

- We say that we desire from our children more civility and responsibility, but in many of our schools we steadfastly refuse to teach right and wrong.
- We say that we want law and order in the streets, but we allow criminals, including violent criminals, to return to these same streets.
- We say that we want to stop illegitimacy, but we continue to subsidize the kind of behavior that virtually guarantees high rates of illegitimacy.
- We say that we want to discourage teenage sexual activity, but in classrooms all across America educators are more eager to dispense condoms than moral guidance.
- We say that we want more families to stay together, but we liberalize divorce laws and make divorce easier to attain.
- We say that we want to achieve a color-blind society and judge people by the content of their character, but we continue to count by race, skin and pigment.

**From:** *Writing the World* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 10. "It has become a mark of sophistication to shun the language of morality."

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## WHO ARE THE CONSERVATIVES?

*Russell Kirk*

*Russell Kirk, a former history professor, became one of the foremost intellectual influences on modern conservatism after publishing *The Conservative Mind* in 1953. A prolific author, he wrote a number of essays and thirty books, including *The Conservative Constitution*, *The Roots of American Order*, and *The Conservative Reader*. He died in 1994.*

*This essay is from his 1954 book A Program for Conservatives. Kirk begins by defining modern liberalism in opposition to conservatism. He then discusses the conservative tradition, beginning with the eighteenth-century British statesman Edmund Burke, who articulated his conservatism in reaction to the French Revolution. Since Kirk was writing in 1954, after the spread of Communism into Eastern Europe, he probably had modern Communism in mind when he criticized abstract government planning. Throughout Kirk's writing, the root of the word conservative is apparent: Kirk wants to conserve, rather than to break with, the past. In his view, the past embodies the collective wisdom humans have arrived at through much time and experience. Similarly, Kirk would conserve individual or private ownership of property rather than put property ownership into the hands of government, as modern Communists were doing during much of Kirk's lifetime. Like many conservatives today, Kirk believes that crucial "civil" institutions, such as family, church, and community organizations, are endangered when too much focus is put on either individual rights or government regulation. According to this view, civil institutions need to be strong to provide individuals with the strength and wisdom derived from tradition and experience.*

*As you read, note what Kirk says about conserving tradition, "that delicate growth called society." Pay attention as well to his skepticism about the changes that liberal or radical planners might introduce.*

The people whom we call "conservative" are not restricted to any social class or any economic occupation or any level of formal education. Some are physicians, and some engine-drivers, and some professors, and some clerks, and some bankers, and some clergymen, and some diemakers, and some soldiers. In a popular magazine, recently, I noticed a passing reference to "the rich conservatives, the well-off liberals, and the poor laboring men." This notion is nonsense. Some millionaires are fanatically radical, and some working men are fiercely conservative, and the well-to-do may be anything under the sun. Conservatism and liberalism and radicalism are states of mind, not of the pocket-book. The United States, throughout most of our history, have been a nation substantially conservative, though rich men have exerted less direct influence upon government here than almost anywhere else in the world. Conservatism is something more than mere solicitude for tidy incomes.

Conservatism, indeed, is a word with an old and honorable meaning—but a meaning almost forgotten by Americans for some years. Even today, although there are many men of conservative prejudices active in national and state politics, few are eager to describe themselves as "conservatives." The people of the United States became the chief conservative nation of the world at the very time when they had ceased to call themselves conservatives at home. For a generation, the word "liberal" had been in fashion, particularly in universities and among journalists. The liberal, in American parlance, has been a man in love

with constant change;...commonly the liberal has tended to despise the lessons of the past and to look forward confidently to a vista of endless material progress, in which the state<sup>o</sup> will play a larger and larger role, and a general equality of condition will be enforced.

This liberal now is a distraught and frightened man, incapable either of serious leadership or serious criticism. It is time for people who know they are *not* liberals or radicals to ask themselves just what they do believe, and what they must call themselves. The traditional system of ideas opposed to liberalism and radicalism is the conservative belief. Already the words "conservative" and "conservatism" are being employed as terms of praise in the popular press and by serious critics of society, and books by conservative writers are receiving an attention that they have been denied most of this century. In politics, as in physics, it is scarcely possible to make progress until you have defined your terms. What is conservatism? Who are the conservatives?

Aristotle was a conservative, and so was Cicero, and there have been intelligent conservatives in every age. John Stuart Mill, a century ago, called conservatives "the stupid party." But the conservatives have outlasted their enemies, or most of their enemies. Modern conservatism, as a regular body of ideas, took form about the beginning of the French Revolution. In England, the founder of true conservatism was Burke, whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* turned the tide of opinion against the levelling<sup>o</sup> and destructive impulse of the French revolutionaries. In America, the founders of the Republic had no desire to turn society upside down; and in their writings, particularly in the works of John Adams and in the *Federalist Papers*,<sup>o</sup> we find a sober conservatism built upon an understanding of history and of human nature. . . .

Edmund Burke, much read in history and much practiced in the conduct of political affairs, knew that men are not naturally good, but are beings of mingled good and evil, kept obedient to a moral law chiefly by the force of habit and custom, which the revolutionaries would discard as so much ancient rubbish. He knew that all the advantages of the civil social existence are the product of intricate human experience over many centuries, not to be amended overnight by some coffeehouse philosopher. He knew religion to be a great benefit to mankind, and established order to be the gift of Providence, and hereditary possessions, and the mass of prescriptive beliefs which we call "prejudices." He set his face, then, against the revolutionaries like a man who of a sudden is attacked by robbers.

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<sup>o</sup>the state: A term used to refer to the federal government, state government, or other governmental entities.   <sup>o</sup>levelling: Here, the desire on the part of French revolutionaries to have all people on the same level and to do away with a class system in which some people have more rights, privileges, or wealth than others.   <sup>o</sup>*Federalist Papers*: Written to defend the proposed U.S. Constitution, the *Federalist Papers* advocated checks and balances that would prevent popular opinion from producing change too rapidly.

Burke had defended the rights of the Americans because they were the traditional and real rights<sup>o</sup> of actual men, developed through historical processes. He attacked the false concept of the Rights of Man<sup>o</sup> expounded by the French speculators because he recognized in this abstract notion of rights an insensate desire to be free of all duties toward the past and toward posterity. Burke never favored revolution; he bitterly regretted the American war, and had labored for conciliation, neither repression nor revolution. And the American Revolution, after all, was (as Burke said of the triumph of William and Mary) "a revolution not made, but prevented"; it was an act of separation, but it preserved, rather than destroyed, the traditional framework of life in America. The French Revolution, on the contrary, was intended to uproot that delicate growth called society, and, if not impeded both in the realm of mind and the realm of politics, would end by subjecting all men either to anarchy or to a ruthless master. They would have lost all real rights in the pursuit of pretended abstract rights....

We Americans were from the first a people endowed with strong conservative prejudices, immeasurably influenced by the spirit of religious veneration, firm in a traditional morality, hostile to arbitrary power whether possessed by a monarch or a mob, zealous to guard against centralization,<sup>o</sup> attached to prescriptive rights,<sup>o</sup> convinced of the necessity and beneficence of the institution of property. We have reason, I think, to be proud of the healthy and continuous existence of conservative principles here, for three centuries; and it is to be hoped that we will act today in the light of this long conservative development, not lusting after abstract new doctrines, whether those doctrines are called "conservative" or "liberal" or "radical." What we most require is an illumination and renewed recognition of the lofty conservative concepts and institutions which have sustained our nation....

Centralization, extension of the economic functions of government, the increase of taxation and national debts, the decay of family-life and local association, and the employment of state education to enforce uniformity of character and opinion—these influences, and others, are at work among us with dreadful power. We are just beginning to make our way back to the first principles of politics and ethics. The conservative instinct of America, just now reawakening, must draw its vigor from everyone who believes in enduring truth, in liberty under law, and in the political and economic institutions essential to the preservation of a just and free and tranquil society....

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<sup>o</sup>real rights: Rights that people already possessed, such as the right to one's property, rather than the sort of abstract rights, such as the right to equality, that French reformers articulated. <sup>o</sup>Rights of Man: A reference to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, issued by French reformers in 1789. It stated that "men are born and remain free and equal in rights." <sup>o</sup>centralization: Here, the concentration of power in a central government rather than in smaller and more local forms of government (such as states, counties, or towns). <sup>o</sup>prescriptive rights: Rights established by past laws and traditions.

The American conservative, priding himself upon his old antipathy toward abstraction, ought to endeavor to define his own terms. Precisely what is the essence of our American conservatism? I think that the old conservative character of the American nation is marked by these qualities:

(1) A belief in an order that is more than human, which has implanted in man a character of mingled good and evil, susceptible of improvement only by an inner working, not by mundane schemes for perfectability. This conviction lies at the heart of American respect for the past, as the record of Providential purpose. The conservative mind is suffused with veneration. Men and nations, the conservative believes, are governed by moral laws; and political problems, at bottom, are moral and religious problems. An eternal chain of duty links the generations that are dead, and the generation that is living now, and the generations yet to be born. We have no right, in this brief existence of ours, to alter irrevocably the shape of things, in contempt of our ancestors and of the rights of posterity. Politics is the art of apprehending and applying the Justice which stands above statutory law.<sup>o</sup>

(2) An affection for variety and complexity and individuality, even for singularity, which has exerted a powerful check upon the political tendency toward what Tocqueville calls "democratic despotism." Variety and complexity, in the opinion of conservatives, are the high gifts of truly civilized society. The uniformity and standardization of liberal and radical planners<sup>o</sup> would be the death of vitality and freedom, a life-in-death, every man precisely like his neighbor—and, like the damned of the *Inferno*, forever deprived of hope.

(3) A conviction that justice, properly defined, means "to each the things that go with his own nature," not a levelling equality; and joined with this is a correspondent respect for private property of every sort. Civilized society requires distinctions of order, wealth, and responsibility; it cannot exist without true leadership. A free society will endeavor, indeed, to afford to men of natural abilities every opportunity to rise by their own efforts; but it will resist strenuously the radical delusion that exact equality of station and wealth can benefit everyone. Society longs for just leadership; and if people destroy natural distinctions among men, presently some Bonaparte will fill the vacuum—or worse than Bonaparte.

(4) A suspicion of concentrated power, and a consequent attachment to our federal principle<sup>o</sup> and to division and balancing of authority at every level of government.

(5) A reliance upon private endeavor and sagacity in nearly every walk of life, together with a contempt for the abstract designs of the collectivistic reformer.<sup>o</sup>

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<sup>o</sup>statutory law: The laws enacted by legislatures, as opposed to a higher law coming from God or from customs developed over generations. <sup>o</sup>planners: People who rely on laws and government programs to change people for the better. <sup>o</sup>federal principle: The principle of power being distributed, in the United States, between the central government and the states. <sup>o</sup>collectivistic reformer: Someone who believes in reforms that emphasize group (collective) ownership.

But to this self-reliance, in the mind of the American conservative, is joined the conviction that in matters beyond the scope of material endeavor and the present moment, the individual tends to be foolish, but the species is wise; therefore we rely in great matters upon the wisdom of our ancestors. History is an immense storehouse of knowledge. We pay a decent respect to the moral traditions and immemorial customs of mankind; for men who ignore the past are condemned to repeat it. The conservative distrusts the radical visionary and the planner who would chop society into pieces and mould it nearer to his heart's desire. The conservative appeals beyond the fickle opinion of the hour to what Chesterton called "the democracy of the dead" — that is, the considered judgment of the wise men who died before our time. To presume that men can plan rationally the whole of existence is to expose mankind to a terrible danger from the collapse of existing institutions; for conservatives know that most men are governed, on many occasions, more by emotion than by pure reason.

(6) A prejudice against organic change, a feeling that it is unwise to break radically with political prescription, an inclination to tolerate what abuses may exist in present institutions out of a practical acquaintance with the violent and unpredictable nature of doctrinaire reform.

American character being complex, along with these conservative threads are woven certain innovating and even radical threads. It is true, too, that national character is formed, in part, by the circumstances of history and environment, so that such a character may alter, or even grow archaic. Certain powerful influences presently at work among us are affecting this traditional character, for good or ill. It is time, nevertheless, that we acknowledged the predominantly conservative cast of the American mind, since the inception of the Republic, and time that we paid our respects to the strength and honesty of that character. We are not merely the pawns of impersonal historical influences; we have it in our power to preserve the best in our old institutions and in our old opinions, even in this era of vertiginous change; and we will do well, I think, if we endeavor to govern ourselves, in the age that is dawning, by the prescriptive values in American character which have become almost our second nature.

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## A NEW CONTRACT WITH AMERICA

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*Sam Brownback*

*Sam Brownback was a freshman congressman from Kansas when he published this 1996 article in Policy Review. Its title refers to the Republican congressional platform for a "Contract with America" in 1994. Brownback grew up on a family farm in Kansas and received degrees in agricultural economics and law; prior to*

*1994 he had served as secretary of agriculture for Kansas. When Republican senator Robert Dole retired from the U. S. Senate to run for president in 1996, Brownback was elected to replace him.*

*This reading reveals Brownback's program for a "new" contract with America. Writing more than forty years after Kirk, Brownback nevertheless shares some of Kirk's basic assumptions: that centralized government and planning are more likely to harm than to promote the general welfare, that solutions lie with individuals, not governments, and that the intermediary institutions of a civil society (families, churches, community organizations, clubs) need to be strengthened.*

*As you read, note why Brownback would restrict the role of government and who, instead, he would assign the task of promoting the general welfare.*

"I love my nation but I fear my government." So read a bumper sticker I saw in Topeka, Kansas, during my first campaign for political office. I was running for Congress and I had to wonder: Was this not the same government that had mobilized the nation to win World War II, that had defeated communism, that had built the interstate highway system? What had gone so desperately wrong? A few months later, I understood perfectly the meaning of that message.

Americans deeply believe in the principles of America, but they don't see them reflected in their government. Americans believe in freedom, democracy, moral values, family, community, and free markets. Yet their government seizes their rights without their consent. Government has become their master, not their servant.

To address these concerns, I ran a campaign in 1994 based on three words: Reduce, Reform, and Return. Reduce the size and scope of the federal government. Reform the Congress. Return to the basic values that had built the country: work and family and the recognition of a higher moral authority.

While many were rightfully skeptical back then that what I said would ever happen, none says so now. We are finally seeing some progress toward reversing a trend thought unstoppable: the growth of government, the irresponsibility of Congress, and the loss of the moral character upon which the nation was founded. The current debate over the budget is about more than simply learning to live within our means. It is a turning point in the history of the federal government. The crucial issue is who should be in charge of major programs like welfare and Medicaid<sup>o</sup>—the bureaucrats and regulators and members of Congress in Washington, or the American people and their elected state and local representatives.

Our Founding Fathers designed the federal government to be limited. But in the name of compassion, the federal government now tries to do all things for all people. We have discovered, by spending trillions of dollars and taking

<sup>o</sup> Medicaid: A federal- or state-sponsored program of medical aid for people who cannot afford regular medical services.

rights and freedoms away from individuals, that government cannot solve all of our problems. Indeed, exceeding the authority for which the system was designed hurts people.

I certainly discovered this in the district I represent.

LeCompton, Kansas, has a population of 750. At the city hall one day, I met Jeff Goodrick, who showed me a ramp that has provided access to the handicapped for 20 years. Under the new Americans with Disabilities Act, the town was told to replace this ramp for an estimated cost of \$15,000, even though the design of the old ramp had never denied anyone access to the tiny city hall. The new one was to be slightly longer, with a slightly more gradual slope. The people of LeCompton don't have the money to pay for this new ramp without sacrificing other services essential to their community. Their freedom had been diminished, and for what?

In Erie, Kansas, I walked up and down the main street while I was campaigning. I entered a small repair shop and visited with the owner, Rex Bohrer. He had the thick, callused hands of a man who has not lived a life of leisure. I asked him for his vote. Rex stared up at me from behind an air-conditioner he was repairing and said, "You runnin' for the U.S. Congress?"—to which I answered a timid "yes." He said, "I want to talk to you." He led me to the front of his shop and showed me a government manual containing more than 50 pages of fine print telling him how he must repair refrigerators under new regulations regarding the chemical freon.<sup>o</sup> He asked, "What the heck am I supposed to do with this? I don't understand this manual, and you tell me that if I violate any provision it could cost me \$10,000. What am I supposed to do?"

I didn't know. I certainly do not want to pollute the environment with dangerous chemicals. But here was an honest citizen trying to earn an honest wage who was being directed by an impossibly complex manual and who faces fines of up to \$10,000 if he violates any of its provisions. Rex's only recourse is to quit the business that he needs for survival. What is he to do?

In Girard, Kansas, I was speaking to the seniors of Girard High School about the Social Security trust fund. A number of these students had already paid some Social Security taxes. I asked how many of them expected to receive anything from Social Security when they reached the age of 65. Out of nearly 100 students, only four raised their hands. Then I asked how many of them believed in extraterrestrials. About 15 hands went up. This mirrors the responses of young people everywhere. Nationwide, fewer Americans under 25 believe that they will receive anything from Social Security when they retire than believe in UFOs. . . .

In nearly every town hall I visit, I hear complaints about our tax system. The complicated and frequently politically driven statutes<sup>o</sup> that now make up our tax

<sup>o</sup> freon: A chemical often used as a refrigerant; it is believed to deplete the ozone layer. <sup>o</sup> statutes: Laws.



code compromise our economic growth and provoke class envy. No one can understand the 10,000 pages of tax laws; even the tax lawyers complain about its complexity. When America's taxpayers call the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] for information, they get five different answers from five different agents. Whatever happened to a tax code designed only for raising federal revenue? How did we end up with a system that micromanages our lives and our economy?

Everywhere I go, I hear stories that reveal an overreaching regime distorted by the false notion that centralized authority will lead this nation on the right path. In fact, the American people believe they can handle most of their problems better than the federal government can. They are right.

How has a nation conceived in liberty and opposition to tyranny arrived at a point today where citizens are more fearful of their own government threatening their rights than they are of any other government?

We got off track by forgetting our core principles. But the good news is there is a way out: It's called the Constitution. However much we may have strayed from the precepts of that document, Americans continue to revere it and the principles it enshrines. Ratified by our founding generation and amended by succeeding generations, the Constitution stands equally for self-government and limited government. It is the instrument with which we empowered the federal government in the first place. But it is also the instrument with which we limited that government. If we would only return to those principles of limited government, then our nation, our economy, our liberties, and our social fiber will grow stronger than we have seen for a generation.

The bureaucratic model of growth and prosperity for a nation has been shown wanting all over the world, from communism in the former U.S.S.R., to socialism throughout Europe, to the welfare state in America. Those running for office in 1996 will find that one of the keys to success and leadership will be a vision of hope, of a brighter future with a smaller government—one that is at last turning toward its constitutional principles and away from the idea that a centralized, bureaucratic government will solve all of our problems.

We must create an environment in which Americans look first to themselves and to each other for help, not to their congressmen. We must return to a society where people rely on their communities and do not regard their government as a substitute for civil society.\*

The Constitution gives the federal government a limited number of important enumerated powers—for example, to borrow money, to regulate commerce with foreign nations and among the states, to establish post offices and post roads, to declare war, to coin money, to lay and collect taxes for all these purposes. Powers not granted and enumerated are retained by the states and the people. Much of the federal government literally has no constitutional basis. And that is where we find ourselves today.

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\* civil society: Institutions such as the family, church, community organization, or club in between the individual and government.

The underlying principles limiting the federal government are embodied in our founding documents—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Civil War Amendments. These documents paint a picture of government, and the role of government in human affairs, that is subtle and profound. . . .

In the Declaration of Independence, we find the American vision of freedom and responsibility in its purest form. The Declaration's essence is captured in the few short phrases that begin with the most important phrase of all, "We hold these truths to be self-evident." In that simple line, Thomas Jefferson placed us squarely in the natural-law or higher-law tradition, which holds that there are "self-evident truths" of right or wrong. And what is that higher law? It begins with a premise of moral equality—"all men are created equal"—then defines our equality by reference to our "inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

There, in a nutshell, is the moral vision—a world in which moral people are <sup>20</sup> free to pursue their own happiness, constrained only by the equal rights of others to do the same. It is not the responsibility of government to secure our happiness for us. That is our responsibility—and our right. The role of government, rather, is to secure our rights, as the Declaration goes on to say. That is its basic function. But to be just or legitimate, government's powers must be derived "from the consent of the governed."

We have evolved this century from a constitutional government to a government that behaves without regard to constitutional principle. That moral vision in which people have the right and responsibility to pursue their own happiness has been lost. The federal government no longer *derives* its powers from the people—it just takes them. This is why citizens distrust their government so much today. It is time that we re-limit our federal government so it can perform its proper functions well, and leave to the people and the states those functions which the federal government was never intended to perform.

If we can begin to restore a constitutional government, I foresee an America where freedom and responsibility grow for individuals, families, and communities. Freedom and responsibility cannot be separated. Our freedoms never belonged to the federal government, but to the individual. We must make our government return them.

I foresee an America that is the most family-friendly nation on earth. The family, not the government, should be the backbone of society. Government should cease trying to supplant it. When we are careless, legislative initiatives can harm families. By pledging to spare families from additional legislative and regulatory tinkering, we will do more to protect the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness than any federal legislative quick-fix.

I also foresee an America where far fewer decisions are made by Washington, and more are made by individuals, markets, or localities. Imagine the federal government, operating within its limited role, serving as a model of efficiency and

effectiveness. A federal government focused on its constitutional missions—rather than creating new ones—could become a model for other governments.

So, how do we return to a constitutional government? . . . We must develop an agenda to recover the rights of individuals from their government. 25

## A NEW CONTRACT WITH AMERICA

Call it a new Contract with America—one that passes laws, not merely proposes them. . . . Our goal should be to implement reforms consistent with those timeless principles embodied in the Constitution. . . . Here are some broad outlines for such a contract:

### I. Reduce Government Spending

We will reduce the size of the federal government by a tangible measurement over a period of four years. My preference would be a reduction of federal spending from 22 percent of our GDP [gross domestic product] to 15 percent or less (which may take longer than four years). Imagine taking these resources from the hands of government and putting them back into the pockets of families and entrepreneurs.

### II. Transform the Tax System

We will remove all social engineering<sup>o</sup> from the U.S. tax code to create a new tax system designed strictly for the purpose of raising revenue efficiently. The power to lay and collect taxes was meant to fund the enumerated powers, not to become a political device in and of itself. Today, we discourage certain behaviors and reward others based purely on the whims of those who control the tax leviathan.<sup>o</sup>

### III. Reorganize the Executive Branch

We will redesign the executive branch to be consistent with its constitutional authority instead of one still operating on 20th-century, centralized government experiments. We will replace the 14 cabinet-level agencies, which impose more than half a trillion dollars worth of regulations upon the U.S. economy each year, with perhaps nine, and restrict their regulatory powers under constitutional principles. The Constitution does not authorize at the federal level, for example, many of the activities within the departments of Housing and Urban Development, Commerce, Education, and Energy. 30

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<sup>o</sup>social engineering: Here, the process of managing human beings through the penalties and rewards of the tax system.   <sup>o</sup>tax leviathan: A large bureaucracy with absolute powers over its citizens. The word *leviathan* is from the title of Thomas Hobbes's treatise (1651) on government.

#### **IV. Create a Constitutional Caucus**

We will form a constitutional caucus or commission to evaluate all federal programs for an authorizing principle under the Constitution. A constitutional cleansing of the federal government is long overdue. Furthermore, Congress should require that all legislative proposals cite their precise constitutional authority before they can be enacted. In the case of existing illegitimate programs, Congress should identify and debate which ones should be returned to the states or phased out entirely.

#### **V. Seek Change with Compassion**

As we phase out unconstitutional programs, we will implement change with compassion, so that people currently dependent upon federal programs will have time to prepare for the transition and enjoy the empowerment they receive from their new freedoms.

#### **VI. Pay Off the National Debt**

We will implement a plan not only to balance the budget, but to run surpluses and pay off our \$5-trillion national debt over 30 years, so that our children can decide their own future.

#### **VII. Remove Barriers to Good Citizenship**

We will erase from the books all laws, regulations, and other barriers that prevent local voluntary and civic institutions from helping their neighbors. Faith-based and civic institutions that are leading the fight for a civil society should not be stymied and penalized by mountains of federal laws and regulations that merely supplant local acts of kindness with the cold attitude of "government knows best." Why do we have a poverty class at all, when we spend an average of \$36,000 in federal, state, and local welfare funds on every family below the poverty level? Because as much as 70 cents of each government anti-poverty dollar doesn't even reach the poor—it is engulfed by administrative overhead and "professional" personnel. We will form a task force to conduct an exhaustive investigation of rules and laws that are interfering with those faith-based and civic institutions that are working to revive their communities and families. Then we will implement its recommendations. Local church and community groups can do far more to bring their people back to self-sufficiency than a central planner could ever hope to achieve.

There are conservatives who believe that, with the proper leadership, the federal government can engineer the comeback of the family and civil society. But we should not yield to such temptations. If we are trying to end social engineering

from the left, how can we justify it from the right? Our highest goals should not rely on new legislative initiatives as much as on the proper legislative restraint.

With this platform and this contract with the American people, we will continue to be the party of ideas and of commitment to constitutional principles, to prosperity, to a revived citizenry, and to a government on the side of those who want the culture in America to reflect their basic values. This is more important now than ever before, because government thwarts those values by attempting to replace them. Today, on behalf of the “public good,” government crowds out the individual’s “pursuit of happiness”—including private investment and private charity—by replacing them with government substitutes.

We face today a set of deep-seated problems—overweening government, massive public debt, and crippling dependence on federal programs. But we face as well a historic opportunity to base our solutions upon our very roots as a nation, and upon our principles as a people—freedom and responsibility.

Let us seize the opportunity before us by recovering those principles. If we restore government to its proper role under our Constitution, we will look back in years to come and say that the moment was right, and we were a match for that moment. And our children and grandchildren will thank us.

## CONDOM NATION: GOVERNMENT SEX EDUCATION PROMOTES TEEN PREGNANCY

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*Jacqueline R. Kasun*

*Jacqueline Kasun is a professor of economics at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, and the author of *The War against Population* (1988) and other studies of population programs.*

*This 1994 article, originally published in the conservative journal *Policy Review*, provides a concrete example of how one conservative views a particular public policy issue: sex education. Later in this chapter, you will be able to compare Kasun’s views on this issue to those of liberals and libertarians. Writers from all three civic stances agree that teenage pregnancy is not good for teenagers, their babies, or society in general. Beyond that, however, they disagree on some fundamental assumptions. As a conservative, Kasun asks, Who should decide about what promotes the welfare of teenagers—federal or local government? parents? She also asks, in a more general sense, Who should decide on the substance of young people’s education?*

*As you read, try not to take a stand on sex education itself. Also try not to focus on political party disagreements or on the references to the Clinton administration because political parties often contain ingredients from more than one civic stance. Instead, read Kasun's piece with the goal of seeing what one conservative says about the government's role in sex education.*

During the debate over her confirmation last year, Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders<sup>o</sup> sketched her strategy for combating teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases with her usual sledgehammer bluntness: "I tell every girl that when she goes out on a date—put a condom in her purse." Dr. Elders lamented that schools teach youngsters how to drive but "don't tell them what to do in the back seat."

In fact, they do, and have been doing so for decades in the form of explicit sex-education programs and school-based clinics. And that is the problem. Pre-marital sexual activity and pregnancy have increased in step with the increase in the programs. One of every 10 teenage girls in the United States now becomes pregnant each year. Studies published by the government family planners indicate that these problems are very likely the result of their programs. For example, one such study found that contraceptive education increased the odds of 14-year-olds starting intercourse by 50 percent.

### SEX EDUCATION FOR ALL

None of these facts has ruffled Dr. Elders and her allies in the Clinton administration. Dr. Elders has called for greatly expanding the government commitment to comprehensive sex education from kindergarten through 12th grade, though the surgeon general prefers starting at age three. She wants free contraceptives and abortion referrals through schools and clinics. In his first weeks of office, President Clinton extended the services of federal family-planning clinics and increased their budgets by \$100 million. His proposal for health-care reform gives a prominent place to school clinics.

The Clinton administration's expansion of family planning is only the most recent step in a long march<sup>o</sup> of government-engineered<sup>o</sup> sex education. In 1964 a private coalition of educators and activists founded the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) to "expand the scope of sex education to all age levels and groups." Since then, its curriculum has helped form the basis for sex-ed guidelines in most public schools. In 1965 Congress

<sup>o</sup>Joycelyn Elders: An African American physician from Arkansas who became President Clinton's controversial surgeon general from 1993 until she was fired in late 1994. <sup>o</sup>Long march: A reference to the Long March (1934-35) made by Chinese Communists under Mao Zedong, which served ultimately to consolidate Communist power. <sup>o</sup>government-engineered: Refers to government attempts to manage people's behavior.

began to subsidize birth control for the poor. Beginning in 1967, Congress enacted program after program to extend government birth control. This culminated in the Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 1978, which specifically targeted teenagers, even though they were covered in other programs.

Today, sex education is taught from kindergarten through college throughout the nation. In New York, second-graders stand before their classes to name and point to their genital organs. In California, children model genital organs in clay and fit condoms on cucumbers. From such books as *Changing Bodies*, *Changing Lives*, children are learning alternative forms of sexual expression—including oral sex, anal sex, masturbation, and homosexuality.

At the same time, government-supported “family planning” clinics have blanketed the country, providing young, unmarried men and women with pills, condoms, and abortions—usually without parental notification. School-based clinics, 24 of them in Arkansas alone, often make condoms and other birth-control devices available to children, and even refer teenage girls for abortions without their parents’ knowledge. The number of school-based clinics has grown from 12 in 1980 to at least 325 in 1993, according to the Center for Population Options. All told, federal and state expenditures for contraceptive services increased from \$350 million in 1980 to \$645 million in 1992—not including abortions, sterilizations, and most sex education.

### A RECORD OF FAILURE

It is bad enough that public money is being used to advance a sexuality agenda that many families find objectionable. What is inexplicable is that these government efforts continue—trumpeted by our nation’s chief medical officer—in the face of mounting and irrefutably negative evidence.

Proponents of sex education argue that government family planning increases the use of contraceptives. It does, but it is most effective at encouraging higher rates of sexual activity, teen pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases.

As early as 1980, Melvin Zelnik and John F. Kantner reported in the September/October issue of *Family Planning Perspectives*, a publication of the Alan Guttmacher Institute, that the proportion of metropolitan teenage women who had premarital sex rose from 30 percent in 1971 to 50 percent in 1979. They also reported that the premarital pregnancy rate was increasing even faster than premarital sex activity, despite the increasing availability and use of contraceptives. All of this occurred after more than a decade of increasing sex instruction in public schools.

Studies in the 1980s revealed similar trends. A 1986 Louis Harris poll commissioned by Planned Parenthood found that 64 percent of 17-year-olds who had contraceptive instruction had engaged in intercourse; the proportion was 57 percent for those who had not had the instruction. Two massive studies of

the effects of sex education, published in *Family Planning Perspectives* in 1986, found that young people who had received sex education were more likely to engage in sex at an early age than those who had not received the instruction. These studies were based on two large national probability samples, giving them a high degree of reliability.

### SCHOOL-BASED CLINICS

The record has been equally poor for school-based clinics. Douglas Kirby, a supporter of school clinics, published in the January/February 1991 issue of *Family Planning Perspectives* an evaluation of six clinics that tried to reduce pregnancy by providing birth control services to students. The clinics were operating on school grounds in Dallas, Texas; San Francisco, California; Gary, Indiana; Muskegon, Michigan; Jackson, Mississippi; and Quincy, Florida. Mr. Kirby and his comrades reported that the clinics did not reduce pregnancy. Despite this, they suggested ways to improve the effectiveness of the clinics, which included "more outreach."

As an expert witness, I submitted an affidavit to the Supreme Court of the State of New York in 1991; in it I reviewed seven published studies of the outcomes of programs to reduce pregnancy by providing sex education, together with easy access to contraceptives. The programs had been undertaken in Los Angeles, Baltimore, New York, Cleveland, Seattle, Denver, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, St. Paul, and an unnamed "large midwestern city." None of the seven studies presented valid evidence of reductions in pregnancy: Some gave evidence of increases in pregnancy; six of the seven gave evidence of increases in sexual activity.

The Baltimore school clinic program, despite its positive media coverage, needs to be revisited. Laurie Zabin and Janet Hardy, its director, have written several articles and a book about the clinic, claiming it reduced sexual activity and pregnancy among its student clients. However, a careful look at their research methods shows that they manipulated their sample; they omitted the 12th grade from some of their calculations, on the grounds that some of the young women were not sufficiently "motivated" or "advanced"—whatever that means.

Clinic officials have claimed that students "delayed" sexual activity and that teen pregnancies declined. But they based these claims on questionnaires collected from only 96 of the 1,033 girls surveyed at the beginning of the clinic program. They published figures showing that teen sex increased during the operation of the program, but then denied this is what the figures meant.

Last year, Mr. Kirby and others reported on the almost 20 years of experi-<sup>15</sup>ence in the much-publicized St. Paul school clinics, which provide a "full range of reproductive health services," including sex education and prescriptions for birth control. The media have broadcasted claims of significant reductions in



student birthrates. Mr. Kirby and his co-authors, however, found "a statistically significant increase in birthrates after the clinics opened." They caution, nevertheless, that the appropriate conclusion is that "the St. Paul clinics had little impact on birthrates." Incredibly, the Center for Population Options concluded that the results prove the need for more "interventions."

### SUBSIDIZING ILLEGITIMACY AND ABORTION

Such interventions, however, are simply giving us higher rates of casual sex and illegitimacy. The statistical evidence has been around a long time; Susan Roylance studied 15 states with similar social-demographic characteristics and rates of teenage pregnancy in 1970; in testimony to Congress in 1981 she reported that those with the highest expenditures on family planning showed the largest increases in abortions and illegitimate births among teenagers between 1970 and 1979.

In 1992, I conducted a study of welfare dependency in the 50 states based on data for the mid-1980's (the data for such a study become available only after a lag of three to five years). The results showed that states which spent *more* on birth control per woman ages 15 to 44 had higher proportions of births out of wedlock and higher rates of teenage pregnancy and welfare dependency two years later.

The study also showed that states which provide government-funded abortions do not achieve lower levels of welfare dependency or a lower proportion of births out of wedlock. Instead, those states have significantly higher rates of teenage pregnancy. In *Family Planning Perspectives* of November/December 1990, Shelly Lundberg and Robert D. Plotnick reported similar evidence that easy access to abortion is associated with higher rates of white teenage pregnancy. They also found that easier access to contraceptives and abortions and more generous public assistance are associated with higher rates of premarital births among white teenagers.

The Clinton administration continues to ignore what can no longer be ignored: Government sex-ed programs and school-based clinics either increase teenage sexual activity, pregnancies, and abortion or—at best—have no significant impact. The surgeon general, of all people, ought be aware of the ambiguity. Between 1987 and 1991, during Dr. Elders's vigorous condom and clinic promotion as director of Public Health in Arkansas, the teenage birthrate rose 14 percent.

The Guttmacher Institute, a research affiliate of Planned Parenthood, published an article concluding that "the existing data do not yet constitute consistent, compelling evidence that sex education programs are effective" in reducing teen pregnancies. Reviewing all the published studies on school clinics, investigators at Northwestern University Medical School and the Department of Health and Human Services concluded: "There is little consistent evidence that school-clinic programs affect pregnancy rates." Even the

National Education Association admits that there is "only meager evidence" that sex-ed programs have any effect on teen sex and illegitimacy.

Why, then, the relentless push for such programs at federal and state levels of government?

The near abandonment of common sense and moral instruction of young people in public education is part of the answer. The simple common sense of an earlier era would have suspected that talking to young people endlessly about sex from kindergarten through college, as is now the pedagogical custom, might encourage experimentation. "The philosophy that directs teens to 'be careful' or 'to play it safe with condoms' has not protected them," says Dr. Joe McIlhane Jr., president of the Medical Institute for Sexual Health. "It has only enticed them into the quagmire of venereal warts, genital cancer and pre-cancer, herpes for life, infertility, and AIDS." Such views, however, are not in vogue among President Clinton's health and education elites.

Another related reason for the adherence to failed sex-ed programs seems to be a stubborn assumption that sexual information automatically serves as a catalyst for transforming behavior.

As social scientist Charles Murray<sup>o</sup> has pointedly noted, however, almost 60 percent of the new white teenage mothers in 1991 were unmarried, compared with 18 percent in 1970. In 1991, 92 percent of births to black teenagers occurred out of wedlock, compared with 63 percent in 1970. Hispanics, who account for almost 30 percent of white teenage births, characteristically have higher fertility than other racial groups. The recent increase in teenage fertility, however, is not the result of Hispanic behavior. Fertility among non-Hispanic white teenagers increased by a third between 1986 and 1991, while the rate for Hispanics actually dropped and the rate for blacks increased only 18 percent. Clearly, the big increase occurred among young—and better educated—white women.

Not only were teenagers having rising proportions of births out of wedlock,<sup>25</sup> but as reported by the National Center for Health Statistics, so were women of all ages. In 1960, 5 percent of all new babies were born out of wedlock. In 1991, the number topped 30 percent. This follows nearly three decades of increasingly comprehensive and explicit sex education for our children. Clearly, sexual instruction by itself cannot be expected to promote sexual responsibility. A 1991 *Newsweek* cover story admitted the obvious: "If education alone could affect people's behavior, STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) would be a thing of the past."

### BETTER SOLUTIONS

What can be done to reduce risky youthful sexual behavior? There is a role for government, but it is largely negative: Restrictions on access to government-funded birth control and abortion have been followed by significant reductions

<sup>o</sup>Charles Murray: Controversial conservative or libertarian writer who argues that government social programs often undermine the family by rewarding irresponsibility.

in pregnancy and childbearing. When Ohio and Georgia stopped paying for Medicaid abortions in 1978, not only did abortion decline but so did pregnancy and births among women eligible for Medicaid.

The number of pregnancies among girls under 18 fell by 15 percent within two years after Massachusetts passed a law requiring parental notification regarding minors' abortions. In 1981, Minnesota passed such a law. The abortion rate among girls 15 to 17 years of age fell by 21 percent between 1980 and 1985, the pregnancy rate fell by 15 percent, and the fertility rate by 9 percent. (Planned Parenthood filed suit to have the law declared unconstitutional.) States that have passed parental consent laws for abortion have seen declines in abortion and teenage pregnancies.

Then what explains the flood of claims, so enthusiastically reported in the media, that government financing of contraceptives, abortion, and sterilizations prevents teenage pregnancy and saves billions in public assistance? The studies, all disseminated by family-planning interests, rely on assumptions rather than evidence. They presume that if women did not have easy access to subsidized government family planning, they would not restrain their sexual activity, nor would they buy their own condoms, but instead would engage in high levels of "unprotected" sex.

This assumption flies in the face of evidence as well as common sense. Considerable research has shown that people do adjust their behavior to the size of the risks they face. People whose houses are insured are more likely to build on flood plains. Economists have an expression—"moral hazard"—for this well-known human tendency to take greater risks, when insurance is more comprehensive and to avoid risk when uninsured. Kristin Luker reported as early as 1977 in *Studies in Family Planning* that women who had ready access to abortion were more likely to risk becoming pregnant.

In addition, the government ought to end or amend its \$800,000 ad cam- 30  
paign on radio and television to get Americans to use condoms. For one thing, the ads suggest that responsible condom use assures a high level of protection against HIV. But the research findings thus far are simply too controversial to make such claims. A recent study at the University of Texas, for example, found that even with condoms, the risk of HIV transmission can be as high as 31 percent.

Some of the ads even serve as an inducement to teenage sex. In one of them, a popular rock star tells the audience that he is naked and that he uses a latex condom "whenever I have sex." Not exactly a warning of the hazards of uncommitted sexual activity.

The second part of a strategy for curbing teen pregnancies is more affirmative. Leighton C. Ku and others reported in the May/June 1992 issue of *Family Planning Perspectives* that young people who had been taught "resistance skills"—how to say no—engaged in significantly less sexual activity and had fewer sex partners than students given birth-control instruction. In an abstinence-based program in Atlanta public schools, students are 15 times less likely to have sex

in the year following the program than teens who took traditional sex education or none at all.

Two popular programs, *Sex Respect* and *Teen-Aid*, have done much to slow down teenage sexual activity, according to studies by the Institute for Research and Education. Both teach that abstinence is the healthiest lifestyle and discuss the emotional risks of premarital sex, as well as the risk of disease. A study of Illinois students enrolled in a *Sex Respect* course found that before the program, 60 percent of the students agreed that abstinence was the best way to avoid pregnancy. After the program, 80 percent of the students favored abstinence.

Despite critics of the program, there is a growing market for abstinence-based curricula. A 1990 study of 1,000 sexually active girls under 16 found that when asked what topic they wanted more information on, 84 percent said, "how to say no without hurting the other person's feelings."

### SEX-ED CORRUPTION

After almost three decades of experience and study, the promoters of government birth control have failed to produce any evidence of its salutary effects. On the contrary, the weight of the evidence, much of it published by its own proponents, shows it to be associated with increases in premarital sex, teenage pregnancy, births out of wedlock, welfare dependency and abortion. Most of the young people who are growing up in this era of government family planning are like my students—unwary, basically decent. But there are others. A *New York Times* story in March 1993 featured an interview with a member of a California gang accused of raping hundreds of girls as young as 10 years old. The boy was candid enough: "They pass out condoms, teach sex education, and pregnancy-this and pregnancy-that. But they don't teach us any rules."

The conclusion must be that government birth control is not merely another useless, wasteful public program. If it were, society could afford to ignore it. The conclusion must be, as the common sense of an earlier generation would have predicted, that government birth control corrupts youth.

## A WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

### Conservatism

The following tasks are designed to help you think about the readings and identify and start to work up material you might use in your own essay.

1. Consider your personal experience with civic life. Write a page or so telling about your own personal experience with civic life: Have you, for instance, participated in school government? Worked on a political campaign? Helped solve a community problem or helped others in need? Joined a public sports team or recreational group? Participated in a local neighborhood organiza-