

government is my keeper, I shall not want. Yeah, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of poverty, the Health and Human Services department is there, comforting me with food stamps and AFDC payments.

Republicans should counter this from the bottom up, highlighting success stories and role models and encouraging others to emulate good behavior. Congress might experiment with incentives in the form of tax credits or outright cash gifts to companies and individuals who succeed in relieving government of the burdens of maintaining a welfare state.

Congress cannot do any of this alone. The conservative movement should ask something of every American—but without using the word “sacrifice.” We are investing in our future and our children’s future, not with more money, but with more of ourselves.

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— **Tod Lindberg** —

Americans are deeply divided between two competing visions of government. One of them, clearly, is conservative—limited government, deregulation, decentralization, lower taxes, and reduced government spending together forming a sometimes uneasy alliance with conservative positions on “social issues.” The other vision is not easily characterized, partly because it is not yet fully formed. It is not liberalism—liberalism cannot speak its name in American politics today. But neither is it liberalism-in-disguise, as many conservatives apparently believe. Elements of both the honest and the veiled liberalism survive, but their influence has diminished. The Democratic Party today not only wishes to be seen as having moved to the right; it *has* moved to the right. But that does not mean it has moved into anything like conservative territory.

The trouble behind. The most conspicuous failure of the 104th Congress was its irresistible impulse to set its actions in a broader context. There is nothing wrong, and much right, about cutting taxes, cutting spending, deregulating, and so on. People like those things fine all by themselves. It is not necessary to try to persuade them that these changes are the Third Wave, or that they are consistent with libertarian philosophy, or that the streets should run red with the blood of counterrevolutionaries. Republicans had become so persuaded that they were speaking to Everyman’s real concerns—and they were, by the way—that they imagined that they were doing so every time they opened their mouths. In this remarkably honest period in American

politics, there was occasionally such a thing as too much candor. This is a case not for dishonesty, but for less matter and more art.

The trouble ahead. It is impossible to know what legislation President Clinton might sign. Some have advocated waiting for him to make the first move on controversial issues like Medicare reform, so that Republicans won’t take it on the chin in the realm of public opinion. This may work in some areas, but it lets Clinton pick the space he will work in.

Far better to let a hundred flowers bloom on the Republican side. Legislate, legislate, legislate. Keep sending him tax cuts until he finally likes one well enough to sign it, and then send him the rest anyway. There are, to be sure, certain practical obstacles, such as the senate filibuster wielded by Minority Leader Tom Daschle. But idle hands are the devil’s workshop, so Republicans ought to busy themselves on Republican things.

The danger for conservatives is that Bill Clinton and Al Gore may delineate and capture a political space somewhere to the right of the Left but to the left of the Right, and that this space contains enough votes to allow Democrats to rebuild a majority coalition. The new Democratic policy agenda is unlikely to contain anything like government-guaranteed health insurance, huge stimulus packages, or massive job-training programs. The more likely model for Democrats is the Family and Medical Leave Act—a program that is mandate-laden but unbureaucratic, pitched to middle-class concerns, and much harder to attack than massive programs like ClintonCare.

The best way to avoid that trap, once again, is to keep Republicans at work on Republican things. If a united Democratic congressional caucus and White House reach across the aisle to Republicans more often than Republicans reach across to Democrats, then conservatism is in trouble.

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— **Don Eberly** —

The electorate, sometimes a brutal tutor, has been kind to the Republicans. The lesson of the 1996 election is that the American people generally support the direction the party is traveling in, but are worried about

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the driving. Don't change direction, they are saying, your policies are sensible and necessary. But slow down and navigate more carefully. This republic is not the land of revolutionary jihads.

Three areas require attention: mindset, message, and messenger. Republicans must think and talk in the language, not of revolution, but of governmental reform and social renaissance. The past two years proved just how natural is the impulse among conservatives to oppose rather than propose. For decades, this tendency was well honed through the daily practice of confronting the totalitarian state abroad and the welfare state at home. The former is now functionally gone, the latter is at least ideologically spent.

The challenge now is to create something new—a humane and viable American society. The resuscitation of society is dramatically different work than the demolition of government. A society ravaged by cultural decay and social regression needs a politics of persuasion and prudence. Republicans must quickly evolve from political wrecking balls to architects of a prudently redesigned federal system and a revived civil society.

All this requires a different message. To use a football analogy, American politics is played between the 40-yard lines. The greatest gains for conservatism came in convincing the country that liberals had pulled America and the Democratic party too far to the left. These converts to conservatism were not looking to replace the ideological stridency of the Left with a rigid triumphalism of the Right. What they wanted was nonideological common sense, which is what conservatism has historically been about.

At stake is nothing less than a realignment that favors conservative ideas. America will be governed from neither the Left nor Right, but from the middle, albeit a middle dramatically redefined by conservatism. On a host of domestic policy issues—welfare, crime, affirmative action, taxes, and decentralization—today's center was

yesterday's Right. Properly guided, these trends can be guided toward more important reforms, from downsizing government to voucherizing housing and health care to privatizing retirement programs.

Finally, regarding the messenger, Republicans must think generationally. Half of Clinton's advantage was generational—he embodied the *Zeitgeist* of the Baby Boomers, and to a lesser extent of Generation Xers. For the vast majority of the new electorate, the complexity and diver-

sity of life obscures core certainties. The great temptation in an age of complexity is nostalgia. If the conceit of the Left is that it often ignores the past, the folly of some on the Right is thinking we can live in the past.

The Republican party should skip a generation or two in its leadership to bring up talented women, minorities, and young people. To think that Republicans can govern for long on the Anglo vote alone is fantasy. The party must find a way to connect its principles to the aspirations of new generations and emerging constituencies. Hence the party would be unwise to nominate anyone over the age of 55 in the next presidential campaign.

The greatest legislative priority of the new Congress must be entitlement reform. Republicans need to seize the historic moment to craft a bipartisan package to reform Medicare and Social Security. This is both a moral imperative and a political opportunity. There is a new entitlement constituency forming, led by Generation X, which is deeply concerned about the crushing burden of debt it will carry. Entitlement politics are already beginning to shift as politicians are forced to pay greater attention to this emerging generation.

Republicans must also address the threat that judicial review poses to constitutional balance. Increasingly, the courts have arrogated to themselves the power to decide controversial moral and political questions. The result has been a serious erosion of self-government and of the credibility of the judiciary. To avoid a constitutional crisis, we will need to restore judicial restraint. This might well require congressional action to limit the jurisdiction of the federal courts. Ultimately, the success of such efforts will depend upon increased conservative influence in America's culture-forming institutions, particularly the academy and the legal profession.

Finally, we must recognize that many of our urgent national problems can't be solved through legislative fiat. Our efforts instead should be directed toward facilitating the efforts of citizens to solve problems at the local level. For example, Republicans need to develop and refine policies which encourage local involvement and private charity. The nation is on the verge of a historic turn-of-the-century civic and moral transformation, promising to curb teen pregnancy, renew fatherhood, recover character, and inspire faith-based charity.

Republicans have been in the classroom, cramming for two years of tests in parliamentary skills that the other party perfected over 50 years. Confounding the naysayers, it has received pretty decent grades and is now poised to excel.

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