

Ervin outlines 'great freedoms' for Western Piedmont audience

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Speaking at Western Piedmont Community College Friday, former Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. outlined five great freedoms established by the founders of this nation and challenged his audience to preserve those freedoms.

Ervin was the final speaker in the school's Annual Speakers' Symposium. He spoke to a capacity audience of about 200 in the college auditorium.

The theme of the week-long symposium was the guarantee in the Declaration of Independence of the rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Ervin quoted from this section of the Declaration and said it was a pledge which the nation's

founders fulfilled by providing economic freedom, personal freedom, political freedom, intellectual freedom and religious freedom.

Ervin spoke first of the economic freedom which gave Americans the ability to fulfill their material needs and desires. He said of the founding fathers, "They realized that free men could not be induced to produce goods and services of value unless they were allowed to retain a fair share of the fruits of their labor for themselves and their families." He said this incentive factor of the free enterprise system has made the United States "the greatest economic force the world has ever known."

Ervin said the founders recognized the importance non-material values as well,

and provided for personal freedom. "They gave all Americans by our Constitution more personal freedom than any other people on the earth had ever had." Ervin cited freedom of travel, freedom to establish a family and the ability to do anything which does not interfere with others.

Ervin said the framers of the Constitution believed that man is a political animal, and that all men have a right to participate in government. These ideas were translated into guarantees of political freedom such as the rights of peaceable assembly, redress of grievances, voting and holding office. This degree of political freedom was not known in any other nation at that time, Ervin said.

The former senator said the other two great freedoms, intellectual and religious, were guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution. "In those few words, government at all levels is forbidden to interfere with the thoughts, and in most of the words, and the religion and the political activities of Americans," he said. "We sometimes forget that freedom is not free," Ervin said. "Freedom is the costliest thing that has ever been purchased by mankind."

Ervin said he was asked after a speech at a press association meeting if it is not strange that freedom of the press is being threatened nearly 200 years after it was guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. He said he responded that it is not strange, because "the contest between freedom and tyranny goes on in every generation." He added, "It's an unending fight, and that's the reason those who gave us these great freedoms gave a warning. That warning is that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

Ervin quoted Judge Learned Hand, who said as long as love for liberty exists in the hearts of Americans, laws and courts will not be needed to preserve freedom. But when that love dies, no laws or courts will be able to save it.

Ervin concluded with a challenge: "I would urge you to concentrate your lives in large measure to keeping the love of liberty alive in the hearts of the men and women in our country so that these precious freedoms which have been purchased for us at such a cost may belong, as the preamble to the Constitution indicates it should belong, to all Americans of all generations."



Former Sen. Ervin, right, receives a ham from Grady Church of the WPCC faculty after his speech at the school Friday. (Staff photo by Andy Hern)