



SOLUTIONS for America



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Changing America's Course

THE ISSUE:

The United States is the world's strongest, most prosperous, most just, and freest nation. Yet the path we have been following is turning America into a very different place: a country stifled by a highly regulated economy, nationalized industries, and government-run health care, ruled more by bureaucrats and judges than by the consent of the governed and with a foreign policy that pays far too much deference to international organizations and erodes American sovereignty. The American people now face the choice of either continuing the policies of progressive liberalism or changing course to a new direction that is guided by principle and oriented toward renewing America's greatest purpose and promise.

THE FACTS:

- **We Hold These Truths.** America is unique in its dedication to the principles of liberty and constitutional government. The United States stands for the proposition—proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence and embodied in the Constitution—that all are created equal and endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Government exists to secure these rights, and its legitimate powers are derived from the consent of the governed. An enduring framework of limited government secures national independence and the rule of law, provides for economic opportunity and religious liberty, and maintains a flourishing society of republican self-government.
 - **Liberalism's Rejection of America's Principles.** Over the course of the 20th century, modern liberalism repudiated America's core principles, holding that there are no self-evident truths but only relative values, no permanent rights but only changing rights held at the indulgence of government. The Constitution is a "living" document that endlessly evolves and grows with the times, and it is the new pur-
- pose of government to engineer a better society, assuring equal outcomes and redistributing wealth through a distant and patronizing welfare state that regulates more and more of America's economy, politics, and society.
- **Unlimited Government.** As a result, the federal government now dominates virtually every area of life, and we are wrapped in an intricate web of its policies and procedures. While Congress passes massive pieces of legislation with little serious deliberation, the majority of "laws" are promulgated in the guise of "regulations" by administrators who are mostly unaccountable and invisible to the public. The United States government now controls formerly private banks, a major insurance firm, and significant lenders of home loans, and has stock ownership in leading automobile companies.
 - **Unsustainable Spending.** Annual federal spending has increased by 242 percent since 1970, eight times faster than median household income. The annual federal government budget did not reach \$1 trillion until 1987 but exceeded \$2 trillion in 2002 and \$3 trillion in 2009. The expansion of federal government spending is being driven mostly by the growth of guaranteed entitlements, now more than half of all program spending, and is expected to nearly double over the next decade. As a result, the current national debt (about \$68,000 per household) will double in five years and nearly triple over the next 10 years.
 - **The Collapse of Self-Government.** In assuming more and more tasks in more and more areas outside of its responsibilities, modern government has greatly damaged American self-rule. The state's extended reach—fueled by its imperative to impose moral neutrality on the public square—continues to push traditional social institutions into the shadows. By feeding an entitlement mentality and dependence rather than promoting self-reliance and independence, administrative government encourages a character incompatible with republicanism.

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First Principles

The future of liberty depends on reclaiming America's first principles. This product is part of the First Principles Initiative, one of 10 transformational initiatives in our Leadership for America campaign.

- **An Increasingly Dangerous World.** Transnational terrorism, rampant anti-Americanism, unaccountable international institutions, nuclear proliferation, and regional conflict all threaten our security, our liberties, and our prosperity. The ability of rogue nations and hostile non-state actors to use weapons of mass destruction against the United States creates a new and compelling interest in America’s actively defending itself. Complacency, either at home or abroad, risks not only the peaceful and productive future of this country, but also that of its friends and allies.

THE SOLUTIONS:

- **Reset America’s Compass.** Despite constant criticism and scorn by academic elites, politicians, and the popular media, most Americans still believe in the uniqueness of this country and respect the principles that define its meaning. We must look to the principles and practices of the American Founding not as a matter of historical curiosity, but as a source of assurance and direction for our times.
- **Unshackle American Enterprise.** The American system of democratic capitalism is under concerted attack and must be defended. Government should be the framework for promoting unlimited opportunity and widespread prosperity, and the key is to increase incentives to produce by removing barriers to work and investment: decreasing tax rates, reducing government spending, and preventing the overregulation of private enterprise. It is imperative that we unshackle America’s entrepreneurs and allow the power of economic creativity to flourish.
- **Take Back Our Fiscal Future.** The first step toward restoring budget responsibility is to reform the budget decision process so that Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid—the major drivers of escalating deficits—are no longer on autopilot. In order to ensure a fiscally sustainable future and better stewardship for younger generations, entitlements must be transformed away from subsidized benefits to everyone regardless of need toward real insurance whereby the government spreads risk and protects people against unexpected and devastating occurrences.
- **Restore the Institutions of Civil Society.** Liberty and limited government rest on the strength of institutions that precede our constitutional order. Rather than expanding government intervention in family life and curtailing religious influence in the public square, we must advance policy changes that strengthen marriage and the family and recognize a robust understanding of religion in society.
- **Look to the States.** Self-government cannot be revived without a decided reversal of administrative centralization in the United States, and that means a significant decentralization of power and vast areas of policymaking from the federal government to states, local communities, neighborhoods, families, and citizens. Education, health care, transportation, criminal law enforcement, and homeland security—all issues that in recent decades have become federal concerns but are better dealt with at the state and local levels of government—are ripe for this kind of reform.
- **Promote Liberty and Independence.** As a matter of principle, the United States must be able, willing, and prepared at all times to defend itself and its institutions, just as it promotes the long-term prosperity and well-being of its people. A profound commitment to the concept of sovereignty must be at the center of our nation’s policies. But liberty does not belong only to the United States, and this country must recognize its special responsibility to defend the cause of liberty in the world.
- **Restore the Limits of Government.** To protect individual liberty, the Framers of the Constitution carefully enumerated the powers to be vested in the national government, rejecting any broader approach as dangerous. This great limitation has been whittled away to almost nothing. Today, Congress routinely legislates without regard to the constitutional limits on its powers, and only rarely do the courts act to enforce these limits. Indeed, Congress does not just ignore the constitutional limitations on its powers. Members have repeatedly failed to read the bills upon which they were voting, and some have even declared that they have to pass gargantuan bills first so that they can find out what is in them. None of this inspires confidence in Congress as an institution or in its members, who take an oath to support the Constitution.
- **Reform Government.** Congress should provide proper notice of bill texts to Members of Congress and the public. Each House of Congress should adopt a rule requiring, absent special circumstances, the posting of the text of all bills on an Internet site not less than two days before floor debate begins on such bills. Members should be given a point of order to challenge departures from the rule that would require at least a bare majority vote. Congress should not use improper means to enact major laws such as the “reconciliation” process reserved for budget bills. And Congress should adopt adequate procedures to consider the constitutionality of pending bills along the lines of those set forth in the Enumerated Powers Act, which would require that all legislation in Congress contain a concise explanation of the constitutional authority empowering Congress to act on it.

Solutions for America is a product of Heritage’s Leadership for America campaign. Our mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.