

Defining the principles of conservatism

Why conservatives must counter misguided leftist policies

Washington Times, By Kay Coles James, August 13, 2019

At The Heritage Foundation, we're always thinking about ways to talk to new and non-traditional audiences about how conservative principles can create the greatest freedom, opportunity, prosperity and civil society for the American people.

We realize that for these ideas to take hold, we have to counter the false narratives of left-leaning media outlets, educational institutions and politicians.

We also see how messaging to new audiences can be diluted when some institutions and politicians who bear the "conservative" label drift far from fundamental conservative principles.

This not only hurts the conservative brand, but it also leaves these audiences thinking we're not authentic about our views and that we change them based on convenience. It harms our credibility and leaves them thinking what we told them was right and true really wasn't.

Many institutions and politicians start out as conservative, but if they're not firmly rooted in principles, they can deviate from the path.

This is called trajectory: In physics, think of throwing a ball straight ahead. Eventually, forces like wind and gravity will cause the ball to curve and drop instead of continuing straight.

In politics and policy, the forces that create a curved trajectory — deviating from principles — include pressure from the media or political opponents, pressure from those you normally agree with deviating from principles themselves, or not wanting to be seen as the only one advocating for a position that's right but not popular.

Since principles are meant to represent our highest ideals and should be based on fundamental truths, they should mostly be unchanging.

While good conservatives may have differing viewpoints about some aspects of conservatism, there are certain fundamental principles where we must remain resolute. In fact, at The Heritage Foundation, we call them the True North principles because they represent a fixed direction on which to stay focused, regardless of which ways the forces may be pressuring us.

Some of these major principles include:

- The federal government is instituted to protect the rights bestowed on individuals under natural law. It exists to preserve life, liberty and property — a mission that includes not only protecting the sanctity of life but defending freedom of speech, religion, the press and

assembly, and the right of individuals to be treated equally and justly under the law, and to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

- The federal government's powers should be limited to only those named in the U.S. Constitution and exercised solely to protect the rights of its citizens.
- Government functions best when it is closest and most accountable to the people and where power is shared between the federal government and the states.
- Individuals and families make the best decisions for themselves and their children about health, education, jobs and welfare.
- America's economy and the prosperity of individual citizens are best served by a system built on free enterprise, economic freedom, private property rights and the rule of law. This system is best sustained by policies that promote general economic freedom and eliminate governmental preferences for special interests, including free trade, deregulation, and opposing government interventions in the economy that distort free markets and impair innovation.
- Tax policies should raise the minimum revenue necessary to fund only constitutionally appropriate functions of government.
- Regulations should be limited to those that produce a net benefit to the American people as a whole, weighing both financial and liberty costs.
- Judges should interpret and apply our laws and the Constitution based on their original meaning, not upon judges' own personal and political predispositions.
- America must be a welcoming nation — one that promotes patriotic assimilation and is governed by laws that are fair, humane and enforced to protect its citizens.
- America is strongest when our policies protect our national interests, preserve our alliances of free peoples, vigorously counter threats to our security and interests, and advance prosperity through economic freedom at home and abroad. These are just some of the unchanging principles of conservatism. As the left continues to push policies like Medicare for All, free college tuition, open borders, and depleting the strength of the military, conservatives must counter these policies with a strong voice. We must convince more and more people that our ideas work better and can assure a more free and prosperous future for all Americans. If we don't do that, and more Americans succumb to the false promises of the statist, we soon won't recognize America.

If ever there was a time we needed to be clear about our principles, it is now.

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