

IN State Treasurer Richard Mourdock  
Inauguration Remarks  
January 6, 2011

As we gather today, we are again sharing the moment with thousands of other recently elected officials across the state and nation. This is the week when solemn inauguration ceremonies occur in County Courthouses, State Houses and even in the United States Capitol in Washington, DC. We gather as proof that the biannual revolution envisioned by our Founding Fathers yet continues.

Though the moment is an important one, especially to those of us who have the privilege of raising our hands and taking an oath of office, I wish to suggest to you that the moment should not be about the campaigns just passed nor of the work ahead nor of the personalities involved. Today we celebrate the oath itself.

Last Saturday, Marilyn and I attended the inauguration of newly elected officials in Vanderburgh County. There were fifteen of them. Township trustees, county councilmen, a judge, prosecutor, sheriff, assessor, and a county commissioner each in turn, individually stepped forward, raised their hand and repeated that same oath.

Fifteen times. Hearing the oath, repeated so often, twelve words caught my attention for the importance of their meaning. They seemed almost to increase in volume though I'm sure they were not in fact, spoken more loudly by each successive speaker.

Eight of the words were: "to the best of my skill and ability."

I find comfort in those words. You probably can't appreciate why unless you've held public office and faced an angry constituent who made you very aware of your shortcomings. Knowing that the phrase "to the best of my skill and ability" is what we swear to and not: "to guarantee perfection ... every time..." is indeed comforting. The public should neither demand nor expect perfection from those who hold public office. We are fault-filled, fallible creatures who at our best seek to use the Constitution as our standard and when the law stands in conflict to itself, "to the best of my skill and ability" means we seek wise counsel and act upon it.

"To the best of my skill and ability" offers to the public the highest reasonable standard of individual performance.

Four other words of the oath spoke loudly to me. Those words: "... So help me God."

It is amazing in this era of political correctness that those words have not been stricken from our oaths. Some have tried to rid the public square of all vestige of faith. They would argue such "antiquated" or "divisive" terms should be removed. But they should not.

Should the words "So help me God" be taken from our oaths we have no longer taken an oath, we've simply spoken a sentence. We've no longer made a pledge but offered something akin to a campaign promise. And we all know how those promises melt away under the arguments of "conditions are different now" or "things have changed" or even, when a different audience is present.

"So help me God" is an acknowledgment that a campaign has ended and a higher standard than a temporal one exists.

I close by noting there is one word noticeable in its absence from our oath: it is the word "freedom."

Freedom. Perhaps it is meant to be present implicitly by to our Constitution but I believe it should be made plain.

And so I choose to informally a sentence to my oath.

“I pledge to keep government limited so that our *freedom* might be great, ... This I pledge to the best of my skill and ability, ... so help me God.”