

## The Mount Vernon Statement Recommits Conservatives to the American Founding

February 17, 2010

### INTRODUCTION

Like the Sharon Statement written fifty years earlier, the Mount Vernon Statement is a statement of principle meant to assert general beliefs rather than a political agenda declaring particular policy positions.

The unique importance of this statement, consistent with earlier conservative thinkers and statesmen, is its strong emphasis on “the ideas of the American Founding.” It is a recommitment of conservatism to those ideas—which “define us as a country and inspire us as a people”—as the core principles that undergird conservative thought and public policy. This is significant: the statement underscores the long-maintained view that the ideas of America, and the tradition of limited government and the flourishing of liberty that emanates from America’s first principles, are what conservatives seek to conserve. Many of the phrases of the statement echo the language of America’s core founding documents.

The “constitutional conservatism” of the Mount Vernon Statement stands in opposition to the claims

that permanent truths such as those proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence do not in fact exist and that the limits imposed by the Constitution are obsolete and irrelevant. Rather than follow demands to cast off the old and put on the new—the constant rhetoric of progressive liberalism—constitutional conservatism calls for change toward America’s first principles as guidance for the twenty-first century.

Importantly, the statement also emphasizes that the principles of the Founding provide a “natural fusion” (as opposed to an artificial fusion of mere political expediency) that unites economic, social, and national security conservatives and defines the core framework for a consistent and meaningful conservative policy agenda informed by those principles.

Launched on February 17, 2010, and initially signed by a small list of prominent conservative leaders, the Mount Vernon Statement has since been signed by close to 50,000 individuals from many backgrounds and organizations. After reading the document, readers may sign it at [www.themountvernonstatement.com](http://www.themountvernonstatement.com).

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# The Mount Vernon Statement

## Constitutional Conservatism: A Statement for the 21st Century

*Signed February 17, 2010, at the Collingwood Library and Museum on Americanism,  
part of the original Mount Vernon estate owned by George Washington.*

We recommit ourselves to the ideas of the American Founding. Through the Constitution, the Founders created an enduring framework of limited government based on the rule of law. They sought to secure national independence, provide for economic opportunity, establish true religious liberty and maintain a flourishing society of republican self-government.

These principles define us as a country and inspire us as a people. They are responsible for a prosperous, just nation unlike any other in the world. They are our highest achievements, serving not only as powerful beacons to all who strive for freedom and seek self-government, but as warnings to tyrants and despots everywhere.

Each one of these founding ideas is presently under sustained attack. In recent decades, America's principles have been undermined and redefined in our culture, our universities and our politics. The self-evident truths of 1776 have been supplanted by the notion that no such truths exist. The federal government today ignores the limits of the Constitution, which is increasingly dismissed as obsolete and irrelevant.

Some insist that America must change, cast off the old and put on the new. But where would this lead—forward or backward, up or down? Isn't this idea of change an empty promise or even a dangerous deception?

The change we urgently need, a change consistent with the American ideal, is not movement away from

but toward our founding principles. At this important time, we need a restatement of Constitutional conservatism grounded in the priceless principle of ordered liberty articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

The conservatism of the Declaration asserts self-evident truths based on the laws of nature and nature's God. It defends life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It traces authority to the consent of the governed. It recognizes man's self-interest but also his capacity for virtue.

The conservatism of the Constitution limits government's powers but ensures that government performs its proper job effectively. It refines popular will through the filter of representation. It provides checks and balances through the several branches of government and a federal republic.

A Constitutional conservatism unites all conservatives through the natural fusion provided by American principles. It reminds economic conservatives that morality is essential to limited government, social conservatives that unlimited government is a threat to moral self-government, and national security conservatives that energetic but responsible government is the key to America's safety and leadership role in the world.

A Constitutional conservatism based on first principles provides the framework for a consistent and meaningful policy agenda.

- It applies the principle of limited government based on the rule of law to every proposal.
- It honors the central place of individual liberty in American politics and life.
- It encourages free enterprise, the individual entrepreneur, and economic reforms grounded in market solutions.
- It supports America's national interest in advancing freedom and opposing tyranny in the world and prudently considers what we can and should do to that end.
- It informs conservatism's firm defense of family, neighborhood, community, and faith.

If we are to succeed in the critical political and policy battles ahead, we must be certain of our purpose.

We must begin by retaking and resolutely defending the high ground of America's founding principles.

Edwin Meese, former U.S. Attorney General under President Reagan

Wendy Wright, president of Concerned Women for America

Edwin Feulner, Jr., president of the Heritage Foundation

Lee Edwards, Distinguished Fellow in Conservative Thought at The Heritage Foundation, was present at the Sharon Statement signing.

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council

Becky Norton Dunlop, president of the Council for National Policy

Brent Bozell, president of the Media Research Center

Alfred Regnery, publisher of the *American Spectator*

David Keene, president of the American Conservative Union

David McIntosh, co-founder of the Federalist Society

T. Kenneth Cribb, former domestic policy adviser to President Reagan

Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform

William Wilson, President, Americans for Limited Government

Elaine Donnelly, Center for Military Readiness

Richard Viguerie, Chairman, ConservativeHQ.com

Kenneth Blackwell, Coalition for a Conservative Majority

Colin Hanna, President, Let Freedom Ring

Kathryn J. Lopez, *National Review*

Tom Winter, Editor in Chief, *Human Events*

Morton Blackwell, President, The Leadership Institute