

The Sutherland Dream



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This evening, as I look out over this audience and see friends, elected officials, community and business leaders, my heart is full as I consider the humble beginnings of The Sutherland Institute, the progress we have made, and the progressive unfolding of The Sutherland Dream.

Sutherland began with a simple idea and an ambitious dream. The idea was that a principle-based think tank organization here in Utah could be a vehicle for serving this state which – due to the nature of politics itself – could never be done by those in public office alone. Utahns are fortunate to have a lay legislature and countless other non-career elected and appointed officials. This is important for the sake of keeping government close to the people. However, in these politically sophisticated times, there is a certain disadvantage to lay office holders as these good people are inundated with the petitions of vested interests from within and without government, and having neither time nor support staff to do their own research, they find themselves easy prey for those vying for their attention and vote.

I respect and appreciate those of you who are willing to endure the rigors and unpleasant aspects of political campaigns and public office. We hope that Sutherland will help you be more effective in your office.

Speaking for myself, it seems that if for whatever reason I choose not to run for public office, then I ought to be grateful to those who will, even if I do not always fully agree with them. After all, governing in a free society ought not to be about winning or ruling, rather it is about leading, serving, uniting and about achieving the best solutions under a framework of law. This process requires strong advocates, certainly, but it also takes a counter-balancing sense of

humility, civility and dialogue.

Unfortunately, we live in a time where almost everything seems to have been preempted by politics. That which previously was strictly the domain of the home or of churches and other private associations has now been assumed by government. We might do well to remember the words of the great 18th Century parliamentarian, Edmond Burke. He said, "To provide for us in our necessities is not in the power of government. ... It is in the power of government to prevent much evil: [but] it can do very little positive good." [The Works of Edmund Burke (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1901) vol. V, page 133-34]

The political process of elections has spilled over into law making and has become a battleground where contending parties are seeking to gain advantage. Thus the political course often leads to power struggles, pride, vanity and egocentric ambition, ending in acrimony. It all too often manifests itself in strident voices, character assassinations, protest demonstrations, cloakroom deals and corruption. We see certain vested interests use the courts to frustrate the will of the people as enacted by their representatives.

On the other hand, The Sutherland Dream is to allow people of good will to have a positive and lasting effect in Utah by making sound ideas broadly popular among governmental, opinion and business leaders, and the citizens generally. These ideas are based on proven principles of government and backed by honest research. Sutherland appeals to the good will of our citizens in preference to trying to approach public policy as a battle to be won or an enemy to be conquered.

Because Utahns have the capacity, the character, and thus the potential to lead out among the states, The Sutherland Dream is that we will adopt and implement public policies that will be the envy of, and set a standard for, the nation.

Utah has the highest educated populace of any state. There is a remarkable spirit of volunteerism here not found to the same extent anywhere else in the world. We are known as the most generous state when measured by charitable contributions as a percentage of personal income. While the state has attracted Northern Europeans, Polynesians, Hispanics, Asians and other peoples of quite diverse ethnic, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds, yet there is something here that unites us – a kind of pioneer spirit that manifests itself broadly in a work ethic, allegiance to family and traditional values. It is a dream that we can do better and must do better; that if we, here in Utah, do not lead out and set a worthy example, who will do it?

I believe that, here in Utah, character still matters. May it always be so!

One of Utah's early pioneers, John Taylor, foresaw the day when many people not of the LDS faith would flock to Utah's valleys to receive the protection of the law and to live among an honest and just people [Journal of Discourses, vol. 21, page 8]. If that is to happen, and I believe it can and will, then Utah needs to be different. Utah will need to lead out in civility and virtue (both public and private), and lead with freedom under law.

Those of us with The Sutherland Institute are learning from our experiences out in the community every day and we continue to refine our thinking and improve our vision for the future. Yet there is a set of core principles upon which we are anchored which have not changed. They are:

The primacy of individual self-government

The centrality of family

The keystone of private property

The essential and complementary cultures of generosity and self-reliance

The moral compass of religion

The productivity of free markets

The wisdom and virtue of limited government

I feel the need to draw out one more distinction for you related to The Sutherland Dream. Liberty and Freedom are two parallel concepts, but the words are not completely synonymous. Liberty deals primarily with the individual while freedom deals with society. The principles of personal liberty are important but many times must be subordinate to the principle of freedom.

We do not live as an island unto ourselves. Our very existence required the sacrifice of parents and countless others who have gone before to make this day possible for you and me. Freedom carries with it obligations to each other and to future generations. If the blessings of freedom are to continue, it will require strong families that teach faith, values and self-government in the home to the rising generation. This is why, among other reasons, the family is the fundamental unit of society.

If we focus on personal liberty alone, we isolate ourselves and can become competitive in areas where competition is non-productive or irrelevant and we become disinclined to acknowledge our responsibility toward others.

While respecting personal liberty interests, sentiments such as, "Just leave me alone. You can do what you want, just don't interfere with me!" are often simply expressions of selfish individualism and portend the rejection of all forms of authority including the home, moral, and civil authority – and we see this kind of thinking on both sides of the political spectrum. Those who are consumed by these notions often find it hard to work with other people and limit their ability to be a positive influence for good. It's a "my way or no way" mind-set certainly not conducive to the spirit of family or community.

Those who truly value lasting freedom are willing to subordinate some of their personal liberty and interests to the greater good, as necessity and wisdom require. We have in our history a powerful example of such action. I suggest that each of you here tonight find the time to read Benjamin Franklin's closing words on the final day of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. In acknowledging good reason for differing views, Franklin appealed for unanimity and exhorted his fellow delegates to "doubt a little [their] own infallibility, and to make manifest [their] unanimity" by signing the Constitution. Had not these great men of wisdom, passion, and experience been willing set aside their differences to unite to form the greatest single instrument of government in human history, where would we be today?

And so, too, must we unite with all people of goodwill in seeking the most good for the most people while still preserving the essential liberty interests and not forgetting those who are unable to help themselves.

Freedom, in order for it to endure, requires balance, vision, sacrifice, self-restraint, morality, humility, and true civility.

I commend to you the book by Stephen L. Carter titled Civility. In this book he writes, "Civility ... is the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together." [page 11]

The civil approach starts with principles when looking for solutions. Civility trusts and respects the process even if the end is not always visible or knowable. But that is part of submitting to the greater good.

Our thanks go to each of you for being here tonight. We hope Sutherland will be a leading and uniting influence for good. I hope that you will stand with us in this noble cause for our mutual sakes as well as for the sake of our posterity.

I am grateful that Paul Mero is at the helm of Sutherland, and that Dr. Jim Jenkins and others have joined us to create a strong and vibrant board of trustees. We also have many wonderful new staff members that you will get to

know

I recommend them to you. I also recommend your serious consideration of the work they are doing, and the contributions from our Board of Scholars and others who will be writing materials for us.

Let's make Utah the best it can be. With your help, God willing, we will succeed and the heavenly banner first raised by the Founders of our nation may continue to fly over the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Thank you so much.