

# Heritage Lectures

No. 839

Delivered April 30, 2004



Published by The Heritage Foundation

June 7, 2004

## Renewing Our Commitment to Limited Government

*The Honorable Mike Pence*

I am deeply humbled to deliver the Kriebler Lecture at the Heritage Foundation's Resource Bank meeting today. Robert Kriebler's dogged advancement of the principles of freedom in the Soviet Union sowed the seeds that felled that wall and I am honored to speak in his memory.

Picture, if you will, a ship at sea. Shoulders back, a proud captain steps onto the sunlit deck of a tall ship plying the open seas of a simpler time. Its sails are full and straining in the wind. Its crew is tried and true; its hull, mast, and keel are strong. But beneath the waves—almost imperceptibly—the rudder has veered off course and, in time, the captain and crew will face unexpected peril.

The conservative movement today is like that tall ship with its proud captain; strong, accomplished, but veering off course into the dangerous and uncharted waters of big government republicanism.

I make this assertion quite aware that I do so before so many who have done so much for the cause of conservative values.

### **The Conservative Vision**

As this Resource Bank meeting comes to a close and we reflect on battles past and future, the words of a young King David—standing in the Valley of Elam just moments before facing Goliath—seem appropriate, “Without a vision the people perish.” And he asked his countrymen, “Is there not a cause?”

Conservatives like those gathered here never suffer that question.

### **Talking Points**

- The conservative movement has veered off course into big government republicanism—as witnessed by the passage of such laws as “No Child Left Behind” and the Medicare Prescription Drug benefit.
- Advances have been made in securing rights for the unborn and instituting tax cuts to spur economic growth.
- The time has come for fiscal conservatives to retake the helm of the conservative movement.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/research/governmentreform/hl839.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/research/governmentreform/hl839.cfm)

Produced by the Coalition Relations Department

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Ave., NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4999  
(202) 546-4400 [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

Conservatives have the vision. Conservatives know the cause—to “establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.”

By the standards of these fundamental objectives of the republic, American conservatives can take considerable pride in the past three years. The ship of conservative Republican government in Washington is strong. Our movement is strong.

In the promotion of national security, economic prosperity, and the sanctity of human life, conservatives made measurable gains in 2003. Under the leadership of President George W. Bush and a Republican Congress, we have provided for the common defense—which the *Federalist* reminds us is the first and most fundamental objective of all.

### The Common Defense

Ours was a nation under attack on September 11, 2001. I stood beneath a sky filled with mud brown smoke; people were running in every direction. F-16s were going supersonic at treetop level to intercept an inbound menace over Pennsylvania. In the midst of the chaos of that time, George W. Bush stood with his arm draped over the shoulder of a bone-weary fireman, speaking courage through a bullhorn to a listening nation.

We saw those words matched by deeds of equal valor. These are the deeds that ousted the Taliban in Afghanistan and have now defeated and captured the butcher of Baghdad. As I stood six weeks ago—amidst the opulence of the palace of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad (now the headquarters of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq)—I thought of that verse in Psalm 49, “They may name their estates after themselves, but they leave their wealth to others...this is the fate of fools.”

This was a fate brought about by the leadership of George W. Bush. These are the deeds that have yielded a safer America and a safer world, visible to all but an angry, frustrated few who remain stubbornly and willfully blind.

Through it all, Republicans in Congress and conservatives throughout the land have stood steadfastly behind our President—whose personal courage and bold leadership have made our families measurably safer.

To provide for the common defense at home. And to project power in the national interest abroad. Conservatives were the margin in the disputed 2000 election. Because of conservatism, America is defending freedom at home and abroad.

### The General Welfare

At the same time, we have promoted the general welfare with the only means that ever works—the means that unleashes the enterprise and initiative of the American taxpayer. Under the leadership of President Bush and the Republican Congress, two successive tax cuts have provided the largest tax relief since the days of Ronald Reagan.

Just as they began to do in 1983, the positive results are now pouring in with each day’s economic news. Americans are going back to work. Businesses are expanding and this President’s determination to act on his conservative Republican principles is the reason for our returning prosperity.

Additionally, 31 years after *Roe v. Wade*, we can finally celebrate progress in securing the unalienable right to life for millions of unborn Americans. Thanks to the unselfish, unflagging efforts of conservatives who have devoted themselves to being the voice for the voiceless, we can now point to the first major legislative victory since the legalization of abortion in 1973. A Republican Congress passed a ban of “partial-birth abortion” and this Republican President signed it into law.

Yet despite these enormous conservative achievements, there are troubling signs that the ship of conservative governance is off course.

### Government Expansion

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—see government increasingly as the solution to every social ill. Let us be clear on this point: This is a historic departure from the limited-government traditions of our party and millions of its most ardent supporters.

This shift to faith in government is especially clear to me. Not because I am a Congressman, but because not long ago (as I watched the children’s animated movie “Ice Age” with my kids) I realized—I am the frozen man. You remember the frozen man. He was

born in a simpler time, slips into the snow, and thaws out years later in a more sophisticated age.

I first ran for Congress in 1988. An entrenched Democratic majority controlled Congress, frustrating President Reagan at every turn. A band of heroic House conservatives were challenging Speaker Jim Wright and welfare-state politics. A balanced federal budget was as much a fantasy as a Republican majority in Congress. But some of us believed. We believed we could reduce the size and scope of government and halt the slow march to socialism embodied in the welfare-state politics of the left.

I lost my bid in 1988 and again in 1990. There's a saying in politics: "When you're out, you're out!" Well, I was out for 10 years.

When I was finally elected to Congress in 2000, I was like the frozen man—frozen before the revolution, thawed out after it was over, a Minuteman who showed up 10 years late!

### **H.R. 1**

A decade ago, when I first ran for Congress, Republicans dreamed of eliminating the federal Department of Education and returning control of our schools to parents, communities, and states. Ten years later (all thawed out), I took my oath of office in the 107th Congress to join the revolution and they hand me a copy of H.R. 1. One—as in our Republican Congress's number one priority: the "No Child Left Behind Act." The largest expansion of the federal Department of Education since it was created by President Jimmy Carter.

In the end, about 30 House conservatives and I fought against the bill and were soundly defeated by our own colleagues. Our Reaganite belief that education was a local function was labeled "far right" by Republicans and the President signed the bill into law with a smiling Ted Kennedy at his side.

Conservatives were told to bear up: This was the exception, not the rule.

And so, relieved to have that experience behind me, I anxiously awaited a new H.R. 1 for a new Congress—an H.R. 1 that I could be proud of. At the onset of the 108th Congress, I was handed another H.R. 1: the Medicare Prescription Drug Bill, the largest new entitlement since 1965.

To the frozen man it was obvious. Another Congress. Another H.R.1. Another example of the ship of our movement veering off course.

Actually, this bill started out promising. The President asked Congress for a very limited program: extending existing welfare benefits to seniors just above the poverty level—where most of the one-in-four seniors without prescription drug coverage reside.

Many conservatives, myself included, were prepared to support this limited benefit. I told the President that we shouldn't make seniors choose between food, rent, and prescription drugs. We were a better country than that.

Yet instead of giving the President the limited benefit he requested, Congress set sail to create the largest new entitlement since 1965—a massive one-size-fits-all entitlement that would place trillions in obligations on our children and grandchildren without giving any thought about how to pay for it.

Conservatives in the House were faced with a difficult choice: Oppose the President we love or support the expansion of the big government we hate.

In the end—with the stalwart support of the Heritage Foundation and its courageous president—25 rebels decided to make a stand for the principle of limited government.

It is said, "In fire gold is tested," and so it is. While much has been made of the pressure that my colleagues and I endured, we also witnessed the unprecedented pressure placed on the Heritage Foundation and its president to conform to the majority's will. Instead of capitulating, Ed Feulner, Stuart Butler, and the Heritage Foundation confirmed the confidence of tens of thousands of their supporters over the decades by standing firm.

When all the votes were counted, we were one rebel short. In the end the bill passed. The welfare state expanded. And the ship of conservative government veered off course.

### **Taking a Stand**

However, as recent developments suggest, I will always believe that the stand we took mattered. Even in defeat. Sometimes a small group of people can take a stand, be defeated, and still make a difference.

In 1836, less than 200 men fought against thousands of Mexican forces to defend an ancient Christian mission on the plains of Texas. Though they died to the last man, the Texas volunteers within those missionary walls exacted such a horrific toll on the army of Santa Anna that Colonel Juan Almonte privately noted, “One more such glorious victory and we are finished.”

And so they were. The inspiration of the men who made their stand at the Alamo fueled the victory that Sam Houston would lead just six weeks later.

“One more such glorious victory and we are finished.”

- One more big-government education bill.
- One more new government entitlement.
- One more compromise of who we are as limited government Republicans—and our majority could be finished.

What then is the state of the movement? It is strong on the advance, but veering off course from our commitment to limited government.

The time has come for conservatives to retake the helm of this movement and renew our commitment to fiscal discipline and to what we know to be true about the nature of government:

- Conservatives know that government that governs least governs best.
- Conservatives know that as government expands, freedom contracts.
- Conservatives know that government should never do for a man what he can and should do for himself.

## Reagan’s Perspective

As I think of these timeless principles, I think of Ronald Reagan. I met President Reagan in the summer of 1988. I was a 29-year-old candidate for Congress and he was winding down a presidency that changed the world. It was a candidate photo-op in the Blue Room of the White House. I was determined to say something of meaning to the great man.

After we exchanged pleasantries, I told him I was grateful for everything he had done for the country and everything he had done to inspire my generation to believe in America again. He seemed surprised. His cheeks appeared to redden with

embarrassment and he said, “Well, Mike, that’s a very nice thing of you to say.”

Moments later, he took a minute to respond to the accolades that I and others offered with characteristic humility and optimism saying: “Many of you have thanked me for what I did for America but I want you to know I don’t think I did anything. The American people decided it was time to right the ship and I was just the captain they put on the bridge when they did it.”

As I said in January of this year in my address to CPAC (the Conservative Political Action Conference), it’s time for conservative Americans to do what Reagan did. It’s time for conservative Americans to right the ship again. It is time to celebrate our great Republican President and Congress as they lead our nation’s progress in national security, economic prosperity, and the value of human life.

But it is also time to see her listing to port—in the direction of big government—and set her right again. Know that this is not a sign of disloyalty, but of true loyalty to principle. When a ship is approaching a rocky coast, the life of the ship and its crew depends on the navigator (with his sextant) to counsel the captain and crew to steer clear of the shoals and—if need be—to forcefully oppose the captain when the fate of the ship hangs in the balance.

In the months since I first delivered this challenge, conservatives—including many in this room—have done just that. They have done that in newsprint, on talk radio, and cable news. Conservatives have spoken with integrity and courage to our leaders in Washington about the error of our present heading.

And the ship is turning.

## A Course Correction

Since that day in November when I, and a great many others, spoke words of admonition to our President and the leaders in Congress, there is evidence that a course correction is underway.

In just the past few months, this President has asked Congress to ensure sustained economic growth by making his tax cuts permanent. He has called for restraints on federal spending and produced a budget that holds the growth of the discretionary federal government to less than 1 percent. He

has made it clear that he would veto the upcoming highway bill if it raises taxes or busts the budget.

After weeks of confusion from Massachusetts to California, this President has brought moral clarity to the debate over same-sex marriage by calling on Congress to pass a Constitutional Amendment to protect marriage. The President rightly called marriage “the most enduring human institution,” and so it is. Marriage was ordained by God, confirmed by law, is the glue of the American family, and is the safest harbor for children.

This, then, is our cause: to stand with our captain as he leads us well, to right the ship when she is adrift, and to support every effort to set her right.

As Robert Kriehle knew, this cause will prevail. Our labors for liberty are never in vain. The cause of freedom is not our cause, but—as a young King

David knew—the cause is His: the author and finisher of our faith and our freedom.

It is written: “It is for freedom that Christ has set you free.” I believe, with all my heart, that He who set this miracle of democracy on these wilderness shores will see the cause of freedom through every tomorrow until—by His grace—the veil of tyranny is lifted from every corner of planet Earth.

Thank you for the honor of addressing you and thank you for all you do to keep the cause of conservative values alive in this shining city on the hill, this last best hope of earth—these United States of America.

—*The Honorable Mike Pence (R-IN) presented the annual Kriehle Lecture at the 27<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of The Heritage Foundation’s Resource Bank in Chicago, Illinois.*

### About Robert H. Kriebel

Robert Kriebel made his first major mark on the world back in the 1950s, in the improbable realm of nuts and bolts. The problem was as elementary as it was vexing: When you fasten mechanical parts together with nuts and bolts, how do you keep them from working loose and falling apart?

It was a mechanical engineer's problem, but Bob envisioned a chemical engineer's solution. He and his father, working together in a business that began with six customers and sales of \$300 a month, perfected a bonding compound. They called it Loctite, a name coined by Bob's wife, Nancy, who later served as an Honorary Trustee of The Heritage Foundation. One drop would permanently wed nut to bolt. Bob and his father began producing the compound and selling it to industries that built everything from dishwashers to farm tractors. Their company, the Loctite Corporation, grew into a Fortune 500 giant.

Having caused a quiet revolution in the business world, Bob turned his mind to politics and the consequences of another revolution: the communist revolution that spawned the hideous specter of the Soviet Union. While American politicians were fashioning policies on the assumption that the Soviet Union was a permanent fixture on the planet, Bob thought otherwise. He was convinced that so craven a system could be undone by better people with better ideas.

Never knowing a problem he wouldn't attack, Bob set to work nurturing the internal strengths that lay buried alive under the Kremlin's rule. He began smuggling computers and fax machines to Soviet

citizens. Making more than 50 trips himself, he organized field teams that went behind the Iron Curtain to live among the Soviet people and spread the subversive doctrines of freedom and democracy. The KGB warned President Gorbachev about these subversives, but he ignored the warning and thus invited the coup that toppled his regime.

Bob produced the first political commercials ever run on Ukrainian television. They promoted Ukrainian independence. And when 89 percent of the voters agreed with that message, their democratic will drove the last nail into the Soviet coffin.

In his every success, Bob Kriebel was a model and an inspiration for conservatives. He showed us that seemingly impossible dreams can be achieved if only we form an intelligent plan and pursue it with an attitude that knows no defeat.

Too many conservatives lose hope. They doubt that the liberal welfare state can be brought to collapse and that America can be set squarely on its original foundations. They doubt that future generations will enjoy the freedom and liberty we have fought so hard to preserve. In short, they doubt that the Heritage Foundation's vision for America can be achieved.

The only acceptable response to them is the one Bob Kriebel gave to every naysayer who doubted him, to every obstacle that ever stood between him and his vision of great things that could be and ought to be: Yes, we can.