

Foreword

A PROMISE TO AMERICA

Kevin D. Roberts, PhD

Forty-four years ago, the United States and the conservative movement were in dire straits. Both had been betrayed by the Washington establishment and were uncertain whom to trust. Both were internally splintered and strategically adrift. Worse still, at that moment of acute vulnerability and division, we found ourselves besieged by existential adversaries, foreign and domestic. The late 1970s were by any measure a historic low point for America and the political coalition dedicated to preserving its unique legacy of human flourishing and freedom.

Today, America and the conservative movement are enduring an era of division and danger akin to the late 1970s. Now, as then, our political class has been discredited by wholesale dishonesty and corruption. Look at America under the ruling and cultural elite today: Inflation is ravaging family budgets, drug overdose deaths continue to escalate, and children suffer the toxic normalization of transgenderism with drag queens and pornography invading their school libraries. Overseas, a totalitarian Communist dictatorship in Beijing is engaged in a strategic, cultural, and economic Cold War against America's interests, values, and people—all while globalist elites in Washington awaken only slowly to that growing threat. Moreover, low-income communities are drowning in addiction and government dependence. Contemporary elites have even repurposed the worst ingredients of 1970s “radical chic” to build the totalitarian cult known today as “The Great Awakening.” And now, as then, the Republican Party seems to have little understanding about what to do. Most alarming of all, the very moral foundations of our society are in peril.

Yet students of history will note that, notwithstanding all those challenges, the late 1970s proved to be the moment when the political Right unified itself

Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise

and the country and led the United States to historic political, economic, and global victories.

The Heritage Foundation is proud to have played a small but pivotal role in that story. It was in early 1979—amid stagflation, gas lines, and the Red Army’s invasion of Afghanistan, the nadir of Jimmy Carter’s days of malaise—that Heritage launched the Mandate for Leadership project. We brought together hundreds of conservative scholars and academics across the conservative movement. Together, this team created a 20-volume, 3,000-page governing handbook containing more than 2,000 conservative policies to reform the federal government and rescue the American people from Washington dysfunction. It was a promise from the conservative movement to the country—confident, specific, and clear.

Mandate for Leadership was published in January 1981—the same month Ronald Reagan was sworn into his presidency. By the end of that year, more than 60 percent of its recommendations had become policy—and Reagan was on his way to ending stagflation, reviving American confidence and prosperity, and winning the Cold War.

The bad news today is that our political establishment and cultural elite have once again driven America toward decline. The good news is that we know the way out even though the challenges today are not what they were in the 1970s. Conservatives should be confident that we can rescue our kids, reclaim our culture, revive our economy, and defeat the anti-American Left—at home and abroad. We did it before and will do it again.

As Ronald Reagan put it:

Freedom is a fragile thing and it’s never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by way of inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation[.]¹

This is the duty history has put before us and the standard by which our generation of conservatives will be judged. And we should not want it any other way.

The legacy of *Mandate for Leadership*, and indeed of the entire Reagan Revolution, is that if conservatives want to save the country, we need a bold and courageous plan. This book is the first step in that plan.

THE CONSERVATIVE PROMISE

This volume—*The Conservative Promise*—is the opening salvo of the 2025 Presidential Transition Project, launched by The Heritage Foundation and our many partners in April 2022. Its 30 chapters lay out hundreds of clear and concrete policy recommendations for White House offices, Cabinet departments, Congress, and agencies, commissions, and boards.

Just as important as the scope of *The Conservative Promise*’s recommendations is the breadth of its authorship. This book is the product of more than 400 scholars

Foreword

and policy experts from across the conservative movement and around the country. Contributors include former elected officials, world-renowned economists, and veterans from four presidential Administrations. This is an agenda prepared *by* and *for* conservatives who will be ready on Day One of the next Administration to save our country from the brink of disaster.

The Heritage Foundation is once again facilitating this work. But as our dozens of partners and hundreds of authors will attest, this book is the work of the entire conservative movement. As such, the authors express consensus recommendations already forged, especially along four broad fronts that will decide America's future:

1. Restore the family as the centerpiece of American life and protect our children.
2. Dismantle the administrative state and return self-governance to the American people.
3. Defend our nation's sovereignty, borders, and bounty against global threats.
4. Secure our God-given individual rights to live freely—what our Constitution calls “the Blessings of Liberty.”

What makes these four pieces of the conservative promise so valuable to the next President is that they cut through superficial distractions and focus on the moral and foundational challenges America faces in this moment of history. This was one of the secrets of conservatives' success in the Reagan Era, one our generation should emulate.

As in the late 1970s, Americans today experience the failures of political and cultural elites in countless ways: in the job market and in the grocery store checkout lines, on the streets and in our schools, in the media and within our institutions. But in truth, these daily dysfunctions are not innumerable problems, but innumerable manifestations of a few core crises.

In 1979, the threats we faced were the Soviet Union, the socialism of 1970s liberals, and the predatory deviancy of cultural elites. Reagan defeated these beasts by ignoring their tentacles and striking instead at their hearts.

His approach to the Cold War? “We win and they lose.”

His economic agenda? The human dignity of work and its many rewards.

His platform in the culture wars? The “community of values embodied in these words: family, work, neighborhood, peace and freedom.”

This book—and Project 2025 as a whole—will arm the next conservative President with the same kind of strategic clarity, but for a new age.

PROMISE #1: RESTORE THE FAMILY AS THE CENTERPIECE OF AMERICAN LIFE AND PROTECT OUR CHILDREN.

The next conservative President must get to work pursuing the true priority of politics—*the well-being of the American family*.

In many ways, the *entire* point of centralizing political power is to *subvert* the family. Its purpose is to replace people’s *natural* loves and loyalties with *unnatural* ones. You see this in the popular left-wing aphorism, “Government is simply the name we give to the things we choose to do together.” But in real life, most of the things people “do together” have nothing to do with government. These are the mediating institutions that serve as the building blocks of any healthy society. Marriage. Family. Work. Church. School. Volunteering. The name *real people* give to the things we do together is *community*, not *government*. Our lives are full of interwoven, overlapping communities, and our individual and collective happiness depends upon them. But the most important community in each of our lives—and the life of the nation—is the family.

Today, the American family is in crisis. Forty percent of all children are born to unmarried mothers, including more than 70 percent of black children. There is no government program that can replace the hole in a child’s soul cut out by the absence of a father. Fatherlessness is one of the principal sources of American poverty, crime, mental illness, teen suicide, substance abuse, rejection of the church, and high school dropouts. So many of the problems government programs are designed to solve—but can’t—are ultimately problems created by the crisis of marriage and the family. The world has never seen a thriving, healthy, free, and prosperous society where most children grow up without their married parents. If current trends continue, we are heading toward social implosion.

Furthermore, the next conservative President must understand that using government alone to respond to symptoms of the family crisis is a dead end. Federal power must instead be wielded to *reverse* the crisis and rescue America’s kids from familial breakdown. *The Conservative Promise* includes dozens of specific policies to accomplish this existential task.

Some are obvious and long-standing goals like eliminating marriage penalties in federal welfare programs and the tax code and installing work requirements for food stamps. But we must go further. It’s time for policymakers to elevate family authority, formation, and cohesion as their top priority and even use government power, including through the tax code, to restore the American family.

Today the Left is threatening the tax-exempt status of churches and charities that reject woke progressivism. They will soon turn to Christian schools and clubs with the same totalitarian intent.

The next conservative President must make the institutions of American civil society hard targets for woke culture warriors. This starts with deleting the terms sexual orientation and gender identity (“SOGI”), diversity, equity, and inclusion

Foreword

(“DEI”), gender, gender equality, gender equity, gender awareness, gender-sensitive, abortion, reproductive health, reproductive rights, and any other term used to deprive Americans of their First Amendment rights out of every federal rule, agency regulation, contract, grant, regulation, and piece of legislation that exists.

Pornography, manifested today in the omnipresent propagation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children, for instance, is not a political Gordian knot inextricably binding up disparate claims about free speech, property rights, sexual liberation, and child welfare. It has no claim to First Amendment protection. Its purveyors are child predators and misogynistic exploiters of women. Their product is as addictive as any illicit drug and as psychologically destructive as any crime. Pornography should be outlawed. The people who produce and distribute it should be imprisoned. Educators and public librarians who purvey it should be classed as registered sex offenders. And telecommunications and technology firms that facilitate its spread should be shuttered.

In our schools, the question of parental authority over their children’s education is a simple one: Schools serve parents, not the other way around. That is, of course, the best argument for universal school choice—a goal all conservatives and conservative Presidents must pursue. But even before we achieve that long-term goal, parents’ rights as their children’s primary educators should be non-negotiable in American schools. States, cities and counties, school boards, union bosses, principals, and teachers who disagree should be immediately cut off from federal funds.

The noxious tenets of “critical race theory” and “gender ideology” should be excised from curricula in every public school in the country. These theories poison our children, who are being taught on the one hand to affirm that the color of their skin fundamentally determines their identity and even their moral status while on the other they are taught to deny the very creatureliness that inheres in being human and consists in accepting the givenness of our nature as men or women.

Allowing parents or physicians to “reassign” the sex of a minor is child abuse and must end. For public institutions to use taxpayer dollars to declare the superiority or inferiority of certain races, sexes, and religions is a violation of the Constitution and civil rights law and cannot be tolerated by any government anywhere in the country.

But the pro-family promises expressed in this book, and central to the next conservative President’s agenda, must go much further than the traditional, narrow definition of “family issues.” Every threat to family stability must be confronted.

This resolve should color each of our policies. Consider our approach to Big Tech. The worst of these companies prey on children, like drug dealers, to get them addicted to their mobile apps. Many Silicon Valley executives famously don’t let *their own kids* have smart phones.² They nevertheless make billions of dollars addicting other people’s children to theirs. TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms are specifically designed to create the digital

Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise

dependencies that fuel mental illness and anxiety, to fray children's bonds with their parents and siblings. Federal policy cannot allow this industrial-scale child abuse to continue.

Finally, conservatives should gratefully celebrate the greatest pro-family win in a generation: overturning *Roe v. Wade*, a decision that for five decades made a mockery of our Constitution and facilitated the deaths of tens of millions of unborn children. But the *Dobbs* decision is just the beginning. Conservatives in the states and in Washington, including in the next conservative Administration, should push as hard as possible to protect the unborn in every jurisdiction in America. In particular, the next conservative President should work with Congress to enact the most robust protections for the unborn that Congress will support while deploying existing federal powers to protect innocent life and vigorously complying with statutory bans on the federal funding of abortion. Conservatives should ardently pursue these pro-life and pro-family policies while recognizing the many women who find themselves in immensely difficult and often tragic situations and the heroism of every choice to become a mother. Alternative options to abortion, especially adoption, should receive federal and state support.

In summary, the next President has a moral responsibility to lead the nation in restoring a culture of life in America again.

PROMISE #2: DISMANTLE THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE AND RETURN SELF-GOVERNANCE TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

Of course, the surest way to put the federal government back to work for the American people is to reduce its size and scope back to something resembling the original constitutional intent. Conservatives desire a smaller government not for its own sake, but for the sake of human flourishing. But the Washington Establishment doesn't *want* a constitutionally limited government because it means they lose power and are held more accountable by the people who put them in power.

Like restoring popular sovereignty, the task of reattaching the federal government's constitutional and democratic tethers calls to mind Ronald Reagan's observation that "there are no easy answers, but there are simple answers."

In the case of making the federal government smaller, more effective, and accountable, the simple answer is the Constitution itself. The surest proof of this is how strenuously and creatively generations of progressives and many Republican insiders have worked to cut themselves free from the strictures of the 1789 Constitution and subsequent amendments.

Consider the federal budget. Under current law, Congress is required to pass a budget—and 12 issue-specific spending bills comports with it—every single year. The last time Congress did so was in 1996. Congress no longer meaningfully budgets, authorizes, or categorizes spending.

Foreword

Instead, party leaders negotiate one multitrillion-dollar spending bill—several thousand pages long—and then vote on it before anyone, literally, has had a chance to read it. Debate time is restricted. Amendments are prohibited. And all of this is backed up against a midnight deadline when the *previous* “omnibus” spending bill will run out and the federal government “shuts down.”

This process is not designed to empower 330 million American citizens and their elected representatives, but rather to empower the party elites secretly negotiating without any public scrutiny or oversight.

In the end, congressional leaders’ behavior and incentives here are no different from those of global elites insulating policy decisions—over the climate, trade, public health, you name it—from the sovereignty of national electorates. Public scrutiny and democratic accountability make life harder for policymakers—so they skirt it. It’s not dysfunction; it’s corruption.

And despite its gaudy price tag, the federal budget is not even close to the worst example of this corruption. That distinction belongs to the “Administrative State,” the dismantling of which must a top priority for the next conservative President.

The term Administrative State refers to the policymaking work done by the bureaucracies of all the federal government’s departments, agencies, and millions of employees. Under Article I of the Constitution, “*All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and a House of Representatives.*” That is, federal law is enacted only by elected legislators in both houses of Congress.

This exclusive authority was part of the Framers’ doctrine of “separated powers.” They not only split the federal government’s legislative, executive, and judicial powers into different branches. They also gave each branch checks over the others. Under our Constitution, the legislative branch—Congress—is far and away the most powerful and, correspondingly, the most accountable to the people.

In recent decades, members of the House and Senate discovered that if they give away that power to the Article II branch of government, they can also deny responsibility for its actions. So today in Washington, most policy is no longer set by Congress at all, but by the Administrative State. Given the choice between being powerful but vulnerable or irrelevant but famous, most Members of Congress have chosen the latter.

Congress passes intentionally vague laws that delegate decision-making over a given issue to a federal agency. That agency’s bureaucrats—not just unelected but seemingly un-fireable—then leap at the chance to fill the vacuum created by Congress’s preening cowardice. The federal government is growing larger and less constitutionally accountable—even to the President—every year.

- A combination of elected and unelected bureaucrats at the Environmental Protection Agency quietly strangles domestic energy production through difficult-to-understand rulemaking processes;

Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise

- Bureaucrats at the Department of Homeland Security, following the lead of a feckless Administration, order border and immigration enforcement agencies to help migrants criminally enter our country with impunity;
- Bureaucrats at the Department of Education inject racist, anti-American, ahistorical propaganda into America's classrooms;
- Bureaucrats at the Department of Justice force school districts to undermine girls' sports and parents' rights to satisfy transgender extremists;
- Woke bureaucrats at the Pentagon force troops to attend "training" seminars about "white privilege"; and
- Bureaucrats at the State Department infuse U.S. foreign aid programs with woke extremism about "intersectionality" and abortion.³

Unaccountable federal spending is the secret lifeblood of the Great Awakening. Nearly every power center held by the Left is funded or supported, one way or another, through the bureaucracy by Congress. Colleges and school districts are funded by tax dollars. The Administrative State holds 100 percent of its power at the sufferance of Congress, and its insulation from presidential discipline is an unconstitutional fairy tale spun by the Washington Establishment to protect its turf. Members of Congress shield themselves from constitutional accountability often when the White House allows them to get away with it. Cultural institutions like public libraries and public health agencies are only as "independent" from public accountability as elected officials and voters permit.

Let's be clear: The most egregious regulations promulgated by the current Administration come from one place: the Oval Office. The President cannot hide behind the agencies; as his many executive orders make clear, his is the responsibility for the regulations that threaten American communities, schools, and families. A conservative President must move swiftly to do away with these vast abuses of presidential power and remove the career and political bureaucrats who fuel it.

Properly considered, restoring fiscal limits and constitutional accountability to the federal government is a continuation of restoring national sovereignty to the American people. In foreign affairs, global strategy, federal budgeting and policymaking, the same pattern emerges again and again. Ruling elites slash and tear at restrictions and accountability placed on them. They centralize power up and away from the American people: to supra-national treaties and organizations, to left-wing "experts," to sight-unseen all-or-nothing legislating, to the unelected career bureaucrats of the Administrative State.

Foreword

As monolithic as the Left's institutional power appears to be, it originates with appropriations from Congress and is made complete by a feckless President. A conservative President must look to the legislative branch for decisive action. The Administrative State is not going anywhere until Congress acts to retrieve its own power from bureaucrats and the White House. But in the meantime, there are many executive tools a courageous conservative President can use to handcuff the bureaucracy, push Congress to return to its constitutional responsibility, restore power over Washington to the American people, bring the Administrative State to heel, and in the process defang and defund the woke culture warriors who have infiltrated every last institution in America.

The Conservative Promise lays out how to use many of these tools including: how to fire supposedly "un-fireable" federal bureaucrats; how to shutter wasteful and corrupt bureaus and offices; how to muzzle woke propaganda at every level of government; how to restore the American people's constitutional authority over the Administrative State; and how to save untold taxpayer dollars in the process.

Finally, the President can restore public confidence and accountability to our most important government function of all: national defense. The American people desire a military full of highly skilled servicemen and women who can protect the homeland and our interests overseas. The next conservative President must end the Left's social experimentation with the military, restore *warfighting* as its sole mission, and set defeating the threat of the Chinese Communist Party as its highest priority.

The next conservative President must possess the courage to relentlessly put the interests of the everyday American over the desires of the ruling elite. Their outrage cannot be prevented; it must simply be ignored. And it can be. The Left derives its power from the institutions they control. But those institutions are only powerful to the extent that constitutional officers surrender their own legitimate authority to them. A President who refuses to do so and uses his or her office to reimpose constitutional authority over federal policymaking can begin to correct decades of corruption and remove thousands of bureaucrats from the positions of public trust they have so long abused.

PROMISE #3: DEFEND OUR NATION'S SOVEREIGNTY, BORDERS, AND BOUNTY AGAINST GLOBAL THREATS.

The United States belongs to "We the people." All government authority derives from the consent of the people, and our nation's success derives from the character of its people. The American people's right to rule ourselves is the obverse of our duty: We cannot outsource to others our obligation to ensure the conditions that allow our families, local communities, churches and synagogues, and neighborhoods to thrive. The buck stops with each of us, so each of us must have the freedom to pursue the good for ourselves and those entrusted to our care.

Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise

To most Americans, this is common sense. But in Washington, D.C. and other centers of Leftist power like the media and the academy, this statement of basic civics is branded hate speech. Progressive elites speak in lofty terms of *openness*, *progress*, *expertise*, *cooperation*, and *globalization*. But too often, these terms are just rhetorical Trojan horses concealing their true intention—stripping “we the people” of our constitutional authority over our country’s future.

America’s corporate and political elites do not believe in the ideals to which our nation is dedicated—self-governance, the rule of law, and ordered liberty. They certainly do not trust the American people, and they disdain the Constitution’s restrictions on their ambitions.

Instead, they believe in a kind of 21st century Wilsonian order in which the “enlightened,” highly educated managerial elite runs things rather than the humble, patriotic working families who make up the majority of what the elites contemptuously call “fly-over country.”

This Wilsonian hubris has spread like a cancer through many of America’s largest corporations, its public institutions, and its popular culture. Those who run our so-called American corporations have bent to the will of the woke agenda and care more for their foreign investors and organizations than their American workers and customers. Today, nearly every top-tier U.S. university president or Wall Street hedge fund manager has more in common with a socialist, European head of state than with the parents at a high school football game in Waco, Texas. Many elites’ entire identity, it seems, is wrapped up in their sense of superiority over *those people*. But under our Constitution, they are the *mere equals* of the workers who shower *after* work instead of before.

This is as it should and must be. Intellectual sophistication, advanced degrees, financial success, and all other markers of elite status have no bearing on a person’s knowledge of the one thing most necessary for governance: what it means to live well. That knowledge is available to each of us, no matter how humble our backgrounds or how unpretentious our attainments. It is open to us to read in the book of human nature, to which we are all offered the key just by merit of our shared humanity. One of the great premises of American political life is that everyone who can read in that book must have a voice in deciding the course and fate of our Republic.

Progressive policymakers and pundits in America either fail to understand this premise or intentionally reject it. They enthusiastically support supranational organizations like the United Nations and European Union, which are run and staffed almost entirely by people who share their values and are mostly insulated from the influence of national elections. That’s why they are eager for America to sign international treaties on everything from pharmaceutical patents to climate change to “the rights of the child”—and why those treaties invariably endorse policies that could *never* pass through the U.S. Congress. Like the progressive Woodrow

Foreword

Wilson a century ago, the woke Left today seeks a world, bound by global treaties *they write*, in which *they* exercise dictatorial powers over all nations without being subject to democratic accountability.

That's why today's progressive Left so cavalierly supports open borders despite the lawless humanitarian crisis their policy created along America's southern border. They seek to purge the very concept of the nation-state from the American ethos, no matter how much crime increases or resources drop for schools and hospitals or wages decrease for the working class. Open-borders activism is a classic example of what the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace"—publicly promoting one's own virtue without risking any personal inconvenience. Indeed, the only direct impact of open borders on pro-open borders elites is that the constant flow of illegal immigration suppresses the wages of their housekeepers, landscapers, and busboys.

"Cheap grace" aptly describes the Left's love affair with environmental extremism. Those who suffer most from the policies environmentalism would have us enact are the aged, poor, and vulnerable. It is not a political cause, but a pseudo-religion meant to baptize liberals' ruthless pursuit of absolute power in the holy water of environmental virtue.

At its very heart, environmental extremism is decidedly anti-human. Stewardship and conservation are supplanted by population control and economic regression. Environmental ideologues would ban the fuels that run almost all of the world's cars, planes, factories, farms, and electricity grids. Abandoning confidence in human resilience and creativity in responding to the challenges of the future would raise impediments to the most meaningful human activities. They would stand human affairs on their head, regarding human activity itself as fundamentally a threat to be sacrificed to the god of nature.

The same goals are the heart of elite support for economic globalization. For 30 years, America's political, economic, and cultural leaders embraced and enriched Communist China and its genocidal Communist Party while hollowing out America's industrial base. What may have started out with good intentions has now been made clear. Unfettered trade with China has been a catastrophe. It has made a handful of American corporations enormously profitable while twisting their business incentives *away* from the American people's needs. For a generation, politicians of both parties promised that engagement with Beijing would grow our economy while injecting American values into China. The opposite has happened. American factories have closed. Jobs have been outsourced. Our manufacturing economy has been financialized. And all along, the corporations profiting failed to export our values of human rights and freedom; rather, they imported China's anti-American values into their C-suites.

Even before the rise of Big Tech, Wall Street ignored China's serial theft of American intellectual property. It outright cheered the elimination of American

Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise

manufacturing jobs. (“Learn to code!” they would gloat.) These were just the price of progress. Engagement was at every step *Beijing’s* project, not America’s. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) dictated terms, only to break them whenever it suited them. They stole our technology, spied on our people, and threatened our allies, all with trillions of dollars of wealth and military power financed by their access to *our* market.

Then came the rise of Big Tech, which is now less a *contributor* to the U.S. economy than it is a tool of China’s government. In exchange for cheap labor and regulatory special treatment from Beijing, America’s largest technology firms funnel data about Americans to the CCP. They hand over sensitive intellectual property with military and intelligence applications to keep the money rolling in. They let Beijing censor Chinese users on their platforms. They let the CCP set their corporate policies about mobile apps. And they run interference for our rival’s political priorities in Washington. One side of Big-Tech companies’ business model is old-fashioned American competitiveness and world-changing technological innovation; but increasingly, that side of these businesses is overshadowed by their role as operatives in the lucrative employ of America’s most dangerous international enemy.

If you want to understand the danger posed by collaboration between Big Tech and the CCP, look no further than TikTok. The highly addictive video app, used by 80 million Americans every month and overwhelmingly popular among teenage girls, is in effect a tool of Chinese espionage. The ties between TikTok and the Chinese government are not loose, and they are not coincidental.

The same can be observed of many U.S. colleges and universities. Through the CCP’s Confucius Institutes, Beijing has been just as successful at compromising and coopting our higher education system as they have at compromising and coopting corporate America.

A casual reader might take the last few pages as surveying a broad array of challenges facing the American people and the next conservative President: supranational policymaking, border security, globalization, engagement with China, manufacturing, Big Tech, and Beijing-compromised colleges.

But these really are not many issues, but two: (1) that China is a totalitarian enemy of the United States, not a strategic partner or fair competitor, and (2) that America’s elites have betrayed the American people. The solution to *all of the above* problems is not to tinker with this or that government program, to replace this or that bureaucrat. These are problems not of technocratic efficiency but of national sovereignty and constitutional governance. We solve them not by trimming and reshaping the leaves but by ripping out the trees—root and branch.

International organizations and agreements that erode our Constitution, rule of law, or popular sovereignty should not be reformed: They should be abandoned. Illegal immigration should be ended, not mitigated; the border sealed, not

Foreword

reprioritized. Economic engagement with China should be ended, not rethought. Our manufacturing and industrial base should be restored, not allowed to deteriorate further. Confucius Institutes, TikTok, and any other arm of Chinese propaganda and espionage should be outlawed, not merely monitored. Universities taking money from the CCP should lose their accreditation, charters, and eligibility for federal funds.

The next conservative President should go beyond merely defending America's energy interests but go on offense, asserting them around the world. America's vast reserves of oil and natural gas are not an environmental problem; they are the lifeblood of economic growth. American dominance of the global energy market would be a good thing: for the world, and, more importantly, for "*we the people*." It's not just about jobs, even though unleashing domestic energy production would create millions of them. It's not just about higher wages for workers who didn't go to college, though they would receive the raises they have missed out on for two generations. Full-spectrum strategic energy dominance would facilitate the reinvigoration of America's entire industrial and manufacturing sector as we disentangle our economy from China. Globally, it would rebalance power away from dangerous regimes in Russia and the Middle East. It would build powerful alliances with fast-growing nations in Africa and provide us the leverage to counter Chinese ambitions in South America and the Pacific. Locally, it would drive billions of dollars of private investment to the communities that have been hammered by globalization since the 1990s. And it would clarify our intentions to Beijing that the next President can ensure that a large part of America's reindustrialization is in the production of the equipment we will need to dissuade future foreign meddling with U.S. vital interests.

PROMISE #4 SECURE OUR GOD-GIVEN INDIVIDUAL RIGHT TO ENJOY "THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY."

The Declaration of Independence famously asserted the belief of America's Founders that "all men are created equal" and endowed with God-given rights to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." It's the last—"the pursuit of Happiness"—that is central to America's heroic experiment in self-government.

When the Founders spoke of "pursuit of Happiness," what they meant might be understood today as in essence "pursuit of Blessedness." That is, an individual must be free to live as his Creator ordained—to flourish. Our Constitution grants each of us the liberty to do not what we want, but what we ought. This pursuit of the good life is found primarily in family—marriage, children, Thanksgiving dinners, and the like. Many find happiness through their work. Think of dedicated teachers or health care professionals you know, entrepreneurs or plumbers throwing themselves into their businesses—anyone who sees a job well done as a personal reward. Religious devotion and spirituality are the greatest sources of happiness

Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise

around the world. Still others find themselves happiest in their local voluntary communities of friends, their neighbors, their civic or charitable work.

The American Republic was founded on principles prioritizing and maximizing individuals' rights to live their best life or to enjoy what the Framers called "the Blessings of Liberty." It's this radical equality—liberty for all—not just of rights but of authority—that the rich and powerful have hated about democracy in America since 1776. They resent Americans' audacity in insisting that we don't need them to tell us how to live. It's this inalienable right of self-direction—of each person's opportunity to direct himself or herself, and his or her community, to the good—that the ruling class disdains.

With the Declaration and Constitution, our nation's Founders handed to us the means with which to preserve this right. Abraham Lincoln wrote of the Declaration as an "apple of gold" in a silver frame, the Constitution. So must the next conservative President look to these documents when the elites mount their next assault on liberty.

Left to our own devices, the American people rejected European monarchy and colonialism just as we rejected slavery, second-class citizenship for women, mercantilism, socialism, Wilsonian globalism, Fascism, Communism, and (today) wokeism. To the Left, these assertions of patriotic self-assurance are just so many signs of our moral depravity and intellectual inferiority—proof that, in fact, we need a ruling elite making decisions for us.

But the next conservative President should be proud, not ashamed of Americans' unique culture of social equality and ordered liberty. After all, the countries where Marxist elites have won political and economic power are all weaker, poorer, and less free for it.

The United States remains the most innovative and upwardly mobile society in the world. Government should stop trying to substitute its own preferences for those of the people. And the next conservative President should champion the dynamic genius of free enterprise against the grim miseries of elite-directed socialism.

The promise of socialism—Communism, Marxism, progressivism, Fascism, whatever name it chooses—is simple: Government control of the economy can ensure equal outcomes for all people. The problem is that it has never done so. There is no such thing as "the government." There are just people who work for the government and wield its power and who—at almost every opportunity—wield it to serve themselves first and everyone else a distant second. This is not a failing of one nation or socialist party, but inherent in human nature.

Nighttime satellite images of the Korean peninsula famously show the free-market South lit up, with homes, businesses, and cities electrified from coast to coast. By contrast, Communist North Korea is almost completely dark, except for the small dot of the capital city, Pyongyang, where a psychotic dictator and his cronies

Foreword

live. The same phenomenon is on display in the infuriating fact that four of the six richest counties in the United States are suburbs of Washington, D.C.—a city infamous for its lack of native productive industries.

We see the same corruption expressed on an individual level whenever billionaire climate activists, who want to outlaw carbon-fueled transportation, fly to A-list conferences on their private jets. Or when COVID-19 shutdown politicians like former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and California Governor Gavin Newsom were caught at the hair salon or dining at fancy restaurants after moralizing about how everyone else must stay home and forgo such luxuries during the pandemic. For socialists, who are almost always well-to-do, socialism is not a means of equalizing outcomes, but a means of accumulating power. They never get around to helping anyone else.

The Soviet empire was a social and economic failure. North Korea, despite the opulence of its tyrants, is one of the poorest nations in the world. Cuba is so corrupt that its people regularly risk their lives to escape to Florida on rafts. Venezuela was once the richest nation in South America; today, a decade after a Marxist dictator took over, 94 percent of Venezuelans live in poverty.⁴ Even socialist Senator Bernie Sanders' home state of Vermont was forced to repeal the state's single-payer health care system just three years after creating it.

In every case, socialist elites promised that if only they could direct the economy, everything would be better. Very quickly, everything got worse. In socialist nation after socialist nation, the only way the government could keep its disgruntled people in line was to surveil and terrorize them.

By contrast, in countries with a high degree of economic freedom, elites are not in charge because *everyone* is in charge. People work, build, invest, save, and create according to their own interests and in service to the common good of their fellow citizens.

There is a reason why the private economy hews to the maxim “the customer is always right” while government bureaucracies are notoriously user-unfriendly, just as there is a reason why private charities are cheerful and government welfare systems are not. It's not because grocery store clerks and PTA moms are “good” and federal bureaucrats are “bad.” It's because private enterprises—for-profit or nonprofit—must cooperate, to give, to succeed.

So as the American people take back their sovereignty, constitutional authority, respect for their families and communities, they should also take back their right to pursue the good life.

The next President should promote pro-growth economic policies that spur new jobs and investment, higher wages, and productivity. Yes, that agenda should include overdue tax and regulatory reform, but it should go further and include antitrust enforcement against corporate monopolies. It should promote educational opportunities outside the woke-dominated system of public schools and

Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise

universities, including trade schools, apprenticeship programs, and student-loan alternatives that fund students' dreams instead of Marxist academics. Just as important as expanding opportunities for workers and small businesses, the next President should crack down on the crony capitalist corruption that enables America's largest corporations to profit through political influence rather than competitive enterprise and customer satisfaction.

Analogous pro-growth reforms for America's voluntary civil society are also in order. America is not an economy; it is a country. Economic freedom is not the only important freedom. Freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the freedom to assemble also represent key components of the American promise. Today, in addition to the problem of Big Tech censorship, we see speakers at universities shouted down, parents investigated and arrested for attempting to speak at school board meetings, and donors to conservative causes harassed and intimidated. The next conservative President must defend our First Amendment rights.

BEST EFFORT

Ultimately, the Left does not believe that all men are created equal—they think *they* are special. They certainly don't think all people have an unalienable right to pursue the good life. They think *only they themselves* have such a right along with a moral responsibility to make decisions for everyone else. They don't think any citizen, state, business, church, or charity should be allowed *any* freedom until they first bend the knee.

This book, this agenda, the entire Project 2025 is a plan to unite the conservative movement and the American people against elite rule and woke culture warriors.

Our movement has not been united in recent years, and our country has paid the price. In the past decade, though, the breakdown of the family, the rise of China, the Great Awakening, Big Tech's abuses, and the erosion of constitutional accountability in Washington have rendered these divisions not just inconvenient but politically suicidal. Every hour the Left directs federal policy and elite institutions, our sovereignty, our Constitution, our families, and our freedom are a step closer to disappearing.

Conservatives have just two years and one shot to get this right. With enemies at home and abroad, there is no margin for error. Time is running short. If we fail, the fight for the very idea of America may be lost.

But we should take this small window of opportunity we have left to act with courage and confidence, not despair. The last time our nation and movement were so near defeat, we rallied together behind a great leader and great ideas, transcended our differences, rescued our nation, and changed the world. It's time to do it again.

Now, as then, we know who we are fighting and what we are fighting for: for our Republic, our freedom, and for each other. The next conservative President

Foreword

will enter office on January 20, 2025, with a simple choice: greatness or failure. It will be a daunting test, but no more so than every generation of Americans has faced and passed.

The Conservative Promise represents the best effort of the conservative movement in 2023—and the next conservative President’s last opportunity to save our republic.

ENDNOTES

1. Ronald Reagan, Inaugural Address, January 5, 1967, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/january-5-1967-inaugural-address-public-ceremony> (accessed March 14, 2023).
2. Quispe López, “6 Tech Executives Who Raise Their Kids Tech-Free or Seriously Limit Their Screen Time,” *Business Insider*, March 5, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/tech-execs-screen-time-children-bill-gates-steve-jobs-2019-9#google-ceo-sundar-pichais-middle-school-aged-son-doesnt-own-a-cell-phone-and-the-tv-can-only-be-accessed-with-activation-energy-1> (accessed March 14, 2023).
3. Simon Hankinson, “‘Woke’ Public Diplomacy Undermines the State Department’s Core Mission and Weakens U.S. Foreign Policy,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3738, December 12, 2022, <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/woke-public-diplomacy-undermines-the-state-departments-core-mission-and>.
4. Michelle Nichols, “Venezuelans Facing ‘Unprecedented Challenges,’ Many Need Aid—Internal U.N. Report,” <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-un/venezuelans-facing-unprecedented-challenges-many-need-aid-internal-u-n-report-idUSKCNIR92AG> (accessed March 14, 2023).