

It is an honor to be here at the Reagan Library.

Tonight, at the library dedicated to our 40th president, I want to speak about freedom.

I have had the privilege to see first-hand how powerful and how fragile freedom is. 28 years ago I stood outside a polling place, a schoolhouse in western Kenya. Soldiers had chased away people lined up to vote. A few hours later, the people began streaming back in, risking further attack, undaunted in their determination to exercise their right to vote.

In 1992, I sat across a table from a young mayor in Nizhny Novogorod, Russia and listened to him talk of his dream of liberating his nation from communism. Years later, for his dedication to the cause of freedom, Boris Nemtsov would be assassinated by Vladimir Putin's thugs.

In Warsaw, in 1990, I listened to a young Polish woman tell me that her greatest fear was that the people would forget what it was like to live under communist domination, that they would forget the price of freedom.

Natan Sharansky, who spent years in the Soviet Gulag, told me it was the words of Ronald Reagan – passed secretly among the prisoners – that affirmed America was watching, America knew of their struggle. America stood with them.

A few years ago I met a man who escaped Castro's totalitarian regime on a boat when he was 14 years old. I asked him how he had the courage to risk his life to get to America. He said, "It was the words of Ronald Reagan." He described listening to President Reagan on the radio in the evenings with his parents, with a blanket over them so the neighbors didn't report them. He said he wanted to be part of everything America stood for.

Here in the Reagan Library a few years ago, I was meeting with the Defense Minister from a Baltic nation. He had grown up behind the Iron Curtain. I told him the story of that Cuban immigrant. He looked at me and said, "I had exactly the same experience." He said he and his parents had been able to watch Finnish TV in the evenings and had heard the speeches of Ronald Reagan – his parents told him America was a great nation led by a great man.

I have seen the power of faith and freedom. I listened to Pope John Paul II speak to thousands in Nairobi in 1985 and 19 years later I watched that same Pope take my father's hand, look into his eyes, and say, "God Bless America."

God has blessed America, but our freedom survives only if we protect it. If we take our duty and our obligation seriously.

Today we are facing threats to our freedom around the world and here at home. The list of these is not insubstantial: Russia, China, Iran, North Korea. American adversaries on the march. And here at home, the Biden Administration's economic policies have contributed to the worst inflation in 40 years and we are watching the expansion of government regulation that kills jobs

and economic growth. We do not have control of our southern border. This is dangerous and reckless.

I am a conservative Republican. I believe the policies of limited government, low taxes, a strong national defense are the right ones for this nation. I believe the family, not the government, is the fundamental building block of our society.

But at this moment, we are confronting a domestic threat we have never faced before— a former president who is attempting to unravel the foundations of our Constitutional Republic. And he is aided by Republican leaders and elected officials who have made themselves willing hostages to this dangerous and irrational man.

Some in my party are embracing the former president and enabling his lies. Many others are urging that we not confront Donald Trump, that we simply look away. That is certainly the easier path. One need only look at the threats facing witnesses in front of the January 6 committee to understand that.

But to argue that the threat posed by Donald Trump can be ignored is to cast aside the responsibility every citizen bears to perpetuate the republic. We must not, we cannot do that.

“It is up to us in our time,” Ronald Reagan said, “to choose and choose wisely between the hard but necessary task of preserving peace and freedom, and the temptation to ignore our duty and blindly hope for the best while the enemies of freedom grow stronger day by day.”

No party, no nation, no people can defend and perpetuate a constitutional republic if they accept a leader who has gone to war with the rule of law, with the democratic process, with the peaceful transfer of power, with the Constitution itself.

As the full picture is coming into view through our work on the January 6 committee, it has become clear that the efforts Donald Trump oversaw and engaged in were even more chilling and threatening than we imagined. As we have shown, Donald Trump attempted to overturn the presidential election to stay in office and prevent the transfer of presidential power. He summoned a mob to Washington. He knew they were armed and angry. He directed the violent mob to march on the capitol in order to delay or prevent the counting of electoral votes. He attempted to go there with them. When the violence was underway, he refused to take action to tell the rioters to leave. Instead, he incited further violence by tweeting that Vice President Mike Pence was a coward. He said “Mike deserves it” and “didn’t want to do anything” in response to the Hang Mike Pence chants.

It is undeniable -- the Republican party cannot be both loyal to Donald Trump and loyal to the Constitution. We must choose.

I come to this choice as a mother, committed to ensuring my children and their children and grandchildren will continue to live in an America where the peaceful transfer of power is guaranteed; that they will live in an America that is a nation of laws, not of men.

I come to this choice as an American, as a citizen of the greatest nation God has ever created on the face of the earth. I come to this choice as a person of deep faith who believes our rights come from God, not from the government, always mindful that we must pray as though everything depends upon God, because it does, and we must work as though everything depends on us, because it does.

America is exceptional. We are a good and a great nation. Ordinary Americans in every generation have done extraordinary things – heroic things – to defend our freedom and that task is now ours.

President Kennedy in his inaugural address said, “In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger.” Today, that responsibility is ours.

What a magnificent responsibility that is. But, my fellow Americans, we stand at the edge of an abyss. We must pull back. We must reject the dangerous and anti-democratic Trump cult of personality. We must, in all places and in all times, reject the anti-semitism, racism, and bigotry that some in our political life are embracing and enabling. There must never be a place in our body politic for those views. History teaches that what begins with words ends in far worse.

One of my Democratic colleagues said to me the other day that he looked forward to the day when he could disagree with me again. Believe me, I share that sentiment. It will mean our politics have righted themselves. And I know they will.

But perhaps we can take this moment to agree what that future should look like. It should be a future where our political leaders are serious, where they are worthy of our support, where they are prepared, where they are substantive, where they defend principle, where they abide by their oaths of office.

When each of us casts our votes, we should do so with a commitment to electing people who are as serious as the challenges we face. We demand excellence in so many areas of our lives, we should demand it of our elected officials, as well.

When I first was elected to Congress, I would take the opportunity each time I was on the floor to find a member I hadn't met, to sit next to someone, talk to them, hear their story. And, without exception, the members I met that way on both sides of the aisle, were in congress for the right reasons. They were there because they love their country and wanted to serve their constituents. That is a valuable thing to remember.

We should not minimize our policy differences. They are big and they are real. I believe the most important obligation of the federal government is to ensure the defense of our nation. And I believe America must always have military forces that are second to none. I believe we must be clear-eyed about the threats we face and dedicate the resources necessary to ensure deterrence. Our enemies must never make the mistake of thinking they can prevail if they attack. I serve on the Armed Services Committee and I have differences with most of the Democratic members of the committee. But we also share much in common. Among my most competent, honorable and serious colleagues are a group of women veterans I serve with on that committee. Women like Mikey Sherill from New Jersey, Chrissy Houlihan of Pennsylvania, Elaine Luria of Virginia. Former DOD official Elissa Slotkin of Michigan. We debate issues. We disagree, and we respect each other. For 61 years, that tradition of uniting across party lines has meant that the Armed Services Committee produces the National Defense Authorization Act, authorizing resources for the defense of the nation on a bipartisan, usually unanimous, basis.

We need to debate and defend our beliefs. But we should work to build a future where we remember that despite our differences, we are all Americans. Where our political battles and disagreements are intense, but where we do our best not to descend into vitriolic partisan attack.

I say this as someone who is as guilty as anyone – as someone who has certainly engaged in her share of ferocious partisan attack over the years.

But this time, this moment in our history, demands more. We cannot let ourselves be torn apart. That is what our enemies hope for.

Our Founders provided that every elected official would swear an oath. And it's not an oath to a party. It's not an oath to an individual. It's a solemn oath that we swear before God to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. The Founders established this oath because they knew the danger of faction. They knew the survival of this great American experiment, the survival of our Republic depends upon public servants of good will doing their duty to the Constitution, putting loyalty to the nation and its founding ideals above self-interest. This is no small thing. In fact, it is everything.

I think often of the inscription above the fireplace in the state dining room at the White House. It is from a letter John Adams wrote to his wife, Dolly. "May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof," and we must always remember that. Our presidents are entrusted with incredible power. We must not elect people who are more loyal to themselves or to power than they are to our constitution.

Despite all the challenges we are facing, there is so much that gives me hope for this great nation. I see hope and the future in the eyes of my children. A wise woman once told me this lesson of motherhood – when your children are young, they hang around your knees, when they are grown, they hang around your heart. That is so true. As all mothers know, every time

you have to leave your kids you worry and feel some guilt. For Mother's Day this year, my youngest son gave me a wonderful gift – a note on which he had written – every time you leave, mom, I know you're going to work for America. It brought me to tears.

He's a teenager so it may just be that he wanted me out of the house, but still...

Over the last 18 months or so since January 6, I have been so moved by the young people who approach me everywhere – at home in Wyoming, in Washington, in airports – especially the young women, who seem to instinctively understand the peril of this moment for our democracy, and who know it will be up to them to save it.

And I have been incredibly moved by the young women, some of whom worked on the Trump campaign, some in the Trump White House, some as staffers on the hill, who knew immediately that what happened on January 6 must never happen again. America met one of these young women yesterday, Ms. Cassidy Hutchinson. Her superiors – men many years older—are hiding behind executive privilege, anonymity and intimidation. Her bravery and patriotism were awesome to behold. Little girls all across this great nation are seeing what it really means to love this country, what it really means to be a patriot.

I want to speak to every young girl watching tonight – the power is yours and so is the responsibility. In our great nation, one individual can make all the difference. And each individual must try. There are no bystanders in our Republic.

And let me also say this to the little girls and young women watching tonight - These days, for the most part, men are running the world, and it's really not going all that well.

So, let us all leave here tonight, resolved that we will embrace the grace and compassion and love of country that unites us, resolved that we will fight to do what is right, resolved that we will be able to look back at these days and say, in our time of testing, we did our duty. We stood for truth.

Ultimately, that is what our duty as Americans requires – that we love our country more. That we love her so much, we will stand above politics to defend her. That we will do everything in our power to protect our constitution and our freedom – paid for by the blood of so many. We must love her so much we will never yield in her defense.

Thank you.

