

Human Events^{ONLINE}™

House Conservatives Steer Course For Return to Limited Government

by Rep. Mike Pence
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Make no mistake about it. When President Bush won his landslide reelection victory by more than three million votes, self-identified conservatives--who made up 34% of the electorate--were the margin of victory.

Buoyed by measures defending marriage on the ballot in 11 states, the volunteer foot soldiers of American conservatism overwhelmed the thousands of paid mercenaries of MoveOn.org and kindred organizations to send George W. Bush back to the White House with larger majorities in both the House and the Senate--a first for a wartime President since 1944.

Conservatives were right to support the significant conservative accomplishments of a President and Congress that defended freedom at home and abroad, promoted economic freedom through tax cuts and defended their moral freedom in the sanctity of life and marriage. The campaign became a referendum on conservative principles and, as pointed out in HUMAN EVENTS last week, the election was a mandate for conservative leadership in Washington.

Confident Hope

Now, the President and Congress must deliver on the confident hope of millions of American voters by restoring the luster to our reputation as the party of limited government. On this front, there is work to be done.

Earlier this year, in light of two consecutive sessions of Congress that saw a 52% increase in the Department of Education, the first new entitlement in 40 years and record increases in non-defense spending, I likened the conservative movement to a tall ship plying the open seas of a simpler time with a proud captain and a strong and accomplished crew, but veering off course into the dangerous and uncharted waters of big-government Republicanism.

Despite the enormous conservative achievements of the past four years, I saw troubling signs that the ship of conservative governance was off course.

While Ronald Reagan said famously, "Government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem," many Republicans--even many who call themselves conservatives--had begun to see government as the solution to every social ill. This was a historic departure from the limited-government tradition of our party.

So how do we find our way forward in the uncertain currents of the new governing majority? How do we launch this new Congress with priorities that reflect our party's commitment to limited government?

Conservatives must dead reckon from the starting point of what we know to be true about the nature of government. We know that government that governs least governs best. We know as government

expands, freedom contracts. We know that government should never do for a man what he can and should do for himself. And we know that liberty also means freedom from the unbridled growth of government and its attendant burdens of debt, escalating taxes and suffocating bureaucracy.

As we navigate off of these fixed truths, the way forward is clear: After four years of the largest growth in entitlement and discretionary spending in more than a half-century, we must rediscover the principles of limited government that brought our party to power in 1980 and 1994 and put them into practice. This requires that House conservatives have their own agenda, built on the principles of freedom, including not only what conservatives must do in the 109th Congress, but also what they must undo.

What Conservatives Must Do

First, House conservatives must rally support in Congress and the country for President Bush's agenda where it conforms to the ideals of limited government. The good news is that all of the "Big Three" items that the President outlined last week are worthy of vigorous conservative support. These include:

- **Modernizing Social Security** by introducing the option of personal savings accounts for younger Americans. Members of the Republican Study Committee, including Representatives Paul Ryan (R.-Wis.), Sam Johnson (R.-Tex.) and Jeff Flake (R.-Ariz.) are already working on legislation to make this a reality.
- **Overhauling the Internal Revenue Code** without a tax increase to achieve a system that is simpler and fairer for taxpaying Americans. Representatives John Linder (R.-Ga.) and Mike Burgess (R.-Tex.) are leading in this area.
- **Reforming the legal system** to end the hidden tax that frivolous lawsuits place on our manufacturing and health care economies. Rep. John Shaddegg (R.-Ariz.) is sponsoring legislation to do just that.

These are President Bush's priorities and they deserve to be the priorities of conservatives in Washington. In addition to these "Big Three" goals, House conservatives should also put on green eyeshades and put our fiscal house in order. We can do this by:

- **Additional tax cuts** (as the Republican Congress has done every year since 1994) to ensure continued economic growth.
- **The Balanced Budget Amendment** to the Constitution, sponsored by Rep. Ernest Istook (R.-Okla.).
- **Fundamental budget-process reform** including a line item veto, like the proposal put forward by Representatives Jeb Hensarling (R.-Tex.) and Paul Ryan.
- **Upholding any presidential veto** on a spending bill that exceeds the budget, an action item that Rep. Chris Cox (R.-Calif.) has been lining up members to support.
- **Cutting wasteful government spending** and actually eliminating outdated government programs, an area in which Representatives Kevin Brady (R.-Tex.), Todd Tiahrt (R.-Okla.) and Tom Feeney (R.-Fla.) are leading.
- **Freedom to purchase affordable health insurance** across state lines and the freedom to purchase insurance in groups, which are initiatives proposed by Rep. John Shaddegg.

House conservatives know the freedom agenda demands not only actuarial perfection, but also gains in

moral freedom. Congress must take action to defend the American people from activist federal judges who would impose their own view of morality and patriotism on our communities, families and most cherished institutions. We must:

- **Defend qualified nominees** to the Supreme Court from extremist, anti-life attacks.
- **Pass the Federal Marriage Amendment**, sponsored by Rep. Marilyn Musgrave (R.-Colo.) by a growing majority.
- **Highlight the humanity of the unborn** and the violence of abortion, by passing legislation strengthening parental rights and recognizing the pain and suffering abortion causes women. Representatives Dave Weldon (R.-Fla.), Joe Pitts (R.-Pa.), Todd Akin (R.-Mo.) and Chris Smith (R.-N.J.) are leading on this crucial issue.
- **Pass the Freedom of Speech in Houses of Worship Act** sponsored by Rep. Walter Jones (R.-N.C.).
- **Limit the jurisdiction of the federal courts**--as Congress is constitutionally authorized to do--over the most cherished symbols of our culture and over the free expression of our faith in the public square. Representatives Robert Aderholt (R.-Ala.) and Akin are pursuing legislation in this arena.
- **Clarify that no foreign court or institution** can create precedents or principles that may be applied to judicial decisions regarding U.S. laws. Rep. Tom Feeney (R.-Fla.) is working to defend our sovereignty against this new threat.

What Conservatives Must Undo

There is legislation already on the books that conservatives must undo to advance the freedom agenda:

- **Restore the 1st Amendment** by repealing much of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act. Like most House Republicans, I fought against BCRA and had the honor of being the only House plaintiff in the legal challenge that Sen. Mitch McConnell (R.-Ky.) took to the Supreme Court. BCRA violated the 1st Amendment directive that "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech" and the 527 circus of this past summer may create an opportunity to reform our campaign finance laws in a manner that empowers the role of political parties and restores the freedom of speech curtailed by BCRA and the Supreme Court decision in *McConnell, Pence et al.*
- **Undo the entitlement elements** of the Medicare prescription drug law. In this law, a Republican Congress created an un-funded Medicare liability equal to the entire Social Security obligation plus one half again. This threatens to bankrupt our nation in the next century and drive millions of retirees into Medicare for prescription drug coverage. Congress should leave a modest drug benefit for the one in four seniors who currently lack coverage--which is what the President asked for in the first place--and should impose the means test on the benefit that inspired Sen. Ted Kennedy (D.-Mass.) to threaten to filibuster the law last year.
- **Reform the No Child Left Behind Act** to reverse the expanding federal role in primary and secondary education, which is a state and local function. Congress should adopt for education the block grant strategy used in welfare reform, promoting school choice and innovation through resources not red tape.

This is a conservative agenda for the 109th Congress. Its theme is freedom. In the wake of the historic landslide of November 2, American conservatives must steer government back to the limited-

government course charted by Ronald Reagan when he took the helm of state in 1981. We must rediscover the freedom agenda of less government and greater fiscal discipline. We must be strong and courageous and do the work knowing that this cause will prevail. For the cause of freedom is not our story but His--the author and finisher of our faith and our freedom.

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