

Governor Mitch Daniels
Welcoming Remarks to the Philadelphia Society
October 23, 2009 - Indianapolis, IN
Transcribed from extemporaneous remarks

My good friend Roger and friends old and new, welcome to our city. I confess to a certain ambivalence in being here and showing you the appropriate hospitality to which you are *due*. As a life-long Los Angeles Dodgers fan, saying good words about anything called the Philadelphia Society comes a little difficult this week. But because of my long-time acquaintance with this particular Philadelphia Society, and what it has meant to our public life and what it must mean now in these days, I say, fervently, welcome to our state and I hope you enjoy your time here.

I was thinking this afternoon about that human tendency to imagine the era in which one lives as *sui generis* and unique in certain ways—facing uniquely difficult problems as though humans have not always wrestled with them. Every election cycle I can remember, somebody got up and pronounced it the most decisive, the most critical and the most imperative of all time. Our foreign policy challenges are always more complex than they have ever been, our economic hurdles more daunting, and so forth. How often we have heard someone lament that, “Our liberty has never been so endangered” and “Our free institutions are imperiled by unprecedented threats and enemies.”

Well, Philadelphia Society membership is known for its erudition, particularly its grasp of history, and therefore it is possessed of a perspective, a broad sense of perspective, about such things, and therefore I think, in this room, we can all say with a calm confidence, that “Our liberty has never been so endangered and our free institutions so imperiled by unprecedented threats and enemies.” [Laughter] There is a new book out about bubbles, and it’s called, *This Time It’s Different*. This time, it’s different. And if you are alarmed this time, I am alarmed with you.

There have been a lot of books written about atheism in the last year or two. People, with I think a certain degree of smugness, are writing and taking up the oldest of arguments with new vigor and some new sense, I guess, that they are finally about to win the day. One of them described this as the “atheists’ moment.” I am going to leave aside the overlap and the cross-hatch, the inextricable links between faith and freedom. That’s not really my point. It just occurs to me that those hostile or maybe just skeptical about free institutions, about the ability of human beings over the course of time to discipline themselves and to govern themselves freely, maybe they are feeling a little bit the same. Maybe that their moment has come, the “I told you so” hour may have arrived.

Where else but Philadelphia did Ben say, “A republic, if you can keep it,” expressing at the very outset the fragility which people through the ages have expressed about whether we are constituted, we homo sapiens, with our appetites and our fallen sinner natures, to operate systems like that which really only so recently came into history and in this country.

People write books these days about tipping points. I don't find those particularly interesting, but I am much more interested in whether there are tipping points that we are approaching in terms of our democracy.

You are thinking about the same things: Are we near that point that people have always speculated about, where a majority concludes that they can expropriate the property of a minority and does so – along with the eventual destruction of the free institutions that gave them that chance.

Even more dangerously—it's on my mind a lot these days—I bet it's a part of this conference at some point, that a majority in our country might simply decide to forfeit freedom with its consequent, concomitant risks and responsibilities—just to forswear it in favor of the false security of dependence.

This is a unique moment. Thinking about the atheists, Paul urged us to put on the “whole armor.” In the whole armor of the defense of freedom, the breastplate is the intellectual defenders—people like those in this room. The struggle, the longtime struggle now so urgently joined between freedom and its enemies, will have to be fought on many fronts with people of many talents, each contributing, but it can never be won without the most excellent exposition by people of thought, of fundamental principles. We will need new vocabulary, we may need new arguments, as we defend timeless ideas and principles.

I just want to say to you, and I don't think it stretches a point to say, that your mission is now more urgent than ever. History did not end, as some thought it would—and some of us hoped they were right—with the decisive permanent triumph of free institutions. It hasn't been very long ago that those books were written. No, man's urge to power over his fellow man is too strong for that, and always will be. We will always need a Philadelphia Society, and organizations like it.

We need it this evening more than we have, and so I do fervently welcome you to our state. I tell you this with complete confidence: you have come to a state of patriots. You come to a state that is not near any tipping points. Here we believe in freedom. We believe in freedom in disciplining our appetites. We believe in defending those principles that have given us the blessings of this country. And we look to you to help us preserve them. Thank you and welcome.