

The Heritage Foundation and Jim DeMint Are Both Vital

President Trump's shout-out during his 100-day rally to Heritage president Jim DeMint, "I want to really thank Heritage ... and also from Heritage Jim DeMint, it's been amazing," reminds me of just what an important asset a strong and independent Heritage Foundation has been to the conservative movement.

I was there, so to speak, at the beginning of the Heritage Foundation and what many people in Washington seem to have forgotten is that Heritage was founded to be a movement conservative force independent of the Republican Party and establishment Republican leaders.

My good friend the late Paul Weyrich, then press secretary for conservative U.S. Senator Gordon Allott of Colorado, was one of the moving forces behind the creation of the Heritage Foundation. One of the other founders was Ed Feulner, then administrative assistant to Congressman Phil Crane, for whom I did the direct mail when he was first elected to the House in a Special Election in 1969.

Paul had the idea for the Heritage Foundation after becoming frustrated with the overly academic posture of the American Enterprise Institute, then the leading conservative think tank in Washington.

Paul, and many others in the conservative movement, saw AEI as producing great material, but not really being in the moment in a way that would affect the course of American culture and politics—their material always seemed to come out after the fact, too late to affect legislation or the course of public policy.

And at a time when many conservatives in Washington were

afraid to publicly identify themselves as such, that meant we lost nearly every battle.

And as my great friend Morton Blackwell put it, Paul looked at the powerful liberal coalition of academics, think tank analysts, members of Congress, White House aides, interest-group officials and journalists running America and wondered: "Why can't we put together an operation like that?"

So, with the help of conservative business leader Joseph Coors and other early conservative donors the Heritage Foundation was born.

Paul Weyrich became the first president of this new conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation. Ed Feulner later succeeded Paul as president and built Heritage into a conservative powerhouse closely aligned with the rise of Ronald Reagan and the Reagan movement, and Ed was succeeded by Senator Jim DeMint.

In the lead-up to the Reagan Revolution, Paul, Ed, Morton Blackwell of the Leadership Institute and I were among an informal group that started meeting at my home every Wednesday morning beginning in 1975 and going continuously for some 10 years.

We were among a small group of determined conservatives, who came to be known as the New Right, that began to discuss how to build a powerful base of conservative activists and leaders who could eventually win in American politics.

What now seems forgotten by all too many in the conservative movement is that the Reagan Revolution, for which Heritage furnished a great deal of the intellectual firepower and rhetoric, was as much a revolution against the Republican establishment and its go-along-get-along leadership as it was against the Democrats and liberalism.

In those early days, Heritage joined us in battling the

Republican establishment every bit as fiercely as we battled the Democratic establishment that dominated Washington at the time.

And truth be told, the Republican establishment, be it on the cultural front or in matters of the growth of government and spending, has always been the first and greatest impediment to governing America according to conservative principles.

Paul Weyrich understood this, as did Ed Feulner. And so did Joe Coors and the other early backers of the Heritage Foundation; that's why they put their money into the risky proposition of creating a new independent movement conservative think tank, instead of donating to the American Enterprise Institute.

When Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, one of the great accomplishments of the conservative movement was when Heritage provided the president-elect's transition team with detailed policy prescriptions on everything from taxes and regulation to trade and national defense.

The published version of these recommendations, the 1,100-page "Mandate for Leadership," was described by United Press International back then as "a blueprint for grabbing the government by its frayed New Deal lapels and shaking out 48 years of liberal policy."

President Reagan used "Mandate" to help realize his vision of a world free of communism, an economy that didn't crush people's dreams with high taxes and regulations, and an America the world could admire once again. He gave copies to every member of his Cabinet. The result: Nearly two-thirds of "Mandate's" 2,000 recommendations were adopted or attempted by the Reagan administration.

Back then, no one in the conservative movement questioned or criticized the "Mandate" for its implicit and explicit criticism of the policies of the establishment Republican

leaders, such as House Minority Leader Representative Bob Michael and Senate Republican Leader Howard Baker.

Today's Heritage Foundation appears to have scored a somewhat similar success, with many Heritage staff and scholars entering the Trump administration and President Trump's budget plan mirroring the Heritage Foundation budget recommendations to the point that left-wing protesters demonstrated outside the Heritage headquarters.

However, today, at a juncture in American political and cultural life every bit as crucial as was 1980, Heritage is in the midst of shake-up in leadership.

Jim DeMint who was recently ousted as president of the Heritage Foundation, is one of the leading conservative thinkers and brightest political minds of the limited government constitutional conservative movement.

Some have alleged that it is because Heritage under Jim DeMint was out of synch with the Republican leadership on Capitol Hill—especially House Speaker Paul Ryan.

I certainly hope these rumors are not true.

Making the Heritage Foundation just another arm of the Capitol Hill Republican establishment would be a disaster for the conservative movement, which in the thinking of Paul Weyrich and the other Heritage founders with whom I was so closely associated, was always to be a third force, independent of the Republican Party, that would stand for limited government constitutional conservative principles, not the self-interest of any individual politician. {eo}

Richard Viguerie transformed American politics in the 1960s and '70s by pioneering the use of direct mail fundraising in the political and ideological spheres. He used computerized direct mail fundraising to help build the conservative movement, which then elected Ronald Reagan as the first

conservative president of the modern era. As the "Funding Father of the conservative movement," Viguerie motivated millions of Americans to participate in politics for the first time, greatly expanding the base of active citizenship. He is our era's equivalent of Tom Paine, using a direct mail letter rather than a pamphlet to deliver his call to arms.

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