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Laying the Groundwork for a Revolution

The Honorable Roy Blunt

I want to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to be here today. It's a great honor to be around men and women of such passion and principle: people who support limited government, the rule of law, the vigorous defense of our national borders, and the pursuit of freedom. Keep in mind that I work on Capitol Hill, where agreement on these principles isn't always easy to find.

At Heritage, our nation's founding principles still mean a lot, and for the people lucky enough to work here—whether you're an intern for the summer or part of the full-time staff—serving as the conscience of the conservative movement as well as its catalyst is a full-time responsibility. I'm glad you're a part of that, and you should be too.

Last November, just a few days after the midterms, I came here to share some thoughts on what the results of that election meant; what, in my judgment, they did not mean; and how members of my party could take advantage of our new status to renew our purpose, refocus our message, and rededicate ourselves to the ideas and principles that brought us to public service in the first place.

In the eight months since then, I've learned that life in the minority provides you a little more time to think. Not necessarily a good thing, but not necessarily a bad thing, to have occasional moments to take stock. And in the minority, I've learned it's the strength of your ideas—not the rules of the House—that provide your only chance to win the argument, if not always the vote, on a given day.

Talking Points

Conservatives know that the solutions to illegal immigration, runaway government spending, a failing health care system, and a lack of adequate domestic energy resources are found in taking simple steps:

- Secure the border;
- Stop runaway spending;
- Give individuals, not bureaucrats, control over their health care;
- Understand that a secure domestic energy policy is part of a sound homeland security strategy; and
- Trust the American people to make decisions on how to spend their money for themselves and their families.

These solutions may sound simple, but it is often the simplest ideas—as in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—that form the firmest groundwork for a revolution.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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Too often, in the majority, the need to govern became more important than the results of our work. But what we're for and why it's right for the country are questions a minority party in Congress must ask itself if it wants to regain the trust of the American people and, eventually, the responsibility of advancing our agenda rather than stopping theirs. These are also the questions a political movement must ask itself if it hopes to remain an active participant in the battle of ideas our country is all about.

Protecting the Nation

I don't know that it's possible to seriously discuss our domestic goals and ideas without first addressing the matter of security. The federal government has no greater responsibility than to protect the life, liberty, and property of its citizens. And so, before we can talk about health savings accounts, marginal tax rates, or coal-to-liquids, we must first confront the issue of terrorism and security in a new age of conflict and resolution.

To do this requires a national security strategy that is thoughtful and aggressive. More than that, it requires a posture that treats the business of fighting terrorists not as a series of trials and prosecutions, but as an overarching, global strategy to counter extremism abroad and disrupt the planning and execution of terrorist activities here at home. And despite what some will tell you, the front lines of this struggle can be found in Iraq, where right now our men and women and uniform are battling, capturing, and killing members of al-Qaeda and other agents of radical Islam.

It is perhaps one of the great paradoxes of American politics that those who support an ever-expanding role for the federal government—as an arbiter of outcome, a distributor of wealth, and an engineer of social good—nonetheless reject the idea that that same government should be given the resources and support it needs to keep us safe from attack.

The enemies we are confronted with today are different from those of the previous century. They owe no allegiance to governments and hold little regard for life, liberty, or the tranquil pursuit of happiness. They are concerned with only one thing: the complete destruction of those who do not share their narrow view of the world. We must confront their

tactics of terror with the same level of passion and single-minded determination that drives them to act.

But we must also realize that even if it had unlimited resources, the federal government cannot and should not be everywhere. To fill these inevitable gaps, we need a strong and coordinated effort from state and local officials. In foiling the terrorist bombings in Piccadilly Circus last month, it was not agents of the central British government acting on exclusive intelligence that prevented the possible deaths of hundreds or thousands of people. It was a squad of local rescue workers who followed their instincts and worked with national agencies to block a potentially catastrophic attack. Recognizing the realities of the threats we face, we need to allocate our scarce national resources according to metrics of risk and vulnerability, not patronage and personal favor.

Securing Our Borders

Of course, even with ample resources and equipment, there are limits to what state and local officials can do. Handling our national immigration system is one of them. The Constitution is very clear about whose job it is to define our border, secure it, and make sure those who come through it are regulated, identified, verified, and deemed legal to be here.

Sadly, the federal government has not proven up to the task in fulfilling these basic responsibilities. Legislation passed during the last Congress in the House would have built a secure wall, sent thousands of additional federal agents to the border, and punished employers who willfully break the law. It didn't get very far in the Senate—only the part that would build a wall became law. But then again, neither did the truly dangerous bill the Senate passed last year or the equally bad proposal that was soundly rejected by House conservatives and the American people last month.

You know, you couldn't pick up a newspaper a year ago during the Hezbollah attacks on Israel without reading somewhere that the government of Lebanon was not really a government because it couldn't control its southern border. I think that's one of the definitions of whether your government is working or not, and right now, we have a lot of work to do on that.

Conservatives understand that America is a nation of immigrants and of opportunity, benefiting from the free and vigorous exchange of ideas, cultures, and customs. But we also know this is a nation of laws, of order, and of respect for those who came to this country the right way and followed the rules once they got here.

Stopping Runaway Spending

Respect for the rule of law and working together to protect our homeland are responsibilities that all Americans should share. A reckless spending agenda in Washington should not be forced on the working people of our country who already pay their share. Unfortunately, the majority this year passed a federal budget plan that will raise taxes by somewhere between \$250 billion and \$400 billion in just five years, and this year alone, they plan to spend \$115 billion more than last year.

Stop and think for a moment how truly incomprehensible a figure like that is. If you went on a \$1,000 shopping spree today and every day thereafter until you spent just \$1 billion, you would have to shop every day for the next 2,740 years. But it only takes about four hours for the government to spend \$1 billion of your money—to do for you what we are told you cannot do for yourself.

Over the years, the government has managed to creep into our lives in a number of new, increasingly intrusive ways as it has added to its menu of so-called essential services. Today, our government makes first contact with you before you are born and does not let go until after you die—and I mean *long* after.

We have programs to take care of you in the womb and programs that will be there alongside the doctor when you are born. Then you take your first steps. We have federal programs for child care, for gifted students, failing students, juvenile delinquency, and ADD. We have programs that teach kids how to swim, jog, and play tennis. We have programs that teach our young people how to do a proper sit-up and what snacks to avoid after dinner.

As you grow older, the government will help you buy a home, fix it up, and then sell it for a bigger one. When today's young workers retire, the government will send back a small portion of what you put

into Social Security and use the rest now to provide services you never knew you couldn't live without. And when you die, there are programs for that too.

Three generations of post–New Deal efforts to rein in the size of government have resulted in short bursts of success sandwiched in between long periods of disappointment. And, frankly, it's not hard to understand why, because while it's easy to oppose big government in the abstract, when it comes to specifics, the entrenched interests that protect every government program as if their livelihoods depend on it—and they often do—make it next to impossible to reduce spending or, heaven forbid, roll it back. Remembering the \$40 billion cut in entitlements we shepherded through the last Congress, it seems we were still straining to drain the swamp with a teaspoon while liberals are now using a fire hose to restore their hallowed view of the Great Society.

So what are we to do? In order to try to get the upper hand, I have proposed that we develop a “pay-go” rule for the creation of new government programs and benefits. Very simply, if it is your intention to create a new government program, you must in the same bill terminate an existing government program of equal or greater size. While it would not decrease the size of government, if it's all we do, it would force a fight between advocates of new programs and those battling to keep what they have. And just maybe we will find out that neither program had a whole lot of merit in the first place.

Bringing Sanity to Health Care

Whatever specific plan we adopt to roll back spending, we have to realize that the impact these government programs have on our society is not just measured in dollars. Everyone in this room knows that when government pays the bills, government makes the rules. It's true for all the programs I mentioned. It's true for education. And it's particularly true when it comes to the delivery of health care.

For liberals, the predictable answer to rising costs, uneven access, and diminishing quality of our nation's health care system is to spend more money and issue more government mandates and regulations. The three leading liberal candidates for our nation's most serious elected office have settled on

the idea that universal, government-run health care is the solution to all our health care problems.

How that works in practice is already proven. Just take a look at the Medicare system. What a doctor gets paid for treating our seniors often has nothing to do with the cost to the doctor, but is based on a government formula. Prices do not change as a result of innovation or competition, but when a new regulation is enacted.

And wouldn't you know it: The government almost never gets the price right. When it sets the compensation for certain procedures or services too low, you get rationing of care. When the government sets the price too high for another procedure, seniors find themselves getting tests and treatments they don't need. And just to make sure no one operated outside this perfect government system, it is actually against the law for a senior and a Medicare doctor to agree to any care or payment system outside of Medicare.

Some of us have been working with groups like Heritage to find a better way—a way that recognizes that Americans want quality health care when and where they want it and that, as taxpayers, they want the best price possible when government pays. The marketplace is the only known mechanism available to deliver what people want.

Rather than expanding government-controlled programs, we should work to expand access to private individual health insurance. A tax deduction coupled with a tax credit for individual health insurance would expand on the success we have already seen in Medicare Part D and health savings accounts by providing a real means for millions of Americans to go into the private market and purchase the insurance that is best for them.

Insurance coverage, premiums, and even payments to the doctor would be worked out in the marketplace, not by some bureaucrat. The marketplace already works to help keep costs low in other forms of insurance, like homeowners and auto. Can you imagine the guy who fixes your fender after a wreck getting paid by a government formula rather than negotiating the price with you and your insurance company? What insanity! It's time to introduce some sanity into the health care system and empow-

er individuals to make these decisions rather than the government.

Making America Energy Independent

The right tax policies for a strong economy, health care initiatives derived from and driven by the marketplace, and energy independence will be the pillars of a new American century.

Americans' energy bills went up again this summer. Unfortunately, nearly two-thirds of our oil comes from places outside the United States these days, and a good portion of that is shipped from areas of the world where hatred for the West in general and America in particular is the rule. There is nothing wrong with buying things from people who don't like you, but it's really dumb to *have* to buy things from people who don't like you.

You cannot reduce our reliance on foreign energy when you refuse to tap into our own supply. You cannot substitute alternative energy for imported fossil fuels fast enough if you make it impossible to build nuclear power plants or refuse to explore and utilize the abundant resources we have off our own shores, in the Arctic, and in the form of hydrodams we already have in place. Renewables, alternatives, and conservation are also important parts of energy independence—but make no mistake: Energy independence requires actual energy.

As it stands, an energy bill produced by this Congress is more likely to increase our reliance on foreign energy and increase costs to families looking to cool down their homes or fill up their cars. That is why I believe we should require government to answer one simple question before passing any energy policy: Will it increase our domestic energy supply and reduce our reliance on foreign energy?

If we can judge proposals by that basic standard, I believe we can focus on energy policies that hold the most promise, including expanding oil, natural gas, and coal production on land and off; building our next generation of nuclear power plants; investing in biofuels; and deploying more windmills and hydrotechnology.

The bills being shuffled through any of the 11 separate House committees this summer—some of which have never even seen an energy bill before—

produce no energy and actually increase our reliance on foreign sources. These bills acknowledge not a single one of the 12 key energy principles identified by Heritage last month and, as a consequence, leave our country less able to respond to disruptions at home and more vulnerable to circumstances abroad.

More energy dependence is exactly what we don't need. Unfortunately, the congressional majority tends to believe that energy comes from a light switch and that the solutions to our nation's energy problems come from taxes, mandates, and regulations—not more supply.

Looking to the Future

These are some of the challenges and opportunities that face conservatives today, and it is up to us to rise to these challenges and meet these opportunities. Yet I often feel that some parts of the Washington establishment have been paralyzed by the desire to solve every problem with either the trendiest new idea or the most complicated policy imaginable—the less decipherable, the better.

As conservatives, we know the solutions to illegal immigration, runaway government spending, a failing health care system, and a lack of adequate

domestic energy resources are found in taking the simple steps my constituents in Southwest Missouri remind me of time and time again:

- Secure the border;
- Stop runaway spending;
- Give individuals, not bureaucrats, control over their health care;
- Understand that a secure domestic energy policy is part of a sound homeland security strategy; and
- Trust the American people to make decisions on how to spend their money for themselves and their families.

These solutions may sound simple, but it is often the simplest ideas—as in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—that form the firmest groundwork for a revolution.

Thank you again for your time, your dedication, and your commitment to the realization of a future in which conservative values remain the bedrock, the foundation, the architecture, and—above all—the driving force for revolutionary change.

—*The Honorable Roy Blunt represents the Seventh District of Missouri and serves as Minority Whip in the U.S. House of Representatives.*