

# These 5 Issues Are Destroying Conservatism in America

Since 2000, conservatism has been in retreat. For those who believe in limited government, freedom, the rule of law, secure borders, lawful immigration, traditional values and a restrained foreign policy, the past two decades show very little accomplishment.

We have now elected three presidents since then, and yet the federal government continues to grow, agencies still over-regulate, the burden on taxpayers remains great, and there is no end in sight. The Bush and Obama administrations dramatically increased the role of government, especially in health care. Except for a few issues where conservatism coincidentally aligns with business interests and some judicial nominations, the Republican Party has failed to articulate a credible and coherent conservative message. This failure is combined with the failure of conservative thought leaders to push a message of freedom and governmental restraint.

In my view, there are five key reasons for the retreat in conservative ideas and ideals.

1. As conservatives won elections and victories since 2000, especially in 2010 and 2014, they became part of congressional majorities in Washington. Conservatives began to talk like legislators, compromise like legislators and became part of a process largely looked upon with derision and disfavor by the American people. Conservatives could not and cannot paint a picture to persuade the people to the rightness of their position, and the resulting noise of CBO scoring, reconciliation and debt ceilings wipe out any conservative message.

2. Bushism: The mixture of Big Government Republicanism, big trade agreements and robust international commitments have crowded out conservatives and compromised conservatives. Conservative credibility has been tested and destroyed by endorsing Medicare Part D, campaign finance reform and bailouts and subsidies. The impact of the Bush presidencies on conservatives and conservatism has been profound. The George W. Bush administration's expansion of Medicare set the tone for later expansion by the Obama administration, and most surprisingly it was a Bush appointee to the Supreme Court, John Roberts, who set Obamacare in constitutional stone.

3. Conservatives forgot to talk to the poor, the near-poor and the struggling middle classes. When it comes down to electoral success, you need votes to win and people vote. Think-tank seminars, trendy resort meetings and intellectual gatherings do not move people and spread ideas of freedom. Forgotten were those shut out from our steel mills in the Ohio Valley, the coal mines of West Virginia or the auto plants of Michigan. The ideas of freedom are as applicable and important to them as any trade seminar on an island resort. In fact, it is more important, because, by persuading these voters, you can change elections and influence ideas for generations to come.

4. Conservative credibility has been severely tested because of its compromise with the Republican establishment. Whether it is voting for, making excuses for or half-heartedly advocating for big-government programs like Medicare Part D, No Child Left Behind or the Export-Import Bank, many conservatives betrayed their principles, appeared hypocritical and seemed brazenly political.

There is nothing more symbolic of the collapse of conservatism than the Washington drama of repealing and replacing Obamacare. To the extent that the Republican Party is the conservative party and to the extent that it is now the governing party, its handling of the repeal of Obamacare has been a disaster for conservative principles. More than a third

of Republican office holders favor making permanent the Medicaid expansion of Obamacare. This permanent expansion will leave tens of millions of Americans dependent on the government for decades to come. This can hardly be free or even healthy.

Lost is any discussion of patient choice, of restoring the relationship between patient and doctor and removing both government and insurance companies from the relationship between doctor and patient. Freedom and choice have been lost in this debate.

5. Finally, conservative principles also take a back seat in the endless drama between the president and the media. Any given day, driving from one appointment to another, you can randomly tune in to talk-radio. Almost without exception, the talk is about the mainstream media, one rant after another about the media and its unfair coverage. The complaints drown out discussion of issues about freedom. This is combined with the attacks by the president and his allies about how “fake news” drowns out conservative principles and ideas. It’s all about the media, and not the issues.

These key issues drown out the conservative message of freedom and limited government. Conservatives will need to articulate a more forceful and clear message, independent of these distractions and diversions, even if it means becoming more and more independent from the Republican Party and the Washington establishment. {eo}

**Samuel G. Casolari** is a trustee of Grove City College and a contributor to *The Center for Vision & Values*.

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