the next generation.

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To do this, we are going to have to be bold ... but that has never been a problem for Tennesseans.

There is a story about the old man and the boy walking in the woods. One day, they come upon a huge, old oak tree. They stop a moment and the boy looks up with dreams in his eyes, and says, "Someday, I'd like to get to the top of a tree like that."

The old man looks down at him and smiles and says, "Son, there are two ways of getting to the top of that old tree. One way is when your time comes to climb to the top. It's really hard, you might fall, you'll certainly get scratched up some. The other way is to sit on an acorn and wait for it to grow."

I want Tennessee to count itself among the tree climbers and not the acorn sitters. I want us to take some chances, I don't mind getting scratched up some, but when it comes to educating our children, I want us to climb to the top of that tree.

I've learned a lot about leadership these past four years.

The most important lesson ... and this is a change for me ... has been that leadership is not about other people coming to you for ideas, it is about making ideas come to life in other people.

I'm just beginning my second term, and there is a great deal I want to accomplish ... in education, in healthcare, in creating jobs, in preserving our environment. But when I'm asked what I want my real legacy to be, my answer lies in that view of leadership ... that leadership is helping others bring great ideas to life.

When my time as governor is up, and my portrait goes up on the wall, I want most of all for us to expect more ... expect more of our leaders, expect more of ourselves, expect more for our children.

I want our reference point to change. I don't want it to be what we did last year or what some neighboring state does; I want our reference point, our expectations, to be nothing less than the old dream of what is possible in America.

Inaugurations are a milestone where we pause, where we recommit and renew our purpose. My fellow Tennesseans, I call on you today to join me in rededicating ourselves to big dreams for our children.

We live in a world of day-to-day skirmishes and criticism and egos and setbacks. But underneath that all, I want you to know that I believe.

I believe in that future.

I believe in the strength and the peace of family ... I believe in America ... and I believe that Providence smiles on big dreams and on boldness in reaching for them.

Come believe with me.

Thank you and Godspeed.

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