

# THE HERITAGE LECTURES

*100*

Back to Conservative  
Basics

*By Gary Bauer*



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# BACK TO CONSERVATIVE BASICS

by Gary Bauer

It is a pleasure to be a part of the tenth annual Resource Bank meeting of The Heritage Foundation. But I must tell you that, although it is great to be in Philadelphia, it is even better to be out of Washington, D.C.--even for just one night. Harry Truman who, if nothing else, was a plain talker once wrote of Washington, D.C., that it was the kind of city where if you wanted a friend you should buy a dog. Well, tonight I left my dog back in Washington because I know I am among friends.

Those of us in the Reagan Administration have a great challenge over the next 22 months--a challenge that will not only influence our own success or failure but will also profoundly affect all those allied with us in the public eye. Some in the conservative movement have sought to distance themselves from the Reagan Administration. And when we do things not consistent with the President's central core of conviction, criticism and estrangement are understandable and justified. To say this, however, does not change a basic fact. Ronald Reagan is a conservative President--the most conservative President of modern times. If he can be portrayed by his enemies as having failed, not only will his Administration suffer in the eyes of his fellow citizens but so, too, will the conservative agenda be set back. Likewise, if this President leaves office in January 1989 as a man not only loved for his congeniality but also admired for his policies, the beliefs and ideas we share will be consolidated for GOP success in 1988 and beyond.

**Spending Less.** By any reasonable measurement the first six years of the Reagan Presidency have been a dramatic success built upon principles and ideas generated and supported by men and women like yourselves. Despite the momentum built up by the 50-year-old spending juggernaut, we have made dramatic headway. For the first time in more than a decade, the federal government is actually spending less this fiscal year, in real terms, than the year before. How many Democratic administrations can say that for themselves?

As we have begun to rein in federal spending, we have been able to bring taxes down and subdue the monster of inflation. The result: what our European allies have called the "American Miracle," the creation of over 13 million new jobs in an economic expansion that may well be the longest in peacetime history. The engine of job creation is keeping up its pace, creating 337,000 new jobs last month alone. Median family income in America is rising, employment is holding at historic highs, and America's poor are climbing out of poverty.

In education, there is a rebirth of sorts taking place: higher standards; a return to or at least an acknowledgement of basics; in some schools a new emphasis on values; and a

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greater leverage given to parental concerns. In foreign policy, there has been a new assertiveness: no nation has fallen to Soviet expansionism on our watch, and one communist insurgency (Grenada) has been put down. In the area of defense, the President has given the country a dramatic new vision not built on the threat of mutual destruction but rather on a strategic defense initiative that can free us from that fear forever.

**Frustrated Liberals.** All of these things, of course, have been pushed off center stage by the events of the last four months. Our adversaries in Congress and the liberal establishment, frustrated by six years of conservative achievement, now perceive an opportunity not only to cripple the President for the next 22 months but to rewrite the history of the past six years as one of failure. Suddenly, old, unsupported ideas have been rethrust into the nightly news. Thus, Jim Wright said recently, "It's not, do you tax, but who do you tax," and, as you know, the Speaker seems to have no shortage of ideas in that regard. After six years of fighting Administration efforts to return defense spending to levels necessary to meet the long-term Soviet challenge, the Democrats in the House have fashioned a budget that will gut defense spending by billions of dollars, using the excuse of cutting the deficit. What is happening, though, is that the spending juggernaut now seems to be revving up again, as new money is being thrown at every imaginable social need from an \$88 billion pork barrel highway bill to a new \$450 million homeless bill, which we all know will, in the final analysis, do nothing for those poor souls we see wandering in our city streets.

In short, we are in a battle whose final outcome will determine whether the Reagan years were a mere interruption of the liberal trends of statism at home and defeatism abroad, or whether these years have really been a new beginning for our nation. I believe that this Administration led by Ronald Reagan is not just an interruption. But we conservative activists, scholars, politicians, and writers must redouble and strengthen our efforts if we are to provide the American people with an enduring vision of the American dream--the hope that the opportunity to prosper is there for everyone and that liberty will forever remain our ladder to spiritual and economic success.

So let our recent adversity make our resolve stronger in the tough months ahead to win the hearts and minds of the American people and to reaffirm in our own thoughts and writings our most basic tenets. For I believe that, if we state these things clearly, the great bulk of our fellow citizens will make common cause with us.

**Cultural Conservative.** In a recent "Essay on Our Times," one writer gave his definition of a cultural conservative as someone "who believes that there is a necessary, unbreakable, and causal relationship between traditional Western, Judeo-Christian values, definitions of right and wrong, ways of thinking and ways of living--the parameters of Western culture--and the secular success of Western societies: their prosperity, their liberties, and the opportunities they offer their citizens to lead fulfilling rewarding lives. If the former are abandoned, the latter will be lost."

Now this is not a new idea. In the early days of our nation, personal morality was understood to be the foundation of a healthy society. Jefferson, as well as others, believed that only a virtuous people could be free and that this guiding principle drove public policy. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, this widely shared view was attacked, debunked, and finally rejected by many, especially in the intellectual community.

Ronald Reagan, in contrast, restated in his 1980 and 1984 campaigns that values do matter--that character is important; and I believe there is a new awareness among the American people of this basic truth. It is as simple as this: private choices have public effects. The way our fellow citizens choose to live affects many other lives. There is no such thing as private drug abuse. The abandonment of spouse and children hurts far beyond the home in question. Illegitimacy exacts a price from society as well as from the individual involved. Child pornography and obscenity degrade the community, especially its women and children, as well as those who patronize it. The casual disregard of human life ultimately imperils all those who are weak, infirm, and dependent upon the compassion and resources of others. It simply is not true that what we do is our business only. For in the final analysis, the kind of people we are--the kind of nation we will be for generations hence--is the sum of what millions of Americans do in their otherwise private lives. If increasing numbers of our children are born or raised outside of marriage and if youth drug and alcohol abuse remains at current levels, there will be staggering consequences for us all: greater poverty, more crime, a less educated workforce, mounting demands for government spending, higher taxes, worsening deficits, and problems we have only begun to anticipate.

**Hardest Hit.** Let us look at just one area of private choice--personal relationships. Consider the "anything goes" life styles of the last 25 years. Was it really just a matter of private choice that has ravaged the country with an epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases, many of them new and virulent? Is it a private matter when it results in staggering medical bills distributed among consumers through higher insurance premiums and among taxpayers through taxes to support medical research and health care.

Who is hardest hit by these costs? In this, as in so many other cases, the American family pays. Even when it stands apart from the pathologies that inflict such costs, economic and social, upon the body politic, the family suffers greatly.

It is the answer to this question that leads me to the second tenet that we conservatives should reaffirm--that the American family is the bedrock of our nation, because it is responsible for the nurturing of our future generations. Let us always remind the public and ourselves that it is our philosophy that stands with and offers the most to the American family.

**Unfinished Agenda.** The family has paid too much. It has lost too much of its authority to courts and rule writers, too much of its voice in education and social policy, too many of its resources to public officials at all levels. We have made dramatic progress, during the past six years of economic reform, in turning back those resources to the men and women who earn them through labor, invention, and investment. Now we face the unfinished agenda: turning back to the households of this land the autonomy that once was theirs, in a society stable and secure, where the family can generate and nurture what no government can ever produce--Americans who will responsibly exercise their freedom and, if necessary, defend it.

It is time to reaffirm some "home truths" and to restate the obvious. Intact families are good. Families who choose to have children are making a desirable decision. Mothers and fathers who then decide to spend a good deal of time raising those children themselves rather than leaving it to others are demonstrably doing a good thing for those children. Countless Americans do these things every day. They ask no special favors--they do these



things naturally out of love, loyalty, and a commitment to the future. They are the bedrock of our society. Public policy and the culture in general must support and reaffirm these decisions--not undermine and be hostile to them or send a message that we are neutral.

The Left of American politics is busily fashioning a family agenda. It includes federal day care, guaranteed parental leave, more governmental intervention into the family in the name of protecting it. The pattern has been followed before. Social Democrats in several European nations in the 1930s and 1940s purported to "save" the family by socializing the costs of child rearing. State-funded day care, child allowances, national health systems, and other welfare programs were put in place, but at tremendous expense. Government grew and taxed, pinching pocketbooks and forcing mothers into the workplace. Birth rates declined. All this has been done elsewhere in the name of family. It must be avoided here.

**Helping Hands.** There is great reason for hope. No trend is irreversible. Most of America's families are pulling through, and our institutions are rallying to assist those in trouble. From inner-city neighborhoods to rural communities, most households hold together. Most youngsters aspire to productive, independent lives. Most young adults, upright and responsible, hope to build families of their own. Most families endure.

For most Americans, life is not a matter of legislative battles, judicial decrees, and executive decisions. It is a fabric of helping hands and good neighbors, bedtime stories and shared prayers, lovingly packed lunchboxes and household budget balancing, tears wiped away, a precious heritage passed along. It is hard work and a little put away for the future.

No government commands these things. No government can replicate them. In a faddish culture that emphasizes living for the moment and oneself, they affirm an older, and more lasting, set of priorities.

This fabric of family life has been frayed by the abrasive experiments of two liberal decades. If by some terrible turn of events, it were to unravel, then both economic progress and personal liberty would disappear as well. Neither prosperity nor freedom can be sustained without a transfusion, from generation to generation, of family values: respect and discipline, restraint and self-sacrifice, interdependence and cooperation, loyalty and fidelity, and an ethical code that gives to individuals, however lowly, a transcendent import.

**Heroes of a Healthy Society.** The idols of our recent past were those who defied norms and shattered standards, and indeed there is always a place for "rebels." But in a healthy society, heroes are the women and men who hold the world together one home at a time: the parents and grandparents who forgo pleasure, delay purchases, foreclose options, and commit most of their lives to the noblest undertaking of citizenship: raising children who, resting on the shoulders of the previous generation, will see farther than we and reach higher.

This is social responsibility at its best. Parental nurturing and education of the young are our most important national investments--the fundamental tasks of humanity, which ought to be central to the vision we offer to the American people.

In conclusion, there is a final theme that should guide us through the months ahead. The world is divided between free nations and totalitarians. I am convinced that it will not--that it cannot--remain so forever. Either freedom will, like a prairie fire, spread

across the globe, or those who believe the individual is the slave of the State will prevail. In this twilight struggle, many Americans remain confused and divided. The great oceans that protected us in our infancy have created an isolationism that even today leads us to turn away from the troubles of the world. As conservatives, the message we bring will not always be welcomed, but bring it we must. Any man, whether in Angola or Afghanistan, who loses his liberty subtracts from our own. As long as tyrants possess weapons and a will to conquer, we must devote a significant part of our national resources to build the arms to defend ourselves. This we must do, and convince our children to support, if we are to continue to reap the benefits of freedom and introduce its wonders to struggling men and women around the globe.

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