

REFOCUS. REENERGIZE. RECONQUER

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This last election cycle has set many in the conservative movement back on their heels. Were the Democratic victories that swept across the nation a repudiation of conservatism? Has the Reagan revolution come to an end?

The short answer is “no,” but that doesn’t mean that the conservative movement isn’t in need of some serious introspection. The election results were a repudiation of the Republican Party, but the Republican Party abandoned conservatism some time ago. Massive government spending and expansion of the nanny state have become the hallmarks of the modern Republican Party.

If Ronald Reagan and the 104th Congress taught us anything, it is that conservatism works and people who forcefully and clearly articulate conservative principles win elections. If this last election has taught us anything, it is that those conservative principles must be more than mere rhetoric or the voters will cast those people out of office.

Political parties don’t have philosophies. They are blunt instruments designed to obtain and retain power. In order to use that instrument, conservatives must reassert themselves

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and provide the philosophical direction that will allow the Republican Party to reach out to Americans. Conservatives must address the major issues that affect the lives of all Americans.

First among these are the symbiotic issues of government largesse and the burden of taxation. Support for small, inexpensive, unobtrusive government is a

bedrock principle of conservatism because conservatives understand that the true cost of distended government is individual liberty. Every dollar sent to fill a government coffer is one less that a person can use in their own lives. Every meddling law enacted by a bustling nanny government results in citizens having less liberty to manage their own lives.

The crushing weight of taxation drags down our entire society. It drains our economy of energy. It prevents families from enjoying the full fruits of their labor. It bleeds the very life out of our social contract and leaves an anemic shadow of our Founding Fathers’ vision. Conservatives must vigorously confront the increasingly universal supposition

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that government can solve all of society's ills with yet another program. Instead, conservatives should battle to lighten the weight of taxation so that individual Americans can keep their own money and make their own choices on how to better their lives.

The second issue that conservatives must address is that of paying for health care. Health care affects every American and paying for it has become a very serious problem. The national consensus appears to be forming around some sort of government program to solve the nation's health care woes. So far, conservatives have done a poor job defining and articulating an alternative to this consensus.

The appeal of a government solution to health care is strong. For the average American, it presents the opportunity to transfer the cost and responsibility for their own health care to someone else. Government-controlled health care is also an easy political sell because it can be clearly and quickly explained. What is often forgotten or ignored is the incredible surrender of liberty that government health care entails. Once a person gives control of his health care to the government, the government controls everything about the person.

Conservatives must develop a coherent market-based health care reform plan that can be clearly articulated as the preferred alternative to socialized health care. A great deal of thought has been invested by the conservative movement into developing solid market-based solutions to the health care system's problems. What is missing is a way to package those ideas into a plan that can be easily explained. What's missing is the "elevator pitch" – a way to sell the idea in three minutes or less. The best ideas in the world are useless if they can't be sold to the electorate.

The third issue that the conservative movement must address is that of education. Education touches the lives of every single American, yet conservatives have ceded both the K-12 system and the public university system to the Left. This surrender has exacted an

enormous cost on both the conservative movement and America's children.

The Left has used their control of education over the past several decades to socially engineer their vision for America at the expense of providing America's youth with quality schooling. The result is that America's children continue to fall behind the rest of the world in education. An average American tenth grader can explain the tenets of global warming theory as articulated by Al Gore, but he can't balance a checkbook. Conservatives should no longer accept education policies that indoctrinate rather than educate. America's kids deserve better.

Furthermore, the result of the Left's control of education is that waves of kids graduate every year who have been immersed in liberalism for over a decade. That, coupled with the fact that many of these kids are economically illiterate and lack a basic understanding of civics, leads to a continually refreshed voting base for the Left. This has been the unintended political consequence of abandoning the business of teaching to the Left.

The conservative ideas for education have been successful wherever they have been tried. Merit pay for teachers. School choice. Direct instruction. All of these policies are focused on providing children with a quality education instead of a quality indoctrination. By forcefully advancing a proven child-centered education platform, the conservative movement can take the vanguard on education policy.

Taxes, health care, and education are issues that directly affect every single American. From Rockefeller Republicans to Blue Dog Democrats to soccer moms to NASCAR dads to middle class families to destitute bums, every American has cursed taxes, fretted over doctor bills, or worried about the education of their children. These three issues are exceedingly important.

The conservative movement is alive and well, but it must be reasserted by strong leaders to regain control of the Republican Party and the country.