

The Mount Vernon Statement

Constitutional Conservatism: A Statement for the 21st Century

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.

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