Virtually every law that we pass—either at the local or national level—has an impact on families. We often hear that you cannot legislate morality. I would suggest to you that in one sense that’s true—meaning you cannot and should not do things by compulsory means or force; indeed, my belief is that we must allow people their free agency. But in another sense, every law we pass—I hope—has a moral predicate to it. I hope our environmental laws have a moral foundation, I hope our tax structure has a moral foundation, I hope our traffic laws are based upon morality—upon the greater good of society. So the truth is, every time we legislate, we are legislating somebody’s view of what is right and wrong. And that’s called morality.

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My colleague from Oregon in the U.S. Senate, Ron Wyden, is Jewish and a loyal Democrat. And yet Oregon is so tolerant, open-minded, and politically diverse that it also elected, in me, a Mormon who is a conservative Republican. That creates a tremendous challenge for each of us to maintain a majority, or 51 percent, in any election, particularly when it comes to issues of morality and family.

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When you are elected to public office, you’re not asked to check your values at the door. In fact, when people cast a vote for a candidate, what they really need to do is look for someone who agrees with their general political philosophy, someone in whom they have confidence in their judgment and in their integrity. I have never met anyone I have voted for, with whom I agree 100 percent of the time. And you never will find such a candidate. So what I have worked to do as I have run for and served in elected offices is to be true to what I regard as absolutes and to state those clearly whenever asked—but also to not be so closed-mind that I could not hear the opinions of others.

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Let me share with you some of the obvious issues that I have had to deal with as an elected official. The first is the issue of abortion, which probably brings into conflict my fundamental beliefs more than any issue I have ever wrestled with. My religious view is that, before being born in mortality, we lived in a pre-earthly state where we were presented with two plans: One was based on compulsion and the other was the Savior’s plan, which was based on our having free agency. We wanted two things in coming to earth: we wanted life, and we wanted choice. And as you hear me say those words, you will hear the two slogans of the two sides of the abortion issue.

I believe that free agency, or choice, is extremely important to God’s plan for his children. I also believe that no matter what the law is, we ultimately have the choice—as individuals—about whether we will do right or wrong. I also believe that we don’t have to make legal everything that people choose to do.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the first great laws passed on this earth were the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are about choices, and they’re about promises. And yet the fact that many in this country steal does not mean that we should suspend all of our laws of property or make theft legal.

It does seem to me that law is a teacher. It sets up standards, by which, if we keep them, we will ultimately be saved from harm and disease and all kinds of heartache.

There are other issues that affect family life enunciated in the Ten Commandments. For example, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” And I will tell you that if you struggle with policies relating to heterosexuality and homosexuality, heterosexual adultery is far more destructive of the American family than is homosexuality because it is far more common and leaves far more homes damaged, with government often left to pick up the pieces.

In my state there is a large gay and lesbian community. And I think that one of the things that should always characterize people of faith is not sanctimony but love, not a spirit of exclusion but inclusion. Now, loving people doesn’t mean you accept everything about them, but you do try to understand and listen. And so when I deal with the issue of gays and lesbians who are demanding more public recognition, what I have done is to try to distinguish between real family values and their counterfeits. For example, in trying to influence the issue of same-sex marriages, my view on the matter is one of those absolutes, and I am opposed. At the same time, there are issues like protecting gays and lesbians from violence, or helping them with employment and housing, that I support.

So, I believe that it is not inappropriate, for example, to find ways to say to people in the gay and lesbian community, “I care about you. I value you. And these are the ways I can help you.” But then I make it clear where I can’t.

It is important to remember that our Constitution was made for an imperfect people; in fact, it deals with how we as imperfect people relate with one another in our society. As a result, the constitution covers murderers, and felons of all kinds.

What I have found in my wonderful opportunities to serve my state and my country is that while I’m in the minority on many family law issues, I’m respected for my positions. And what I also find is that the world is hungry for people who have an anchor in their lives. They believe that not all values are relative, and are willing to fight for some ultimate truths—because the family, in the end, is something that government cannot replace and must not ever replace.