

Less Government, More Freedom: Embracing the Constitution's Vision for Prosperity

The aspiration for liberty and self-determination drove the Founding Fathers of our nation to risk their sacred honor, their fortunes and even their lives 229 years ago. The odds were against them. Their volunteer militia was largely untrained and would be facing the most powerful, disciplined army in the world. By way of their radical proclamation, the writers of the Declaration of Independence joined the Revolutionaries who had put everything on the line in the fight for freedom.

We honor their boldness and courage. But we must do more. We must remember their belief that the greatest threat to their freedom and liberty would not come from a foreign enemy. They feared the very government they were in the process of establishing.

Our Founding Fathers had witnessed time and again, in the words of the nineteenth-century historian Lord Acton, that “power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” They wanted a government that Daniel Webster would later describe from the U.S. Senate floor as “a people’s government, made for the people, made by the people, and answerable to the people.”

Following the Revolutionary War, the Framers of the 1789 Constitution worked to create a government that would allow individual states the ability to band together in unity as a single nation, yet would preserve the freedom and independence they had just fought so hard to achieve. Limiting the power of the federal government was one of their bedrock beliefs.

Division of power, checks and balances, three branches of government—their approach had overlap, contradiction, and inefficiency. The Framers knew that. But more pressing was their fear that we would enslave ourselves by an oppressive, authoritarian government.

Years later, President Martin Van Buren would echo a similar concern. In 1837, he wrote: “All communities are apt to look to government for too much. . . . But this ought not to be. The framers of our excellent Constitution and the people who approved it acted at the time on a sounder principle. They wisely judged that the less government interferes with private pursuits the better for the general prosperity. Its real duty is to leave every citizen and every interest to reap under its own protection the rewards of virtue, industry, and prudence.”

We have not remained true to the vision the Constitutional Framers set for us. On this anniversary of American independence, President Van Buren’s words beg us to examine our approach:

- How do we respond to health care crises? Government programs.
- How do we ensure ethical business practices? Government regulation.
- How do we care for the poor? State redistribution of wealth.
- How do we manage international competition? Trade barriers.

The answer to every economic and social challenge cannot be: “the government should do something about that.” Every time we fall prey to this kind of thinking, when we look first to law or regulation or legislators to cure what ails us, we chip away at our own freedoms. We trade our liberty for protection. As the Founding Fathers knew, we may well be our own worst enemy.

Spending in Washington is out of control. The budget continues to grow. I recently heard one legislator commend the current congress for its reduction of the deficit, from over \$450 billion to around \$375 billion. No one should be celebrating a \$375 billion deficit.

At the end of the day, responsible citizens are expected to balance their checkbooks and live within their means. The government should be held accountable for the same.

Spending must be cut and the size of government must be reduced. Other candidates for the U.S. Senate will propose cutting taxes and reducing regulations with the idea that these will result in greater tax revenue. I favor both approaches, but neither addresses the root of the problem.

Our government is too big. Rather than taking action ourselves or looking to our families and communities for solutions to our social challenges, often the government is the first place we turn; in fact, it should be our final resort.

President Van Buren was right: "The framers of our excellent Constitution and the people who approved it acted at the time on a sounder principle." As good citizens of these United States, we honor them by doing the same.

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