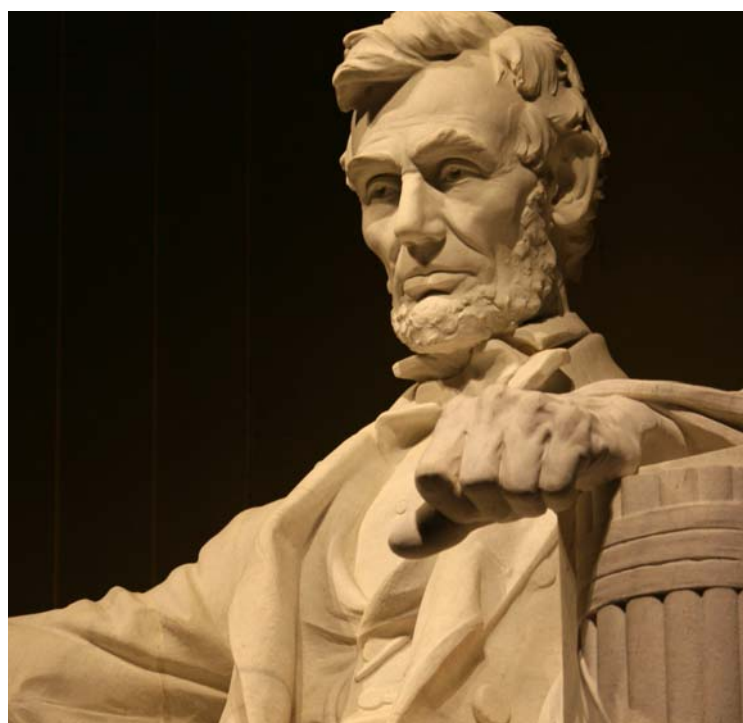


LEARNING FROM LINCOLN

Principle and Pragmatism

Getting the Balance Right

A Symposium



David Allen, Paul D. Allick, Greg Blankenship, Fran Bradley, Barry Casselman, Larry Colson, Kevin Donnelly, Jim Dueholm, Amitai Etzioni, Joseph R. Fornieri, Paul Gessing, John Gibbs, Jay P. Greene, John Gunyou, Jake Haulk, Matthew Heffron, Eric Lipman, Randolph J. May, James H. Miller, Grover Norquist, Tom Prichard, Donald P. Racheter, Lawrence W. Reed, Dane Smith, David Tuerck, Lou Wangberg, Craig Westover, Cheri Pierson Yecke, Stephen B. Young

Introduction by Mitch Pearlstein



Center of the American Experiment is a nonpartisan, tax-exempt, public policy and educational institution that brings conservative and free market ideas to bear on the hardest problems facing Minnesota and the nation.

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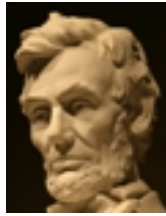
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Introduction

Mitch Pearlstein
Founder & President

Principle and Pragmatism: Getting the Balance Right is part of year-long series of Center activities aimed at re-energizing conservatism in Minnesota and the nation, prompted in part by the Republican National Convention to be held next month, September, in St. Paul. That said, I'm doubly quick to emphasize – and as is the case with everything the Center does – this is a wholly nonpartisan exercise, featuring 29 local and other writers from assorted ideological strains and party denominations. And yes, while it may be conducted under the rubric of “Learning from Lincoln,” and while our 16th president was indeed the first Republican to serve in the White House, I would like to think he rose above party labels a while back. On this last point, you may want to go first to Dane Smith's very good contribution: “Lincoln: Yours, Mine, or Ours?”

A useful frame for understanding current political contests and debates is to consider, on the one hand, the extent to which politicians, activists,

writers, talk show hosts, and others hold fast to what they view as clear-cut principle.

Or, on the other hand, the extent to which such players are open to accommodation, perhaps even eager to reach compromise with their opponents, regardless of whether such foes are outsiders or insiders of their own party.

As witness the current and everlasting presidential campaign, it has been a tension equally relevant to conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats, and germane to a wide range of issues, especially keenly passionate ones like immigration, abortion, same-sex marriage, and the war in Iraq.

How does Lincoln fit in all of this?

For perhaps the best example, I know of no issue in American history better defined by these kinds of conundrums than the timing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Both before and at the start of the Civil War, many abolitionists vigorously urged Lincoln to free the slaves immediately. Lincoln, however, while despising slavery, saw his first responsibility as preserving the union, and to the extent that Border States

might side with the South if he liberated the slaves “too soon,” he delayed issuing the Emancipation Proclamation until he thought the time was strategically – not necessarily philosophically – sound.

One, however, did not have to be a Lincoln scholar to have participated in this project. In fact, writers didn’t even have to mention Lincoln if they chose otherwise, as our focus is on current events rather than 19th Century history. The charge to contributors, simply, was to employ Lincoln if they thought doing so would bolster or add a little jazz to their arguments.

In addition to the on-the-one-hand-on-the-other-hand dilemma cited above, the letter soliciting essays also suggested questions like these:

What course best serves Minnesota and the nation?

- Pursuing political aims in a ceaseless spirit of ideological purity?
- Or endeavoring more modestly to suffice?

Putting matters metaphorically, man may not live by bread alone, but what’s civically healthier?

- Fighting for and accepting only full loaves?
- Or, when necessary, taking victories in slices?

What about conservatism more specifically?

- Would the movement best be served by more resoluteness (described by some as futile dogmatism)?
- Or would it best be served by more flexibility (described by some as defeatist squishiness)?

Writers were urged to be selective instead of touching all these bases, as depth is almost always better than breadth in columns like these. I also urged them to tie their arguments, whenever possible, to one or two actual controversies or issues.

With that as prologue, what did they have to say? Given their savvy, it’s not surprisingly that no one came down completely on one side or the other. No one, it should go without saying, was close to being so unrealistic or just plain silly. Instead, they consistently construed and balanced the two ideas insightfully and helpfully. Here are snippets from a sampling of pieces.

Some writers emphasized the importance of collaboration

Paul Allick: “It used to be that public officials who knew how to work with the other side became leaders. I can remember television coverage of President Ronald Reagan and House Speaker Tip O’Neill walking and laughing together and making friendly comments about each other just after some great policy battle on Capitol Hill. Today, we see Joe Lieberman thrown out into the political wilderness for not being pure enough in his worldview or tough enough on the other side. When did it become a political liability to agree with and work with the other side?”

Fran Bradley: “Having spent 12 years in the Legislature as a commonsense conservative trying to bring reform to our welfare and public assistance programs, I learned that change is really a marathon, not a sprint. While it was always important to hold strong to principles and long-range objectives, it was equally important to make meaningful progress. Although this can be incredibly frustrating to those of us impatient for significant change and perfection, experience shows that it usually is the only way to achieve our objectives. There is little satisfaction in repeatedly

fighting the battle of idealism without ever achieving results.”

Barry Casselman: “The next president will have to compromise on many vital issues, or he will fail and fail badly. John McCain has a record of compromise in the Senate; Barack Obama has no such record. But that both candidates start with an appeal to the political center as the final stage of the long 2008 campaign unfolds is perhaps the most hopeful sign in the otherwise gloomy and dubious political environment of today.”

Some symposiasts drew useful distinctions.

Jim Dueholm: “There is a tension between principle and pragmatism only when both are achievable and there is no competing principle. Many pro-lifers oppose exceptions even for rape and incest promptly recorded and verified. But if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned, and a bill outlawing abortion – with those exceptions – were the only politically possible alternative, pro-lifers would probably support the bill as a matter of principle. Without the bill, over a million fetuses a year would die, and with the bill, maybe a few thousand. Saving the savable lives would be the principled thing to do.”

Eric Lipman: “The better and more helpful question to ask is: When did the Great Emancipator stand on principle, and were these pragmatic choices? Phrased in this way, it is clear that pragmatism is not always a pathway different from principle, but could be part of a sequence, from one to the other. Better still, I think that is how President Lincoln viewed his own dilemmas and choices.”

Craig Westover: “Ayn Rand, at her philosophical best in the book *The Virtue of Selfishness*, noted that the question “Doesn’t life require compromise?” is usually asked by people who fail to differentiate between what is fundamental principle and what is

merely a concrete, specific wish. In the context of this symposium, we paraphrase Rand by noting that the question on the table (“What is the right balance between principle and pragmatism?”) fails to differentiate between fundamental principles and personal values.”

Stephen B. Young: “Aristotle spoke of what is needed in the ethical person as moderation – prudence and wisdom in the choice of action. Approaching office as Lincoln did invokes both the learning of Aristotle and the best teachings of the Old and New Testaments. Too much fidelity to principle at the wrong time and in the wrong way can be a form of arrogance, while too much compromise and opportunism is but a different form of willfulness.”

Some urged what might be described as a measure of latitude.

Greg Blankenship: “I recall that William F. Buckley, Jr. hinted concern about . . . abandonment of reason late in his life. Given his stature as a founding father of conservatism, his conservatism was never challenged when he broke with conservative ranks on issues. Despite a few somewhat heterodox stances, no one ever questioned what he was. Today’s modern conservative may not always be afforded that courtesy. To me that’s a problem.”

Cheri Pierson Yecke: “Lincoln changed his views over time and allowed them to evolve while simultaneously being cognizant of the need to ensure the principle for which he stood (freedom for slaves) could be successfully enacted. . . . Fast-forward to today: Were a contemporary politician to present such a nuanced proposal to a modern audience, he would most likely be called not a pragmatist but a “flip-flopper,” implying that that he was insufficiently grounded in principle and unwilling to take a bold stand. Such a shallow understanding of introspective contemplation . . . results in

a divisive form of polarizing labels, as though ideas and principles are inherently frozen in time. How refreshing it is – and how rare – when a political figure humbly utters the words ‘I was wrong.’”

Several focused on character in various ways.

Larry Reed: “One of the fascinating people in American history is Grover Cleveland. He had no college education and no formal economics training, and he may have never read a policy paper before being elected president for the first time in 1884. Nonetheless, he almost always came to the right policy conclusions. That’s because he clearly saw the connection between *character* and the *principles of a free society*. Because he possessed the former, he became a champion of the latter.”

Amitai Etzioni: “In short, a party, a leader, a policy need not be either entirely principled or pragmatic but should have an inner core that is basically non-negotiable, and ample spheres in which differences can be worked out in the form of give and take.”

Joseph R. Fornieri: “Lincoln believed that we are justified in making moral judgments in politics. He rejected the moral relativism of popular sovereignty because it denied that slavery was inherently a question about good and evil.”

And a number of participants wrote trenchantly of strategy, broadly defined.

Jay Haulk: “Pragmatism gets a bad rap because many of its purported practitioners are indistinguishable from Neville Chamberlain-type appeasers. Yet there is a legitimate and honorable role for pragmatism. . . . If we can agree that acceptable pragmatism involves searching for ways to achieve the best outcome in the face of conflicting actions required by different accepted constitutional, moral, and legal principles and the inevitable

constraints imposed by real-world situations, then we can distinguish between pragmatism and appeasing compromise. . . . Bear in mind that without a few pragmatists at the Constitutional Convention, we would most likely never have gotten the Constitution.”

David Tuerck: “The great difference between 1861 and 2001 is that, politically, Bush faced the opposite problem that Lincoln faced. Lincoln had to restrain abolitionists whose affronts to the South had led to secession. Bush had to restrain defeatists who believe that it is America’s affronts to Islam that led to 9/11. The one similarity between Lincoln and Bush is that, contrary to conventional wisdom, neither president subordinated principle to pragmatism. Both presidents acted in the name of the one principle that trumps all others, namely, that America must be preserved against the threats of its enemies, both external and internal.”

Grover Norquist: “Common sense suggests that one should keep one’s eyes on the ball. What matters? To secure American liberty, establishing a low flat-rate income tax, personalizing Social Security, and creating full parental choice in education are the big three. One can feel strongly about smaller issues like ending all foreign aid, abolishing sex education in public schools, and ending the waste of money on light rail, but it is not worth the cost if it loses votes on the big issues. We must move forward to liberty as rapidly as possible without sustaining moral wounds that by definition stop our progress towards the goal.”

Other recent and somewhat older American Experiment symposia have included, *What Does It Mean to be an Urban Conservative?*; *Should Medicare be Means-Tested?*; *The Supremes Belt Out a New Hit: School Choice in Minnesota after Cleveland*; and *The Bush Doctrine: A Preemptive Path to Peace or a Recipe for Perpetual War?*

They can be found on our website at www.AmericanExperiment.org.

Writers responded to subtle questions about principle and pragmatism with commensurately nuanced answers, and I thank them for elevating this election season. I also very much welcome your comments.

“Merely the Wisp of a Wish”

By David Allen

Using Abraham Lincoln as a guide for these essays is appropriate because Lincoln’s presidency exemplifies both adherence to principle and pragmatic willingness to consider differing perspectives. On the one hand, Lincoln led the nation into a war based largely on the abolitionist principles of the Emancipation Proclamation. On the other hand, Lincoln struggled to preserve the Union at the price of compromising his beliefs and filled his cabinet with his most formidable political adversaries while giving them real power and voice. What lessons can be learned from Lincoln’s balancing of principle and pragmatism?

To some it may seem obvious that there are issues for which no compromise is possible. The abolition of slavery was clearly an issue about which a principled man like Lincoln could broker no compromise—or was it? Our Founding Fathers compromised on just this issue some four score and seven years before Lincoln. Was the principle less absolute then? Were our Founding Fathers less principled than Lincoln?

The assertion that one should never compromise on important principles is not so obvious after all. There is more to consider than just the importance of the principle; there are other factors to weigh. In the period between the Founding Fathers and Lincoln, there were many men of high moral standing who held high public office, men who were appalled by slavery and who nevertheless compromised their abolitionist beliefs for pragmatic reasons. Were these men

immoral for failing to stand fast on an anti-slavery platform? Or, might they have been moral while quite aware of the evilness of slavery? Perhaps these men had a perspective that holds a lesson for us.

The perspective of when to act on principle and when to act pragmatically should begin with acknowledging that each of us is an individual. The beliefs we hold are our own and not necessarily shared by others. Thus, “standing on principle” demonstrates an arrogance that should be carefully asserted. Standing on principle is insisting that I am right and you are wrong. On rare occasions it may be effective to take a stand on principle, but it is usually ineffective and divisive. The consequences of standing on principle can be as severe as dividing a nation or starting a war. Wisely discerning the rare time when it is necessary to assert the moral superiority of a stand on principle is one of the defining marks of an effective leader or advocate.

Abraham Lincoln’s greatness as a leader and advocate was reflected in the humble, firm, and wise perspective he brought to his decisions. His humility lay in his recognition that the force of his own belief was merely the wisp of a wish without others to stand with him and commit to the act. His firmness shone in the eloquence and passion with which he drew followers to support his convictions. His wisdom was demonstrated in his discernment over when to take an absolute stand and when to engage in a pragmatic dialogue.

In 2008 in Minnesota, we could learn much from Lincoln. Let our preferred methods be dialogue and understanding. Let our focus be building support for our beliefs. Passion, eloquence and the strength of our arguments can move others to embrace our beliefs. Our gain from being pragmatic will be greater unity and understanding. In contrast, let us be very cautious about taking principled stands. The cost of principled stands is divisiveness and mistrust. There comes a time when compromise is not possible, but, like Lincoln, we should endeavor to pursue every alternative before choosing conflict.

David W. Allen is managing partner of the Chancellor Group, LLC.

Ideological Purity Becomes Absurdity

By Paul D. Allick

I have been following politics since I was eight years old. Over the past 31 years, I have been shocked and ultimately saddened that the art of compromise has come to be seen as weakness. Partisan advantage, fueled by a seemingly ideological stubbornness, is now measured as strength.

It used to be that public officials who knew how to work with the other side became leaders. I can remember television coverage of President Ronald Reagan and House Speaker Tip O’Neill walking and laughing together and making friendly comments about each other just after some great policy battle on Capitol Hill. Today, we see Joe Lieberman thrown out into the political wilderness for not being pure enough in his worldview or tough enough on the other side. When did it become a political liability to agree with and work with the other side?

Our current environment of blogs, cable news, and talk radio offers a distorted worldview that says, “Don’t give in. The opposition isn’t only wrong on this or that policy; it is, in fact, morally and intellectually deficient.”

What begins as ideological purity becomes absurdity. What is happening now isn’t even about ideological purity. It’s about power. If ideological purity were fueling gridlock, then Republicans in Congress wouldn’t be perfecting the art of pork-barrel spending, and Democrats wouldn’t be hedging their bets on universal health care. What rules the day is more superficial than ideological purity; it is indeed simply partisan advantage and power consolidation. Yet I am convinced that the mother of this beast is that same purity of ideology.

We are all too human and we want to belong to the morally and intellectually superior group. A

case in point: Earlier this year, the Democrats in Congress supported an expansion of the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The problem was they went about it half-heartedly, finding a way to expand it while maintaining electoral strength. The cost of the expansion would have been covered by cigarette taxes and only for a time certain, and then the bill would come due. As someone who supports some workable form of universal health care, I agreed with President Bush when he vetoed this legislation. In our distorted world of the blogosphere and punditry, it was easy for the Democrats to vilify the President. But the debate did not turn on the ideological question of how to provide health insurance for the nation’s poor and middle-class kids; it turned on funding gimmicks and slash-and-burn politics.

Of course, this behavior is not tied exclusively to the Democrats. The other side has spent plenty of time smearing people who would question the conduct of the war in Iraq. Most of these questions are reasonable. Who gets what contracts? How is the money being spent? How much money is put forth for the veterans returning home? What is the end game? Wouldn’t it bring more health to the body politic and strength to the war effort for the administration to work as hard at getting the opposition’s support as it does in pulling out the tired old patriotic labels? I prefer the George W. Bush of the 2000 campaign. I prefer the “uniter” not the “decider.”

We are swimming in a miasma where neither side will give in. The dangers of ideological purity have produced their inevitable conclusions: We must stay in power no matter how many desperate hypocritical acts it takes, because ultimately we possess the truth.

In chapter five of Thomas Hardy’s novel *Far From the Madding Crowd*, a pastoral tragedy occurs. Farmer Oak’s whole herd of sheep is run over a cliff and killed. The perpetrator is Oak’s own young sheep dog. The young dog is confused. His whole reason for living is to herd sheep; to run them. Thus, running the sheep is

the most important effort, not paying attention to where you are running them. He follows his purpose to a bloody end. Hardy writes, “Another instance of the untoward fate which so often attends dogs and other philosophers who follow out a train of reasoning to its logical conclusion and attempt perfectly consistent conduct in a world made up so largely of compromise.”

The Rev. Paul D. Allick is an interim priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota.

Meeting “Crimination with Crimination”

By Greg Blankenship

Am I still a conservative even though I support a liberal immigration policy? In my state and throughout much of the conservative movement I might be shouted down for speaking apostasy to nativism.

Or what about gambling? At the grassroots level and among social right activists, no tax increase can be high enough for casinos in my home state of Illinois. Pointing out this inconsistency with the Right’s tax policies isn’t well accepted.

Blogger Megan McArdle recently took flak for posting that, while the Laffer curve, which suggests that too-high taxes can result in lower overall tax revenue – may be perfectly valid theory, U.S. tax rates are far too low for it to be an issue. One would think that a respected economics reporter, formally of *The Economist* and now with *The Atlantic*, stating that taxes were low enough in the United States for the Laffer curve not to apply would be a good thing. If this is the case, doesn’t that mean we’re largely getting things right? Why is that a problem?

To me, however, these aren’t signs of dogmatism. They are a problem, but it isn’t dogmatism.

Instead, I think that the problem in our post-modern world is that it doesn’t matter how you get where you are, just so you get where we want

you to be. Perhaps, as Leo Strauss warned in 1956, the influence of continental intellectuals that was polluting American culture has finally polluted our modern conservatism.

By post-modern I mean that the end has more than superseded the means by which we achieve it. This is different than the Machiavellian sense that the ends justify the means. Now, the means aren’t even an afterthought. That isn’t dogmatism, which implies a set of beliefs; instead, mere preferences replace rationality, and that to me signifies anti-intellectualism: If you don’t like what I like, then you aren’t conservative.

I recall that William F. Buckley, Jr. hinted concern about this abandonment of reason late in his life. Given his stature as a founding father of conservatism, his conservatism was never challenged when he broke with conservative ranks on issues. Despite a few somewhat heterodox stances, no one ever questioned what he was. Today’s modern conservative may not always be afforded that courtesy. To me that’s a problem.

In today’s battles we aren’t afforded that benefit of the doubt, and there are reasons for that. Time, space, and choices in modern communications give us little time for serious rumination. Even in the think tank community, productivity and marketing take precedence over rumination. Granted, we aren’t Bill Buckley either, but that, too, would be off point. An authoritative figure doesn’t replace a rational argument. And to Buckley, it wasn’t your decision that mattered. It was the path to that decision that mattered. How we get there matters.

While Lincoln didn’t have to contend with Matt Drudge, talk radio and, more ominously, Katie Couric, he did face a similar predicament where passion trumped rationality over the issue of slavery. Then, the issue wasn’t compressed by modern communications that puts an emphasis on emotional charges. Slavery was visceral all on its own; it didn’t need cable television.

In the 1860s, Abraham Lincoln was chastised, particularly by certain abolitionists for putting the preservation of the Union ahead of ending slavery. Clearly, Lincoln wasn't pro-slavery, but because he questioned the wisdom of destroying the Union to save it, he paid a price by losing many of his erstwhile allies.

When I think of Lincoln and modern conservatism, I think we should remember that one thing so easy to forget when we are moved to great passion: rationality.

In his famous—locally famous, at least—1842 speech to the Springfield Temperance Society on the occasion of George Washington's birthday, Lincoln surprised the gathered crowd by stating that past tactics of denunciation, fanaticism, pride, and vanity were unlikely to turn the drunkard into a teetotaler. Rather, he argued, judgment, rationality, and prudence in command of faith, conviction, and expertise is what would carry the day and,

to have expected them [remember it's drunks to whom he is referring] to not meet denunciation with denunciation, crimination with crimination, and anathema with anathema, was to expect a reversal of human nature, which is God's decree, and never can be reversed. When the conduct of men is designed to be influenced, persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted.

Perhaps today many of us fall into that category of crimination meeting with crimination in our efforts to encourage our friends to keep the faith. If so, we should endeavor to remember next time, before we fire off our swift rebuke, what Lincoln told the Springfield Temperance Society. And, we should act accordingly; after all, a "drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall."

Greg Blankenship is president and founder of the Illinois Policy Institute, located just two blocks from Abraham Lincoln's home.

Don't Let the Perfect Get in the Way of the Good

By Fran Bradley

Having spent 12 years in the Legislature as a commonsense conservative trying to bring reform to our welfare and public assistance programs, I learned that change really is a marathon, not a sprint. While it was always important to hold strong to principles and long-range objectives, it was equally important to make meaningful progress. Although this can be incredibly frustrating to those of us impatient for significant change and perfection, experience shows that it usually is the only way to achieve our objectives. There is little satisfaction in repeatedly fighting the battle of idealism without ever achieving results.

Some purists might call this defeatist squishiness. I don't think so. As long as we never compromise our principles, taking victories in slices beats repeatedly failing to get the full loaf. Admittedly, compromise must be navigated carefully so that we don't give away more than we get. It is always important to be sure that each step is moving us in the direction of our "perfect" goal.

In the area of welfare reform, I have found it most effective to work first on the most egregious elements that spark public outrage. Even liberals generally have to yield to public pressure. Let me give some examples.

- When Representative Bill Haas and I discovered by detailed review of MinnesotaCare enrollment data that people making six times the federal poverty level were still receiving taxpayer-subsidized health care, we successfully repealed language that allowed people on MinnesotaCare to stay on the program forever. We accomplished this while in the minority in the state house.

- A review of the Department of Human Services policies revealed that the state had a “don’t tell” policy when illegal aliens were discovered. Even moderate liberals were outraged, and the policy was changed.
- An independent audit of MinnesotaCare pointed out many risks of fraud and abuse. We used this as a basis for major integrity reforms.
- Using overwhelming scientific evidence of possible harm, we managed to make history by repealing a health insurance mandate.
- In another case of overwhelming medical evidence and the need to balance the state budget, we removed payment in our public assistance programs for non-religious circumcisions.
- Using public outrage over abuses surrounding illegal aliens, we were able to repeal many of the taxpayer-funded welfare and health care benefits being accessed by illegal aliens.
- Public demands for welfare reform led to federal and state rules limiting the time people were allowed to be on welfare and setting “work first” requirements.

None of these changes by themselves represent the wholesale reforms that commonsense conservatives believe should happen. Still, each does represent good progress. Had we been rigid in demanding the “whole loaf,” we would have made no progress.

Perhaps no other topic more tests our balance of principle versus compromise than abortion. Those of us who hold all life as precious, including the unborn and frail elderly, are frustrated with the *Roe v. Wade* decision that

opened the door to abortion on demand. We believe the decision is fundamentally wrong and should be overturned. Still, we have made progress by focusing on the good by putting into law such protections as the “Women’s Right to Know.”

Ronald Reagan taught a lesson in policy activism. He was certainly seen as a leader with strong conservative principles. Yet his strong convictions never overshadowed his ability to communicate and get along with even his political enemies. We can gain much by understanding and respecting people with opposing views. Too many people on the far Left and far Right let their passions get in the way of decency and respect, thereby handicapping their ability to make progress towards their goals.

Adopting the principle of “don’t let the perfect get in the way of the good” is not easy. It requires balance, thoughtfulness, perseverance, and principled vision. It is the most effective way of making a difference.

Fran Bradley, Rochester, was a state representative, 1995-2007.

Gloomy and Dubious Prospects?

By Barry Casselman

It is a commonplace idea today that there is not much difference between the two major political parties in the United States. This view is fostered mostly by activists, academics, and journalists who hold radical views, on the left and the right, and who find the mainstream political geography neither friendly nor navigable.

In reality, the two parties today represent distinctly different views of government, and the parties' base supporters usually require that their candidates for public office reaffirm these views and their parties' ideological values.

The Democratic Party, the traditionally liberal party, was founded by Thomas Jefferson, but

radicalized by Andrew Jackson. This provoked the creation of the Whig Party, which succeeded the defunct Federalist Party that Alexander Hamilton had begun based on conservative principles.

Both parties were ambivalent about slavery, the greatest issue of the mid-19th century.

By the 1850s, the Democratic Party had become the reactionary party, as its pro-slavery wing came to dominate under Presidents Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan, and the interests of the pro-slavery South were allowed to ascend. When Senator Stephen Douglas attempted to advance a compromise position ("popular sovereignty") on slavery, the party split in the 1860 election, thereby dooming Douglas to defeat on his race for president that year. Although populist William Jennings Bryan and liberal intellectual Woodrow Wilson subsequently tried to bring the party back to its original underpinnings, it was not until Franklin Roosevelt that the Democratic Party shed almost a century of prejudice and reaction and resumed its role as the liberal party.

The Republican Party was founded in 1854-56 from the anti-slavery wing of the Whig party, and in 1860 its "radical" candidate for president, Abraham Lincoln, was elected. After Lincoln, the Republican Party became a pro-growth party as the United States became a world industrial and commercial power. With Theodore Roosevelt, the party reconnected with its progressive roots, but following World War I the Republicans once again moved away from the concerns of the growing population of the working class.

The Democratic Party and its New Deal philosophy dominated U.S. presidential politics for more than 40 years. In 1981, Ronald Reagan took office, and one more time the Republican Party was transformed.

His conservative economic philosophy continues to dominate American politics today, and just as Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon governed as

conservative New Dealers, President Clinton governed in his second term as a centrist economic conservative.

Eisenhower and Nixon campaigned as conservatives and Clinton campaigned as a liberal, but each of them governed by compromising ideology to meet what they believed were the contemporary demands of the country. Presidents Bush, father and son, campaigned as Reagan Republicans but governed so that they could enact their priorities in Congresses often dominated by Democrats. Even Reagan, at the beginning of his first term, made compromises in his dealings with a Democratic Congress that today would not be considered Reaganesque.

No president, trying to preside over a nation of several hundred million people, can govern with anything close to ideological purity.

The greatest example of this was, of course, Lincoln himself. Having won the presidency by only a plurality and the split of his opposition, Lincoln faced a civil war even before he took the oath of office in 1861. A long shot for his party's nomination, he had prevailed over several better-known Republican politicians. Always an opponent of slavery, his first priority became holding the Union together, and he delayed the abolition of slavery until the last possible moment. He brought his political opponents into his cabinet. Over strong objections from several fellow Republicans, he allowed a Democrat to be his running mate in 1864 to avoid losing re-election.

In 2008, the presidential race is apparently going to be between two men who have broken the rules about campaigning for the nation's highest office with ideological purity. Senator Barack Obama has campaigned as a post-racial liberal who would succeed the unpopular George W. Bush with a platform (vaguely) described as unity and change. Senator John McCain has campaigned as a maverick conservative whose record would appeal to the powerful political center in America, thus attempting to overcome the

accumulated negative feeling about his party and its incumbent president.

The Democratic and Republican parties political bases, however, have both become perhaps more ideological in recent years. On the Democratic side, the base demands immediate withdrawal from Iraq, increased taxation of the rich, more social programs, and judicial activism. On the Republican side, the base demands support for the military in Iraq and Afghanistan, lower taxation, stanching illegal immigration, and judicial restraint. Neither of these sets of polar demands allows for the resolution of the nation's most pressing problems. Solutions to the issues of health care, social security and pension funds, and education are the demands of the political center, but neither Democrats nor Republicans seem willing to make these issues priorities.

The next president will have to compromise on many vital issues, or he will fail and fail badly. John McCain has a record of compromise in the Senate; Barack Obama has no such record. But that both candidates start with an appeal to the political center as the final stage of the long 2008 campaign unfolds is perhaps the most hopeful sign in the otherwise gloomy and dubious political environment of today.

Barry Casselman writes his nationally syndicated columns on presidential politics and issues of public policy for the Preludium News Service. He lives in Minneapolis.

The Tortoise Wins the Race

By Larry Colson

I recently had a conversation with a fellow delegate at a Republican convention. This particular individual holds many conservative principles near and dear, but overriding all is his pro-life stance. In the past, this gentleman had told me that he'd gladly pay more taxes if only abortion were outlawed.

As a thought experiment and, admittedly to satisfy a bit of my terrible tendency to make trouble for trouble's sake, I offered the following: "Assume I could guarantee you that *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned tomorrow, thus sending the abortion decision back to the states. However, also assume that no national decision, either via the courts or constitutional amendment, would occur for *at least* 50 years. Would you take that trade?" He declined, saying that states like (presumably) California, New York, and Illinois would likely continue to have legalized abortion. I countered with "but think of the babies that would be saved when more traditional states enacted laws outlawing abortion unencumbered by federal court rulings." His response: "As long as abortion is legal anywhere in the United States, it wouldn't be acceptable."

I certainly respect his opinion, but I think it highlights a gigantic flaw in the long-term thinking of conservatives, and more specifically, the Republican Party: We are seemingly incapable of effectively utilizing slippery-slope theory.

The Left, of course, has mastered this art. Not many years ago, few people could imagine that smoking in bars would be outlawed. Today, we have some who are talking about outlawing smoking in private homes, and those advocates are close to being accepted as mainstream. In the past, the mere thought of the government taking personal property for the benefit of another private party under eminent domain laws would have had Americans grabbing the nearest pitchfork and wrapping kerosene-soaked rags on sticks, yet with the *Kelo* decision of 2005, such takings are becoming commonplace.

So how did such assaults on personal freedom become legitimate? When started in cold water, we, like the fabled frog, get comfortable every step of the way as heat is increased until we unwittingly boil to death.

Rather than accept a partial victory and build upon it over time as the results become accepted among average Americans, conservatives tend to

want to go for the gold. Our base principles are sound, and when ideas rooted in those principles are correctly applied, they work every time; thus, we have compelling justification for our desire for full and immediate implementation. Yet while we spend our time looking for the giant leap forward, the Left proceeds to take umpteen baby-steps at all levels of our society, each of which helps to advance its long-term goals. It's done methodically and insidiously.

Two key factors combine to impede our progress. First, we forget that modern liberalism is an affliction of the heart, not the brain. Many of our principles, especially those based on the supremacy of the individual over the collective, are easily twisted to insinuate that such policies would have a negative impact on one disaffected group or another. America's heartstrings get tugged, our proposals sound hurtful, hateful, ignorant or anti-progressive, and we fail.

Second, due largely to the successful slippery-slope strategy of our adversaries, we have reached a point where some of our most important offerings sound radical and crazy. I'm certain that the Founders envisioned an educated populace and may have considered some government role, but they would recoil in horror at the size and scope of influence of today's U.S. Department of Education and teachers' unions. Yet we have "progressed" to where calls to abolish the federal education bureaucracy are dismissed out of hand, and to where California's Second District Court of Appeals feels comfortable, even compelled, to rule that parents must possess teaching credentials to home-school their own children, as it did in February 2008.

To reverse this tide, conservatives must employ similar tactics, but it will be an arduous uphill climb, and likely cannot be completed in our lifetimes. I hope we are wise enough to get started in my lifetime. We cannot abandon our most important tenets, but we must grab incremental gains when they become available. Most importantly, we must first concentrate on those concepts where we have strong but wide appeal, including low taxes, *real* reduction in

government spending and free market solutions to health care and education issues, and focus less, at least immediately, on the most divisive issues. Electoral gains must be solidified by actually governing according to the promised principles. At every level we must work to reverse the gains that have been made by the other side.

It may be a naïve hope on my part, but I firmly believe that if we concentrate on our most successful and most popular conservative positions, we will make steady progress, and convince an increasingly skeptical electorate that our positions are truly worthy of consideration. As we're proven right, success will beget success, and we will, like Aesop's plodding tortoise, win the race.

Larry Colson is managing director of Auto/Mate, Inc., a supplier of automobile dealer management systems based in Albany, New York.
www.automate.com.

A View from Down Under

By Kevin Donnelly

Principle or pragmatism? In politics, the two often conflict, and it takes a shrewd politician to balance them. Take the example of Australia's November 2007 election in which the traditionally left-of-centre Australian Labor Party (ALP), under Kevin Rudd's leadership, defeated Prime Minister John Howard's conservative government.

Under Howard's leadership, Australia recorded low unemployment rates and low inflation, and the economy was strong. While many on the Left disliked Australia's involvement in the Iraq War and argued that the government had failed to act on environmental and aboriginal issues, the sense was that in a time of prosperity the Conservative Government would be returned.

Such was not the case. One factor explaining the ALP's victory is that Kevin Rudd, when Opposition Leader during 2007, staked the same

political territory held by the Conservative Government. The ALP, like most social democratic parties, is close to the trade union movement, is a government of big spending, especially on social welfare policies, and favours a Keynesian approach to economic and fiscal policy.

On being elected leader of the Opposition, Kevin Rudd described himself as an economic conservative, argued that he would not kowtow to the trade union movement, and suggested that government spending would be fiscally responsible and would be evaluated in terms of measurable outcomes.

Also, with regard to education, Rudd stole the Conservative Government's clothes, so to speak. Prime Minister Howard was a staunch defender of a more traditional view of education: placing academic subjects centre stage, telling students they have failed, and supporting state funding to nongovernment schools and ridding political correctness from the curriculum.

Historically, the ALP had opposed state funding for so-called elite, wealthy non-government schools. The ALP had close ties to the teacher union movement and promoted a progressive approach to curriculum. In the months preceding the 2007 election Kevin Rudd, with a good deal of chutzpah, adopted much of the Conservative's agenda on education.

How should one interpret Kevin Rudd and the ALP's dramatic lurch to the middle-ground of politics? Some traditional supporters, especially amongst the cultural Left, argue that the ALP is guilty of forsaking principles in the desire to win government.

Many supporters are prepared to accept life in opposition as long as their party remains committed to its traditional values and beliefs. If winning government means core values are ignored or replaced, with the desire for power paramount, what does the party stand for?

On the other hand, it is a truism that parties can achieve very little while in opposition. While the description 'machievellian' is often applied in a pejorative sense, politics is about gaining and keeping power and a healthy dose of pragmatism is often needed in order to succeed.

An argument can also be made that too much of the political battle is overly confrontational and that for the health of a democracy it is good if parties are not captured by extremism but instead seek compromise and reflect the views of what some term the sensible centre.

What do I think? In relation to Kevin Rudd and the ALP's newfound belief in pragmatism, I have a number of concerns, especially in regard to education. At the level of rhetoric, it is easy to sway the public debate by providing a small target and adopting popular policies espoused by opponents.

If elected, whether such policies can or will be implemented is another matter. One concern is that while the rhetoric at the top might be new, the political organization and its supporters within government service and elsewhere are still committed to the old ways. Once a policy leaves a cabinet minister's office and filters through layers of bureaucracy, eventually to reach the light of day, it often bears little resemblance to what was intended.

Politics involves vested interest groups, and while leaders of political parties are powerful, especially when in government, such interest groups can have a significant impact on what happens on the ground.

Take the example of whole language versus phonics and phonemic awareness—even though a number of inquiries, both local and international, and government ministers favour the more structured and systematic phonics approach to reading, such is the influence of professional associations and teacher training institutions that whole language prevails.

There is also a suspicion that if a party or politician places pragmatism ahead of principle, then one has good reason to ask: What does such a party or politician stand for, and is there a convincing ethical base from which to make decisions?

Politics is a murky business that is often driven by self-interest and ego. By placing pragmatism above principles, the danger is that politicians will undervalue or ignore the type of moral compass so necessary for democracy to prevail.

Kevin Donnelly is director of Melbourne-based Education Strategies and one of Australia's leading education commentators.

When Alternatives Exist, Principle Trumps Pragmatism

By Jim Dueholm

Because of his political mastery and a generally compliant Congress, Lincoln confronted few face-offs between principle and pragmatism. He did, however, show how to define principle in political context.

There is tension between principle and pragmatism only when both are achievable and there is no competing principle. Many pro-lifers oppose exceptions even for rape and incest promptly recorded and verified. But if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned, and a bill outlawing abortion – with those exceptions – were the only politically possible alternative, pro-lifers would probably support the bill as a matter of principle. Without the bill, over a million fetuses a year would die, and with the bill, maybe a few thousand. Saving the savable lives would be the principled thing to do.

In 1861, Lincoln was asked to support a constitutional amendment specifically protecting slavery in the existing states. He willingly agreed both because he knew there was no political support for challenging slavery in those states and because he thought that the federal government

had no constitutional power to tinker with slavery in the states. He was personally opposed to slavery, but he supported the rule of law as a matter of principle, and that principle protected slavery in its existing lair. Two principles collided, and the one principle—attacking slavery in the states—was not politically feasible.

The Emancipation Proclamation, or rather the run-up to the Proclamation, is another example of competing principles. As indicated, Lincoln thought neither he nor Congress had power to interfere with slavery in the states. His view changed, though, when he became convinced that emancipation was the only way to win the war. Then, his personal opposition to slavery united with his perceived war powers to produce the Emancipation Proclamation. The rule of law was no longer a competing principle, and principled opposition to slavery merged with a pragmatic need to win the war.

Compare these examples to Lincoln's position on slavery expansion in the territories. Here, Lincoln told his supporters to oppose a right to expansion "as with chains of steel." He could have relaxed or compromised the Republican opposition to slavery expansion, and might have avoided secession of a number of states if he had done so, but such a compromise would betray the principle on which he was elected and would only postpone a reckoning between freedom and slavery in the territories. "The tug has to come," he said, "and better now than at any time hereafter."

In 1862 following an Indian uprising in Minnesota, more than 300 Indians were sentenced to hang. Lincoln, in the midst of the Civil War, reviewed the trial records and reduced the number of condemned to 38. His action was not popular, and he could have begged off on the grounds that he was overwhelmed by the conduct of the war. But when Governor Alexander Ramsey told him two years later that he would have carried Minnesota by a larger margin if he had not spared Indian lives, he said he could not kill men for votes. There was a clear tension between principle and pragmatism, and principle won.

In 1864, Lincoln faced likely defeat for reelection. To show that he had explored all alternatives to an increasingly unpopular war, his supporters urged him to meet with Confederate representatives in an attempt to end the war, with no condition except for reunion. Everything else, including the Emancipation Proclamation, would be negotiable. Lincoln was tempted, particularly because he knew the Confederates would not accept reunion, so the Emancipation Proclamation as a practical matter would not be at risk. But he could not do it. He feared that apparent weakening of the Proclamation would discourage black enlistments, but beyond that, he said that an apparent willingness to sacrifice the Proclamation would damn him “in time and eternity.” Here again, principle trumped pragmatism when they were viable alternatives.

Jim Dueholm is a long-time Lincoln buff and author of a new article on Lincoln’s suspension of the writ of habeas corpus in the Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association (Summer 2008).

Politicians (and Parties) Need an Inner Core

By Amitai Etzioni

Politics in a democracy is to a great extent an art of finding middle grounds, common grounds, and compromises, given the pluralism of values and interests of different groups that make up the people. However, to be true to self and to one’s values, to keep the moral high ground, and to command the respect of the voters, one had best have an inner core—a *subset* of values that are not open to compromises. For good reasons, we do not trust weather-vane politicians and parties.

To illustrate: 9/11 called for and continues to command new security measures. However, some measures are so incompatible with our better angels that we should not favor them, no matter what. Three key examples of measures that clearly fall beyond the pale serve to illustrate the point.

Torture is considered beyond the pale for moral as well as pragmatic reasons. Although the pragmatic ones can be debated, the moral ones provide the kind of clarity that is necessary for establishing boundaries that ought not to be violated.

In 2006, General David Petraeus wrote in an open letter to all soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan,

Our values and the laws governing warfare teach us to respect human dignity, maintain our laws, and do what is right. Adherence to our values distinguishes us from our enemy. . . . What sets us apart from our enemies in this fight . . . is how we behave. In everything we do, we must observe the standards and values that dictate that we treat noncombatants and detainees with dignity and respect. While we are warriors, we are also all human beings.

Philosophers argue whether there are some limited conditions in which torture can nevertheless be condoned. Most often discussed are the ‘ticking time-bomb’ scenarios, according to which there is a nuclear bomb hidden beneath a city which is about to explode, and we know that a terrorist that was captured knows its location and the code needed to disarm it, but he will not voluntarily yield this information. Whatever happens in this extremely hypothetical situation, one should not try to model conduct for all other situations after such a limited case. Torture is a taboo.

Indefinite detention of suspects without any access to courts—that is, the indefinite suspension of *habeas corpus* rights for terror suspects—is also beyond the pale. Similarly, the mass detention of people on the basis of race, ethnicity, or nationality—as the United States did to over 100,000 Japanese Americans during World War II—is beyond the pale.

One can argue about any and all of these specifics and surely the list can be extended. However, I

hope the preceding examples illustrate sufficiently the kind of limits on new security measures that all politicians and members of free societies should respect—and not be subject to compromises.

For other matters, there is room for give and take. Here, when homeland protection is discussed, it is often properly framed in terms of finding a legitimate balance between two competing public goods – safety and liberty. Furthermore, the point of balance changes throughout history as domestic and international conditions change. Following 9/11, the USA PATRIOT Act was introduced, followed by numerous other security-enhancing measures introduced by President Bush, tilting the balance heavily toward enhanced security. There is room now to ask questions, for instance, with regard to the REAL ID Act of 2005, whether we went too far. The same holds for warrantless surveillance and searches. Here there is often room for finding a middle ground between the purists on either side.

In short, a party, a leader, a policy need not be either entirely principled or pragmatic but should have an inner core that is basically non-negotiable, and ample spheres in which differences can be worked out in the form of give and take.

Amitai Etzioni is a University Professor at The George Washington University and author of How Patriotic is the Patriot Act? and The New Golden Rule.

Philosophical Public Opinion

By Joseph R. Fornieri

Abortion or a woman's right to choose? Same-sex marriage or sodomy? Assisted suicide or murder? Enhanced interrogation methods or torture? Freedom of expression or hate speech?

Which of the terms above best describe these policy controversies? Our choice of language will inevitably correspond to our approval or

disapproval of the particular policy as something that is either, (a) morally neutral, (b) morally right, or (c) morally wrong. There is no alternative.

Lincoln believed that we are justified in making moral judgments in politics. He rejected the moral relativism of popular sovereignty because it denied that slavery was inherently a question about good or evil. His rival from Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas, argued that the decision of territorial settlers to choose or reject slavery was comparable to the decision to raise hogs or horses. Lincoln admitted that “this is perfectly logical, if there is no difference between hogs and negroes.” On the contrary, Lincoln believed that politics could not be stripped of moral reference. He blamed Douglas for having “no very vivid impression that the negro is a human; and consequently [having] no idea that there can be any moral question in legislating about him.”

Lincoln teaches us that fundamental moral questions about the rightness or wrongness of policies that affect one's life, liberty, family, and the well-being of society cannot be evaded. A leader's stance on these questions necessarily educates and influences the public mind and character. Leadership has the potential to elevate or debase the public by disposing citizens either to embrace or to reject noble or vicious policies.

The virtue of prudence involves rectitude in terms of the principle itself as well as the ability to apply the principle under the circumstances. Thus, Lincoln emphasized that before proceeding to derivative questions about how to deal with the question of slavery, the inherent moral question of its rightness or wrongness in the abstract had to be resolved in the public mind. In the absence of this moral clarity, there could be no coherent principle to guide his leadership in dealing with the policy. Without this guiding moral end in mind, the question of slavery would be resolved on the basis of interest, expediency, or personal preference. Such moral indifference would dull the nation's conscience, paving the way for the indefinite perpetuation of the institution. For Lincoln, “statecraft is soulcraft.” Policies

communicate a moral message of right or wrong that forms the character of citizens. Leaders are thus called to provide a clear stance on the rightness or wrongness of policies in the abstract.

In approaching the difficult moral issues above, today's leaders should follow the advice provided by Lincoln in his *Speech at New Haven, Connecticut* on March 6, 1860:

Whenever this question shall be settled, it must be settled on some philosophical basis. No policy that does not rest upon some philosophical public opinion can be permanently maintained. And hence, there are but two policies in regard to slavery that can be at all maintained. The first, based on the property view that slavery is right, conforms to that idea throughout, and demands that we shall do everything for it that we ought to do if it were right. We must sweep away all opposition, for opposition to the right is wrong; we must agree that slavery is right, and we must adopt the idea that property has persuaded the owner to believe—that slavery is morally right and socially elevating. This gives a philosophical basis for a permanent policy of encouragement. The other policy is one that squares with the idea that slavery is wrong, and it consists in doing everything that we ought to do if it is wrong.

In demanding that public policies be grounded upon some underlying “philosophical basis,” Lincoln challenges leaders today to state forthrightly where they stand on the fundamental moral questions of our time.

Joseph R. Fornieri is an associate professor of political science at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York.

Lincoln's Mixed Record on Freedom

By Paul Gessing

Lincoln freed the slaves and held the nation together by winning the Civil War. For these two reasons, he is consistently listed among the greatest American presidents. While his direct role in successfully resolving two of the most important issues in our nation's history is unassailable, it by no means covers or explains the entire Lincoln record.

Lincoln dealt with a number of extremely important issues during his presidency, not always successfully and sometimes in ways that hindered rather than helped the spread of personal freedom. In this essay I wish to address Lincoln's overall record on freedom.

Since, as Randolph Bourne once said, “War is the health of the state,” and the growth of government can have a large, negative impact on human liberty, discussing Lincoln's decision to fight the Civil War itself is a good place to start any discussion of his record.

Was the Civil War a necessity? It is hard to find a good answer to this question. We do know, however, that Lincoln himself said that he fought the war to preserve the Union, not to end slavery. In an 1862 letter to Horace Greeley, Lincoln wrote:

My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause.

From a pro-liberty perspective, therefore Lincoln would have been on more solid ground if he'd fought the war to end slavery rather than to prevent southern secession. After all, preservation of "national unity" is largely irrelevant to liberty, while ending slavery was integral to the cause.

One strategy that might have ended slavery without war might have been to encourage various northern states to adopt the southern concept of "nullification" concerning the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Nullification of the Fugitive Slave Act, which would have involved northern states disobeying the law that required escaped slaves to be returned from the north to the south due to its unconstitutionality, would have made southern slavery unsustainable over time.

The fact that Lincoln never pursued this option is not surprising because, as I have already discussed, ending slavery was not his reason for fighting the Civil War. Nevertheless, the possibility I have outlined above likely would have ended slavery and would have done so without the bloodshed, divisiveness, and loss of freedoms that occurred during the Civil War.

How did the Civil War expand government and take our freedoms? First, on April 27, 1861, Lincoln suspended *habeas corpus* in Maryland and parts of the Midwest. He used this power to arrest 13,000 political opponents. His plan was to set up military courts to rein in U.S. citizens who opposed the war or supported the Confederate cause.

This willingness in a time of crisis to suspend core civil liberties such as a right to trial is one of many examples of American leaders using crises to defy the Constitution and expand their own power. The Bush Administration's suspension of *habeas corpus* since 9/11 is similar.

Wars are also expensive. While hard data on the growth of the federal government during this time are hard to find, it is known that the need to finance the Civil War resulted in enactment of the nation's first income tax in 1862. At first, this tax

was a flat three percent of net income over \$600 a year, but within two years it was altered to a graduated tax.

This iteration of an income tax was repealed in 1872, but the success of this new tax in generating revenue influenced later efforts to adopt such a tax permanently.

Lengthy essays and books have been written on Lincoln and his significant impact on American history. While the end of slavery was certainly hastened by the Civil War, the fact that Lincoln did not fight the war expressly to end slavery is a clear sign that alternative means of ending the South's "peculiar institution" should have been at least considered.

Ultimately, blacks received a half-baked form of freedom after the war. At the same time, the federal government accumulated significant additional powers over all Americans. Thus, at least when analyzed from a pro-freedom perspective, Lincoln's record is more varied than most historians have articulated.

Paul J. Gessing is president of the Rio Grande Foundation, a non-partisan, tax-exempt research and educational organization based in New Mexico, www.riograndefoundation.org.

Getting the Balance Right on Questions Great and Small

By John Gibbs

At the risk of trivializing Lincoln, the 2008 transportation bill dilemma faced by Minnesota Republicans offers an occasion to revisit a recurring challenge of representative democracy. It's a challenge with which Lincoln struggled in executing the Civil War and achieving abolition: the struggle of principle and pragmatism and getting the balance right.

Like slavery, many current issues have significant moral consequences. For example, Republicans today grapple with how best to protect the

unborn: pursue the absolute prohibition of all abortion, or settle for the potential limitation of the practice through a ban on most abortions with some limited exceptions. Such tradeoffs are not limited to the great moral questions and problems. Consideration of Governor Pawlenty's veto of the 2008 transportation bill serves as an example.

In a controversial kickoff to the 2008 Minnesota legislative session, the DFL-controlled legislature immediately passed a \$6.6 billion transportation bill and corresponding 20-cent-per-gallon gas tax increase, license fee increases, and local-option metro area sales tax authorization. The bill would have funded roads, trains, and bureaucracies to support them. This presented a dilemma for the Republican governor, who recognized transportation needs but had pledged no new taxes and saw a full legislative session of fiscal challenges ahead of him. His choice was to sign and move on, or veto and work for a comprehensive package that might control government growth. He chose the veto. This triggered a challenge for Republican house members: stick with the governor and their party, enforce solidarity, and work for a bigger picture equilibrium of fiscal restraint, or go along with the Democratic majority, see the transportation projects move forward, and then work for accommodation through the balance of the session.

Lincoln's Republicans of the mid-19th century fundamentally agreed on the big picture and the big goals: ensure equal opportunity, end slavery, effect emancipation in the near term, preserve the Union, and execute the Civil War to advance these ends.

Minnesota's 21st-century Republicans fundamentally agree on the big picture transportation and fiscal goals: substantial transportation investment is needed to maintain Minnesota's economic stability and enable opportunities, and increased taxes pose serious economic and political risks as Minnesota moves into recession. Less clear was whether addressing transportation without a clear

containment on fiscal issues was the right approach.

Like Lincoln, Minnesota's Republican leaders were offered passionate yet conflicting advice by their traditional base of supporters.

On the one hand, many business groups were outspoken about the need for immediate action and more transportation funding. They indicated that they were well-prepared to accept more taxes and even questionable transit priorities if the end result was to be more roads, less congestion, and a head start on long-term improvements. They urged the governor to sign the bill. Once vetoed, they argued to override the veto. That is, in essence, get the pragmatic results of setting transportation funding and getting the projects going, and deal with the other important issues later.

On the other hand, organized taxpayer groups and fiscal hawks saw this as a very expensive bill without firm priorities. They expressed concern that the bill was crafted before budget forecasts had clarified how much money would be available. They argued that the whole legislative session was ahead and that transportation should be considered in the broader context of available resources and overall state priorities. They further argued that some of the transportation projects properly belong in the then-yet-to-be-crafted biennial bonding bill and that their relative priority should be considered in that context.

In the end, the Republican House divided, the veto was overridden, the legislative session was re-calibrated, and the messy yet beautiful struggle of participatory democracy continued.

John Gibbs is a member of American Experiment's Board of Directors.

Abraham Lincoln and the Virtue of Incremental Reform

By Jay P. Greene

When people think of Abraham Lincoln, they often think of a statue in a memorial in Washington. Like a statue, he is a firm embodiment of political principles, freeing the slaves and preserving the Union.

Yet Lincoln's greatness doesn't stem only from his adherence to principle. He was great because he balanced pursuit of principle with an incremental pragmatism that brought his principles closer to reality. Single-minded pursuit of principle would have made him like John Brown, destructive in his ineffectiveness. Single-minded pursuit of pragmatism would have made him like any ordinary politician, advancing himself but nothing else. It's the balance between principle and pragmatism that led to his greatness.

Education reformers would do well to remember Lincoln's example. Reformers by nature are people of principle. They believe ideals such as all children can achieve, parents should be free to choose the children's schools, there is a core of knowledge that all students should learn, and so on.

There is danger if reformers are unyielding in the pursuit of these ideals. A school is a political organization, like any other, and inevitably people will differ on these ideals and block full implementation of any one of them. Faced with compromises that fall short of their ideals, education reformers may be tempted to despair and give up entirely. Look at Richard Rothstein declaring in his book, *Class and Schools*, that little progress can be achieved in schools because of the stubborn limitations of socio-economic problems outside of schools. Or look at Sol Stern turning away from school choice because Milwaukee schools have not yet been fixed by it.

But as Lincoln demonstrated, greatness can be achieved through incremental reform. Lincoln

may have declared that "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong," yet he also declared (at first) that he would do nothing to abolish slavery in the states where it already existed. Then, through the Emancipation Proclamation, he abolished slavery only in areas not already under federal control. Ultimately, he supported the abolition of slavery in its entirety. He took each step toward his goal incrementally so as not to sacrifice his ability to take the next step.

Similarly, socio-economic problems surely hinder academic achievement, but schools can make progress within those constraints. As schools make progress, especially with disadvantaged students, the constraints of socio-economic status are loosened, making further progress possible. Milwaukee has not been entirely transformed by its school choice program, but its public schools have made gradual progress in response to the challenge. As they make progress, further progress becomes possible.

Absolutist goals in education policy, as in other realms of politics, inevitably lead to frustration. We just need to keep our eyes on the prize and maintain the difficult balance between principle and pragmatism, and then we too will achieve the greatness we are seeking.

Jay P. Greene is endowed professor of education reform at the University of Arkansas and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

The Disunited States of America

By John Gunyou

Watching the national debate over the Iraq War triggered a Vietnam-era flashback for me. Even without the campus protests, it evoked all the divisiveness of that wrenching period.

Armed conflicts have a way of either uniting us, like World War II did, or disuniting us, like the Civil War and Vietnam did. Yet it's not just the current war that's troubling. While conflict is often a necessary step in the politics of

compromise, any number of issues are fracturing public opinion today.

The most disconcerting aspect of that rip in our national gestalt is the underlying cause: wedge politics.

Nature abhors a vacuum, as does the body politic. In the absence of pragmatic leadership, we turn to the purveyors of hardened principle, seeking the comfort of certainty in uncertain times.

Even as our leaders and their challengers speak of bringing the nation together, their political consultants wage wars designed to widen political fissures. They do it to motivate voters sympathetic to their candidates.

Political pundits also engage in systematic divisiveness. Neither James Carville nor Ann Coulter is served by a copacetic public. The media mavens who ply the airways and op-ed pages sell books by inflaming the masses, not by leading them to a better future. They retain their power by fostering discontent, not by resolving it.

Bloggers throw even more fuel onto the fires of discord. Despite the egalitarian promise of the Internet, today's bloggers don't report, they pontificate. Most remain steadfast in their reluctance to allow any factual evidence to interfere with their opinions.

Political discourse is increasingly polarized and pushed to the extreme as the screaming heads compete to gain and hold our attention. New media pander to our prurient interests, and old media join in the fray to survive. In the end, we are diminished as a society.

The politics of discontent have even invaded peaceable Lake Wobegon. "The Good Life in Minnesota" extolled on a 1971 *Time* magazine cover depicting Governor Wendell Anderson and a prize fish catch is a distant memory. With political pragmatism forced underground, we've become as fractured as any other red or blue state.

Caucus loyalty is paramount, with wayward party souls summarily excommunicated. Witness the swift retribution inflicted on Republicans who deigned vote their districts on the transportation bill during the 2008 legislative session, or Democrats who struggle to retain their party's endorsement in swing suburban districts. Partisan litmus tests reinforce the polarity.

Today's political campaigns rely on the vilification of some enemy, either real or imagined. In recent years, it was that ubiquitous, amorphous cadre of terrorists. Casting a broadening net, politicians also malign the gays and the God-fearing, the wealthy and the welfare cheats. Once fear is instilled, then follows the formulaic call to arms to defend against these manufactured threats. Our candidates define themselves in terms of who they spurn, not simply who they embrace.

It's the wrong enemy. The true enemy to our country is our own willingness to have our fears manipulated and our values defined by political propagandists. As long as we view the political process as reality-show entertainment and accept the palliative platitudes of candidates appealing to our basest instincts, the self-destructive cycle will continue.

So where are the Lincolns of today? Where are the leaders willing to rise above superficial political expediency to preserve the union?

Well, they're right there in the halls of Congress, the Legislature, and city hall. We just need to see through the smoky haze of partisan cannon fire to see them. We just need to tune out the cacophony of campaign ads and talk shows to hear them. We just need to stop shouting and talk respectfully to them.

How about that? We had it in us all along.

John Gunyou lives in Minnetonka.

“Without a Few Pragmatists at the Constitutional Convention”

By Jake Haulk

Pragmatism gets a bad rap because many of its purported practitioners are indistinguishable from Neville Chamberlain-type appeasers or sellouts. Yet there is a legitimate and honorable role for pragmatism. Indeed, pragmatism as it relates to public policy can itself be a valid principle. If we can agree that acceptable pragmatism involves searching for ways to achieve the best outcome in the face of conflicting actions required by different accepted constitutional, moral, and legal principles and the inevitable constraints imposed by real-world situations, then we can distinguish between pragmatism and appeasing compromise. In this view, pragmatism does not encompass compromising with special interest pleading or philosophical positions inimical to the well-being of the country. Bear in mind that without a few pragmatists at the Constitutional Convention, we would most likely never have gotten the Constitution.

Examples of how two valid basic principles can collide are legion.

For instance, one of the primary responsibilities of both state and national governments is to provide protection for citizens. At the same time, we believe in and have a constitutional right to free speech. However, as a wise judge observed, one does not have the right to yell “fire” in a crowded theater. Furthermore, we expect government to severely constrain purveyors of pornography so that children do not have the stuff thrust in their faces. In both of these examples, informed and judicious pragmatism must be employed to achieve a balance that society can tolerate.

Likewise, the struggle to achieve a proper balance between individual freedom and privacy and national security represents a quintessential example of the collision of two fundamental principles of government: security and welfare of citizens on one hand and the right to individual

privacy on the other. The pendulum might swing over time as the congress, the president and the courts grapple with this knotty issue, sometimes leaning more toward the side of security and at other times more toward protecting individual privacy rights.

All of the forgoing suggests that it is crucial that we be able to delineate the collisions between valid principles that must be dealt with pragmatically from the cases where the collision is between a valid constitutional, moral, or legal principle and a principle that is merely being passed off as legitimate.

This would be the situation with illegal immigration. The right of the United States to protect its sovereignty has to rank as one of, if not the most, fundamental of all government purposes. People entering the country illegally and refusing to leave might have all kinds of heart-tugging reasons for being here, but they are here illegally just the same. When amnesty proponents and defenders of the current de facto amnesty argue that they are simply being pragmatic, they are distorting any reasonable meaning of pragmatic. What they are defending is the undermining of the rule of law by accepting claims by immigrants and their supporters as having the same level of validity as the Constitution. How pathetic and dangerous for the country.

Then too, the Supreme Court decision in the *Kelo* eminent domain case from Connecticut has trashed individual property rights in favor of the alleged need of a local government to find a more productive use of the land. In this case, the rights of private property codified in law and previous unequivocal court decisions dating back to John Marshall were up against a tenuous and dangerous argument that a government can take land for some purpose other than to serve a public need such as a road or prison. The court’s decision to allow governments to take land and sell it to private individuals or firms is not defensible on the grounds of being pragmatic. It is nothing less than capitulation to special

interests at the expense of traditional Constitutional rights.

What, then, are the practical implications for conservatives in the war to preserve a constitutional republic, individual freedom, and property rights? As long as a policy proposal or legislation has provisions rolling back the size and scope of government or stopping further expansion and does not contain offsetting provisions that increase the scope of government, conservatives should support it, even if it is only a small step.

By the same token, if conservatives are faced with a compromise that on the one hand substantially expands the size and scope of government while offering some small change supportable by conservatives, they should walk away. One does not serve the cause of liberty and property rights by taking three steps backward for one step forward. It is vital that policy advocates and legislators know the difference. Conservative think tanks can play an important role by helping legislators and regulators to know and understand the actual dimensions and probable implications of proposed actions.

Conservatives are faced constantly with policies and legislation that pit valid principles against principles that are valid only in the eyes of some special interest group or for political groups that care little about Constitutional rights, morality, or rule of law. There must be no compromise that requires abandoning fundamental conservative principles or acquiescing to policies based on helping one group at the expense of others or that undermine the rule of law. The tide of progressivism and takings cannot be held in check by compromise now in hopes of winning back lost ground later.

Jake Haulk is president of the Allegheny Institute for Public Policy, www.alleghenyinstitute.org.

A Single Paradigm

By Matthew Heffron

G.K. Chesterton once wrote, “We all have to keep a balance, the real interest comes in with the question of how that balance can be kept.” Being principled versus being practical in politics is one place where balance is needed.

The way to achieve balance between principles and pragmatism is to separate the two ideas and apply them at the right times and in the right circumstances. For example, with pride and humility, the right approach is to have both: to be justly proud of your accomplishments and yet to recognize your faults.

That is the type of balance between principle and pragmatism that we need in politics: principle that is pure in its ability to inspire people to act, and pragmatism that is aggressive in pursuit of what can be accomplished. Each idea needs to operate at its full strength, at the right time and in the right context.

Moreover, being principled and being pragmatic need not be mutually exclusive. A truly balanced person probably displays both in different situations.

For example, being principled involves having ideals and goals, and nothing is more practical than knowing and stating what you want. Similarly, being pragmatic simply means taking opportunities and compromising to get part of what you want rather than nothing, and waiting until the right moment to take action. Consequently, it is essential to be pragmatic in pursuing principles. Having this skill is the mark of true balance in politics.

Abraham Lincoln exemplified this when he issued the *Emancipation Proclamation*; he waited to take steps towards freeing the slaves until he was in a military position to make good on that declaration. An earlier, principled declaration might have delayed the accomplishment of his goal as a result of backlash against an act

perceived to be too strident. An earlier, principled move might have altogether precluded the full accomplishment of his true goal.

The principle was freedom, and Lincoln's pragmatism served it well. He recognized how to act on principle, and he pragmatically recognized the right moment to act.

The pro-life movement continually faces a similar dilemma. Some well-intentioned people think they cannot support indirect measures to reduce the incidence of abortion, such as waiting periods or notification laws, because the principled course is to support a total ban on abortion. Yet if the principle is protecting human life, then the pragmatic approach of taking incremental steps to reduce abortion as those opportunities arise advances the principle.

In this election year, many conservatives believe they have a similar dilemma. In one race or another, no candidate measures up to their principles, and more than a few have suggested "sitting this one out." Conservatives must weigh the costs of that approach and consider whether they might be hurting their principles by failing to be pragmatic about how to achieve them and about taking their victories incrementally.

Pragmatism and principles should be combined into a single paradigm of pragmatically pursuing principles.

Matthew Heffron is a law student at Hamline University.

The Lessons of Fort Sumter

By Eric Lipman

In his challenge to the symposium authors, Mitch Pearlstein presents an important question that is wrapped around a real hazard: Does the presidency of Abraham Lincoln reflect the sturdy adherence to principle or the steely statecraft of a pragmatist?

While this question deserves careful study, in the end, the false choice between principle and pragmatism is a trap. We simply cannot apportion presidents or other political figures between these opposing camps. And trying to push Abraham Lincoln onto one or another side of the divide diminishes him and any discovery that we might make about his presidency.

The better and more helpful question to ask is: When did the Great Emancipator stand on principle, and were these pragmatic choices? Phrased in this way, it is clear that pragmatism is not always a pathway different from principle, but could be part of a sequence, from one to the other. Better still, I think that this is how President Lincoln viewed his own dilemmas and choices.

Lincoln's response to the blockade of Fort Sumter lends support to this sequential view. As readers of these pages will recall, the day after Lincoln took the oath of office, he received word that regiments of the Confederate Army had surrounded Fort Sumter and demanded the surrender of the Union soldiers inside. Lincoln's cabinet was bitterly divided on the best method to avoid the outbreak of civil war. Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, for example, favored a strong show of force, urging that an early rescue of the Fort would dissuade a wider war. Arguing against Blair's view, Secretary of State William Seward and General Winfield Scott maintained that war was best avoided by surrendering the fort and showcasing the withdrawal as an act of compromise.

Against such a backdrop, the limits of the original question are evident: Which set of presidential advisors was pursuing principles and which was practicing pragmatism? Couldn't Blair, Seward or Scott fit neatly into either category? And if that were true, a dichotomous divide between "principle" and "pragmatism" does not help us at all to make difficult decisions today.

If we trace Lincoln's decision-making during the crisis, it is clear that he took pragmatic steps in pursuit of principles that he had long held.

Lincoln believed that the Constitution was an important, covenantal relationship—a relationship that could not be severed or modified by a minority of the country. Likewise, he believed that once the Constitution was ratified, any later disputes amongst Americans, however bitter, were to be resolved within the processes established by that compact. For his own part, Lincoln strenuously disagreed with Southern legislators over slavery, but he, too, was bound. He would not provoke the Southern states to leave the Union or to make war. Lincoln held these views throughout his adult life and reaffirmed them at his inaugural. After completing the oath of office, the new President remarked,

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect, and defend it.

Lincoln's response to the blockade of Fort Sumter was in line with these values. The president dispatched a naval convoy to supply the Union forces with food, pressing the Confederate generals to make the choice of whether to attack the fort and to engage a larger war.

As it was with Lincoln, our choices are never really between martyrdom and opportunism; they are less dramatic and more difficult.

But Fort Sumter does provide us a lesson. In our own fretful times, with advisers on all sides counseling very different courses of action, we need to turn to what we have always said and believed. Then, with the resources we have, we can take pragmatic steps toward these first principles. This is how Lincoln soldiered on through years of difficulty and how he became great.

Eric Lipman is an administrative law judge with the Minnesota Office of Administrative Hearings and the author of the legal web log "Within the Scope."

No Time for Mere Catch Arguments

By Randolph J. May

In the introduction to Doris Kearns Goodwin's magnificent *Team of Rivals*, the story of Lincoln and his War Cabinet, she recounts that Frederick Douglass in 1876 declared at the dedication of a new Lincoln monument, "Any man can say things that are true of Abraham Lincoln, but no man can say anything that is new of Abraham Lincoln."

Douglass spoke just a bit prematurely. In the more than 130 years since, Lincoln's life has been more thoroughly examined than that of any other president. Yet it is still possible to gain new insights, or at least deeper ones, into Lincoln's character. *Team of Rivals*, subtitled *The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, gives us a new appreciation for an aspect of Lincoln's character rare in politicians of any age, and certainly not much in evidence today. That is, the willingness to reach out to political opponents and seek common cause to advance the public interest rather than self-interest.

After winning the presidency, Lincoln brought into his cabinet, in several cases not without dogged persistence, all of his principal rivals for the Republican nomination. And for good measure, he added three former Democrats. Lincoln did so knowing full well that in every instance these men considered themselves to be his superiors.

In arduously melding this "team of rivals," a group of disparate personalities with conflicting loyalties, into an effective governing unit, Lincoln had two paramount goals: first, save the Union, and, second, lead the nation to what he called in the Gettysburg Address "a new birth of freedom," meaning emancipation of the slaves.

But for perhaps the first one, there have been no elections in our nation's history more important than that of 1860, when the Union's fate, and of the fate of the liberty principle for which the Union ultimately would come to stand, hung in the balance. Yet no national election is insignificant, and, in light of the challenges confronting America, the upcoming one may be more significant than most.

We are engaged in a long war with Islamic extremists—one that will continue to try our nation's resolve. Our ability at once to maintain individual liberty and protect our homeland will be tested again and again. Our economy, while the strongest in the world, is presently sluggish, giving rise to more than the usual orgy of irresponsible campaign one-upmanship. Notwithstanding huge looming budget deficits fueled by the lack of political will to reform Social Security and Medicare, our erstwhile politicians gleefully promise more "middle class relief" of all manner—universal health care, universal pre-K education, universal mortgage forgiveness, and so on, not to mention summer gas tax "holidays." It is as if the money to pay for these promises simply grows on some exotic new tree called "Tax the Rich" or "Tax Big Oil."

Having engaged in a series of serious debates with Stephen Douglas over the most profound issues facing the country in 1858, what would Lincoln think about the frivolities and rhetorical excesses of the current campaign? Not much, indeed.

No doubt, much of Barack Obama's appeal this campaign season stems from his so-called "post-partisan" message—the suggestion, without much prior action to back up the suggestion, that he would reach out to people across the political aisle to find common ground to solve problems. Meanwhile, John McCain's appeal to Democrats and Independents stems in part from the perception he would do the same. The existence of partisanship, properly understood, in the sense of political parties developing and vigorously contesting divergent policy ideas and perspectives

is crucial to the success of the ongoing American democratic experiment.

I don't wish to live in a post-partisan America in which candidates, for whatever reason, do not vigorously contest their different governing philosophies. But I do wish to live in an America in which our political leaders show more willingness to engage in meaningful debate that considers fresh solutions for old problems. And I wish to live in an America in which, especially with regard to matters of national security, our leaders show a willingness to adopt a Lincolnian disposition to reach out to rivals.

The nation's current situation in no way approaches the peril confronted by Lincoln. Nevertheless, those who seek to lead us now should heed the injunction contained in Lincoln's December 1862 message to Congress: "If ever there could be a proper time for mere catch arguments, that time surely is not now. In times like the present, men should utter nothing for which they would not willingly be responsible through time and eternity."

Randolph J. May is President of The Free State Foundation, a Maryland-based think tank that promotes understanding of free-market, limited-government, and rule-of-law principles.

Bush Whacked

By James H. Miller

We are in the dying embers of a failed Bush presidency. Peggy Noonan in the *Wall Street Journal* recently told us that his support has evaporated in the last of the Republican strongholds—places like Texas and Alabama. Historians will eventually write George Bush's White House legacy. One can assume that practically the only people interested in this will be his immediate family and the descendants of Warren Harding and James Buchanan.

Yet at this point his presidency remains an ongoing, serious problem for conservatives.

Unfortunately, Bush has made a rather extraordinary transformation to where his name is now used as a negative adjective—e.g., Bush tax cuts, Bush’s Iraq War, Bush’s health care policies. It doesn’t matter what issue, a Bush linkage quashes the chance for success.

Most frustrating is his inability to make his tax cuts permanent. Even with a Republican Congress he couldn’t close the deal. It is genuinely scary to hear Barack Obama and the Democrats who now run Congress discussing estate taxes and tax rates that will almost assuredly increase in 2011. All of us will pay a heavy price for Bush’s incompetence on taxes.

It is a waste of time to argue what happened to Bush. We are left with the question of how we march on to the fight. As someone who has worked in the vineyards for over three decades, I am not interested in ideological arguments or the purity of thought. My suggestion is to start focusing on conservative issues that still have an appeal for the majority of Americans. At first glance they may appear to be few and far between.

Yet there is an issue that is not tainted by the legacy of George Bush. It is crime. We used to talk about it in the late 1980s and 1990s. The issue’s salience has not changed. Simply put, Americans don’t like crime and it’s one of the few issues where voters think conservatives are on the right side while liberals are on the wrong side.

Let me give some practical examples.

- In the 2006 Democratic tsunami in Wisconsin, Republicans fell off the political table, as they did across the country. Here, the Republicans lost the state senate and almost lost the state assembly. A not-too-popular Democratic governor won in a landslide. As it was across the country, the wind was clearly behind the backs of the liberal Democrats, except for one small aberration. A young, unknown

Republican ran for attorney general, an office that had been held by the Democrats for 16 years. His main issue was that he was tough on crime while his much better-known liberal opponent was not. His name was JB Van Hollen, and he became one of the few Republicans nationally to win an upset.

- Five months later, the Wisconsin Supreme Court, one of the most liberal courts in the country, had an opening. An unknown conservative judge took on a liberal lawyer, ran on a very tough-on-crime platform and in an upset was elected to the court.
- This year, a sitting Supreme Court judge, the first appointed African-American in Wisconsin history, was also upset because of the perception that he was soft on crime. The ramifications of that particular race shifted the Wisconsin Supreme Court from one of the most liberal in the country to one of the most conservative.

The lesson was that crime, an issue long off our radar screens, was back.

Academics are now beginning to realize that people make decisions about where they are going to live based on their perceptions of crime. It is an issue that brings not only emotion but also economic impact and a fundamental question of who should concern society more—the criminal or the victim. This is an issue, long ignored, that should be placed on the front burner, from both a philosophical and practical standpoint.

James H. Miller is president of the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute.

Focus on the Big Issues

By Grover Norquist

The perceived conflict between principle and pragmatism occurs on several fronts.

In the Reagan and post-Reagan eras, the most common conflict is that political actors motivated by free-market, limited-government political principles mistakenly assume that all other players on “their” team have similar motives. In fact, as one of the Bush “41” political appointees revealingly stated about us, “They have agendas, we have mortgages.” There are many people for whom an elected position or government appointment is just a job. Keeping that job is the agenda and motivating force. Conservative activists tend to assume these people are motivated by principle and are trimming their sails for the sake of pragmatism. This leads to frustration as we try and patiently explain to these so-called pragmatists that the problem with pragmatism is that it does not advance principle.

Different political players have different metrics. Some wish to be loved by the media. Others like to have certainty in their life. Some Republican congressmen sit in 70-percent Republican districts and take no chances. They are risk averse.

Those who appear to share our enthusiasm for political battles may in fact not share our goals. They may not be weak-kneed pragmatists or summer soldiers at all but may well be boldly following a different star.

Another challenge is the confusion between compromise, gaining half a loaf, winning slowly, and losing. If the goal is to cut taxes, a small tax cut is a compromise, it is slower progress than one wished. A tax hike is losing. If you are trying to get to California from Washington DC, making plans to drive through West Virginia is not treason; it is on the way to California. If you find your feet getting wet and you meet folks speaking French, then you are moving in the wrong direction. That is called losing.

Lincoln had to juggle the competing goals of maintaining the Union, and maintaining a free republic. And like a juggler who rides a unicycle on a tightrope, he also had to win elections every two and four years if he was to complete his task.

The interesting question is how a principled American conservative should act. He should first understand his goal of maximizing human liberty, creating a government that protects rather than abuses said liberty, protecting us from external threats, domestic crime, and the constant threat of despotism imposed by our own government.

This usually means proposing an agenda to the American people in a way that wins their support and their votes and then governing in such a way as to move as rapidly towards maximizing liberty, all the while trying to get re-elected every two years. This is easier in the United States than in Sweden. Articulating a limited government vision wins more votes here than in Stockholm. It is an easier task in Idaho than in Massachusetts.

Here, men of principle and pragmatism should wish to elect the most conservative Republican possible in each state and each congressional district. That means that we grade on a curve. We have lower expectations of former Congresswoman Connie Morella of Maryland than of Chris Cox in Orange County, California, and lower expectations of Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine than of Arizona’s Jon Kyl.

We must know the difference between boldly pushing forward on principled fights and trying to accomplish something that is actually impossible, exhausts our time, energy, and effort, and has an opportunity cost, as we might have been doing something both useful and possible with the wasted energy and time.

In 2005 George W. Bush campaigned for five months to privatize Social Security. He had just won 55 GOP senate seats in the 2004 election. That meant he could not privatize Social Security.

It takes 60 votes to break a filibuster. The Democratic Party is the party of trial lawyers, government unions, and big-city political machines. If every American were to save his FICA contributions in a 401(k) or personal savings account and accumulate real wealth year after year, the party of unions, trial lawyers, and corrupt big-city political machines would be a dead man walking. Bush should have held a quick yes or no vote on the principle, lost, and then moved on to something he could do with 55 votes—cut taxes or pass welfare reform part two.

Recognizing that one does not have the votes in Congress or the electorate to take a particular step forward to liberty is not treason. It is common sense.

The really tricky decisions come in taking one step backward in the hopes of two steps forward. Losing the presidency in 1976 made Reagan possible in 1980 (possible; not in any way predictable or probable). Losing the presidency in 1992 to Bill Clinton made the GOP takeover of the House and Senate in 1994 possible—not inevitable. Both of these steps back to take steps forward look obvious and even wise in retrospect. But many acts of surrender begin with a single step backward. Wisconsin conservatives were unhappy with their Senate candidate in 1957 and were happy to have William Proxmire win the seat. He would be gone in six years and a true conservative could win the seat, they thought. He stayed over 31 years. Barack Obama might govern so poorly that the GOP could win the House and Senate in 2010. Yet between 2008 and 2010 a Democratic president and Congress could change labor law, tort law, and the courts in ways that we could not recover for a generation or two.

Common sense suggests that one should keep one's eye on the ball. What matters? To secure American liberty, establishing a low flat-rate income tax, personalizing Social Security, and creating full parental choice in education are the big three. One can feel strongly about smaller issues like ending all foreign aid, abolishing sex education in public schools, and ending the waste

of money on light rail, but it is not worth the cost if it loses votes on the big issues.

We must move forward to liberty as rapidly as possible without sustaining mortal wounds that by definition stop our progress towards the goal.

Grover Norquist is president of Americans for Tax Reform and author of Leave Us Alone – Getting the Government's Hands Off Our Money, Our Guns, Our Lives.

“Public Sentiment is Everything”

By Tom Prichard

Abraham Lincoln was a great president for a couple of reasons. First, he eloquently communicated a moral vision on the issue of slavery during a time of great national crisis. Second, he understood that politics is the art of the possible while not compromising his principled opposition to slavery. As a result, he provides us with much wisdom as we face what I believe are the paramount moral issues of our day—abortion and marriage.

Lincoln framed and debated the issue of slavery in moral terms. He was very clear that he thought it was wrong and he desired to see it disappear. This elevated the debate on the issue and forced the nation to confront it on the level of fundamental truths. Yet he realized politically he couldn't get rid of slavery overnight. If he had campaigned for the immediate abolition of slavery, he wouldn't have gained the White House.

What lessons does Lincoln hold for us today, particularly on the great social issues of our day—abortion and marriage? I think there are several.

First, issues of abortion and marriage must be addressed from a number of perspectives. Fundamentally the moral dimension must be central, articulated persuasively but with humility

and without apology, just as Lincoln did with slavery.

These issues deal with first principles: the protection of innocent human life and the preservation of the foundational institution in society. These issues are ultimately subject to a higher law.

Second, there is the need for principled, strategic action by political leaders to address these issues. Here, again, Lincoln is instructive. He compromised on approach, not principle, regarding slavery. He dealt with his society where it was at the time and worked from there. Initially he sought to prevent slavery's spread to the territories. Then as circumstances changed—secession by the southern states—his goal became preservation of the Union. And then as the Civil War progressed, circumstances changed again and he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. So he was pragmatic yet principled in his approach.

The same pragmatic approach bounded by principle needs to guide us in the struggle against abortion and efforts to redefine marriage. In the case of marriage, strategic steps are needed: first, passage of state constitutional marriage amendments, and then ultimately a federal marriage amendment. (I believe our nation will ultimately have one definition of marriage, just as Lincoln said we'd be either all free or all slave.) And in the case of abortion, waiting periods, parental notification, and reshaping the composition of the U.S. Supreme Court are all important incremental steps needed to protect the right to life for unborn people.

Third, Lincoln understood that in our representative system of government, winning public opinion is essential. As he said in one of his famous debates with Stephen Douglas, "Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed."

Winning and maintaining the support of the people is essential. This is happening with abortion. People, particularly young women, believe in restricting abortion. Regarding marriage, a strong majority of the public supports marriage between one man and one woman. This is shown by the strong public support for the couple of dozen state constitutional marriage amendments adopted in recent years.

Some people wish the issues of same-sex "marriage" and abortion would go away. They're controversial, divisive, and unimportant. Controversial and divisive, yes. Unimportant, no. Important because they are rooted in a higher law, the "laws of nature and nature's God" to quote the Declaration of Independence. Our failure to address them correctly will determine the success and viability of our nation. No society can long survive if the social foundation continues to crumble, as is the case with marriage. And abortion disregards the rights of innocent unborn human beings, and thus one of the fundamental principles upon which our nation was established, the unalienable right to life.

Lincoln was one of our greatest presidents because he addressed a moral issue with wisdom and vision in the real-world context of politics. The lessons to be learned are timeless.

Tom Prichard is president of the Minnesota Family Council, www.mfc.org.

Getting the Balance Right by Making the Box Bigger

By Donald P. Rachefer

At a recent State Policy Network meeting in Atlanta, we heard a presentation by Denis Calabrese in which he suggested that "making the box bigger" is often a superior strategy to "thinking outside the box."

Applying that notion to the subject at hand suggests that the appropriate responses to passionate issues like abortion, same-sex

“marriage,” and the war in Iraq would be similar to Lincoln’s response to calls for abolition of slavery irrespective of its impact on the war to preserve the Union. That is, solving political problems is best approached by multiple actors with different goals or by the same actor at different times with different goals.

Let’s flesh out this idea by looking at one specific example: elimination of abortion. If you ask the average pro-life person what we need to do to stop the senseless slaughter of millions of unborn babies, the response is likely to be that we need to get one or two more conservative Supreme Court justices who will vote to reverse *Roe v. Wade*.

This is a classic tactical response. It might or might not lead to the ending of the killing of unborn human beings. If *Roe* were overturned, we would return to the status quo ante, with abortion regulation determined by each of the 50 states. While some “red” states might actually outlaw all abortions, it is more likely that such states would increase regulations making it harder but not impossible to get abortions. Meanwhile, it is highly likely that one or more “blue” states would pass laws allowing abortions in any circumstance, with the rest of the states falling somewhere in between. The number of deaths of unborn children would likely fall but not be eliminated altogether.

I am not opposed to conservatives continuing to work for the repeal of *Roe*. Yet if we realize that the problem is actually to stop the killing, and not merely to undo *Roe*, then we should see that there may be a multitude of ways, taken by a multitude of actors, to contribute to the solution.

Some people may work for better sex education and abstinence promotion through governmental and private organizations. Others may work for legislation to mandate that abortionists provide prospective clients with information on fetal development, the mental health consequences for women who have elected abortions, the link between abortions and cancer, and so on, which may dissuade more women from making the choice to kill their unborn child. Alternatively,

some may work for regulations that require abortion clinics to meet the same standards as non-hospital surgical centers, while others may work to increase support for adoption and for the care of expectant mothers who don’t have the resources to carry their children to term. The list goes on.

Indeed, pro-lifers are already working on all of these fronts to address the issue. The point is that it would be a mistake for any of us in the movement to waste our energy accusing others who have a different focus of being less principled or of “selling out” because they elect to undertake what we think is a more pragmatic course of action. Perhaps they will shift their focus to join us once they have accomplished what they see as a more doable intermediate step, just as Lincoln resisted calls for immediate abolition throughout the United States the moment the war started but ultimately did issue the Emancipation Proclamation.

And for those who know their history, that proclamation did not free all the slaves, which was the abolitionists’ goal. It took victory against the Confederacy and the passage of the 13th Amendment, after Lincoln was dead, to accomplish that. So let us all go forward on every front, remembering always that it is the leftists we must vanquish, not other members of the movement on the right who are part of our “bigger box.”

Donald P. Rachefer is the founder and moderator of the Iowa Wednesday Group.

Character and Principles

By Lawrence W. Reed

Playing a politician in a classic Marx Brothers comedy, the inimitable Groucho once declared, “Those are my principles! If you don’t like them, I have others!”

We laugh at Groucho’s line, but it’s a flash of candor that too many of today’s politicians aren’t

honest enough to say in public, even though it aptly describes the way they behave. I wish they would subscribe to a set of principles rooted firmly in truth and consistency, press for policies that advance those principles, and compromise only when it's required at least to move in the right direction. Yet before we can expect politicians to be so principled, we must insist they be men and women of character.

Character is what differentiates a politician from a statesman. Statesmen don't seek public office for personal gain or attention. Like George Washington, they often are people who take time out from productive careers of accomplishment temporarily to serve the public. They don't have to work for government because that's all they know how to do. They stand for a principled vision, not for political expediency. When a statesman gets elected, he doesn't forget the public-spirited citizens who sent him to office and become a mouthpiece for the permanent bureaucracy or some special interest that padded his campaign fund.

Because they seek the truth, statesmen are more likely to do what's right than what may be politically popular at the moment. You know where they stand because they say what they mean and they mean what they say. They do not engage in class warfare, race-baiting, or in other divisive or partisan tactics that pull people apart. They do not buy votes with tax dollars. They don't make promises they can't keep or intend to break. They take responsibility for their actions. A statesman doesn't try to pull himself up by dragging somebody else down, and he doesn't try to convince people they're victims just so he can posture to become their savior.

When it comes to managing public finances, statesmen prioritize. They don't behave as though government deserves an endlessly larger share of other people's money. They exhibit the courage to cut less important expenses to make way for more pressing ones. They don't try to build empires. Instead, they keep government within its proper bounds and trust in what free and enterprising people can accomplish.

Politicians think that they're smart enough to plan other people's lives; statesmen are wise enough to understand what utter folly such arrogant attitudes really are. Statesmen, in other words, possess a level of character that an ordinary politician does not.

In America's first century, Americans generally were skeptical of the expansion of government power, not because they read policy studies or earned degrees in economics but because they placed a high priority on character. Using government to get something at somebody else's expense or mortgaging the future for near-term gain seemed to them dishonest and cynical, if not downright sinful and immoral.

One of the fascinating people in American history is Grover Cleveland. He had no college education and no formal economics training, and he may have never read a policy paper before being elected president for the first time in 1884. Nonetheless, he almost always came to the right policy conclusions. That's because he clearly saw the connection between *character* and the *principles of a free society*. Because he possessed the former, he became a champion of the latter.

Cleveland said what he meant and meant what he said. He did not lust for political office, and he never thought he had to cut corners, equivocate, or connive in order to get elected. He was so forthright and plainspoken that he makes Harry Truman seem indecisive by comparison. H.L. Mencken, who was known for cutting politicians down to size, wrote a nice little essay on Cleveland entitled "A Good Man in a Bad Trade."

Cleveland thought it was an act of fundamental dishonesty for some people to use government for their own benefit at everyone else's expense. Accordingly, he took a firm stand against some early stirrings of an American welfare state. The country was in good hands when it was run by principled citizens like Cleveland.

So how quick should elected officials be to compromise? I offer here no clear line of

demarcation, just a suggestion that if we insisted first and foremost on character, this question would matter a whole lot less than it does today. I'd sooner trust a statesman than a politician to know when to compromise.

Lawrence W. Reed is president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Midland, Michigan, and visiting senior fellow with the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C.

Lincoln: Yours, Mine, or Ours?

By Dane Smith

As a political reporter in the 1990s, I was obliged to blow the whistle twice on conservative candidates who in their campaign brochures had incorrectly attributed to Abraham Lincoln a litany of pro-business, anti-government aphorisms (such as “You cannot lift the wage-earner by pulling down the wage-payer”). These apocryphal quotations originated with an obscure minister named William John Henry Boetcker, who had authored these phrases some 50 years after Lincoln’s death in response to the income tax and economic justice reforms sought by Theodore Roosevelt, the other great progressive Republican on Mt. Rushmore.

Abe has been misquoted by Democrats and liberals as well (check out Lincoln authority Dr. Thomas Schwartz on www.illinoishistory.gov: “Lincoln Never Said That”). It’s pretty well established that Lincoln never uttered the populist doomsday prophecy that “corporations have been enthroned” and that the “money power of the country” would eventually destroy the Republic.

There’s a lesson here, apart from the need to be suspicious of any alleged Lincolnism that sounds self-righteously absolute and clearly applicable to today’s policy alternatives. That lesson is that Lincoln was of such all-encompassing greatness and wisdom that he belongs to all of us and to none of us exclusively.

Still, as the leader of a group that champions ample public investment for the common good, here’s my case for Lincoln being at least partly on my side, and your side, and our side, and on the side of a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

Those words, assuredly accurate and directly from the Gettysburg Address, just do not strike me as a clarion call for individualism, laissez-faire capitalism, and the relentless self-centered pursuit of private good. The words seem to cry out for a more expansive and responsive government, one that is dedicated to a broader prosperity and to the general welfare—two very key words prominently displayed in the preamble to the Constitution and often overlooked these days.

Most of the things we know about Lincoln, where he stood on the great issues of the day, suggest that he was, for his times, a force for progress and that he saw progress mostly as greater equality and suffrage.

At the very least, Lincoln most certainly was not a hidebound religious and economic conservative, hell-bent on states’ rights, property rights, and fundamentalist Christian orthodoxy or the divine right of the United States to rule the world and invade where it pleased.

To one of the questions posed to us in this invitation from Center of the American Experiment, I would argue that Lincoln did not stand for futile dogmatism, nor did he pursue political aims in a ceaseless spirit of ideological purity.

Lincoln presided over the greatest battle in his time—a colossal conflict between property rights and human rights—and Lincoln came down eventually and momentously on the side of the latter. He thought it was worth fighting for. In the similarly endless battle between a strong federal government and states’ rights, Lincoln’s was perhaps the most important statement ever on behalf of the former.

Lincoln's contemporary adversaries portrayed him as a dangerous radical, too fond of "those Negroes." Lincoln had to work hard in his campaign for the presidency to convince voters that he was conservative enough.

For most of his life he was a member of the Whig Party, which believed in a strong federal government, one that was interventionist in the national economy and supportive of taxpayer-financed "public improvements." This was the party that also favored commercial interests over agrarian and emerging labor-movement interests, and it needs to be noted that Lincoln was no utopian and spoke about how property was the proper product of labor and how rich men served as examples to emulate.

But the Homestead Act, one of Lincoln's most far-reaching achievements, amounted to a huge public giveaway of federal land and had been long advanced by radical and liberal egalitarian reformers. The homestead concept had been opposed by industrialists who feared loss of laborers and by southerners who favored a system of a few large landowners rather than many equal freeholders.

On war and peace and international relations, it's also hard to see Lincoln as a hawk or American triumphalist. He fought and was proud of his service in the Black Hawk War and the removal of Native Americans from Indiana and Illinois. Yet as Lincoln scholar Garry Wills has recently written, "Lincoln (was) against President Polk's Mexican War, raised on the basis of a fictitious provocation."

It's hard to see Lincoln in step with today's militant neoconservatives, who seem to view the United States as God's chosen nation with a 21st-century mandate to protect the Christian West.

Nearly everything I've read on the subject suggests that Lincoln was not a Christian fundamentalist and, according to some scholars, not actually a Christian. When told that religious leaders believed God was on his side, Lincoln, in classic self-deprecating style, said he wished that

God had let him in on this secret. He actually said it this way (note the mid-Victorian sentence construction, something to watch for when trying to divine whether Lincolnisms are spurious): "I hope it will not be irreverent of me to say that if it is probable that God would reveal His will to others on points so connected with my duty, it might be supposed He would reveal it directly to me."

That gentle humor, used to utterly disarm the arrogance of his contemporaries, is close to the most important part of him, far more significant than all the imaginative constructions we'll see of Lincoln as conservative or liberal, or this or that.

I always come away from reading Lincoln, or about him, with a feeling that his greatness had more to do with his humility, kindness and slightly melancholy wisdom than anything else. And these are qualities that any person can cultivate on their own way to a measure of personal greatness.

Dane Smith is president of Growth & Justice, www.growthandjustice.org.

One Principle Trumps All

By David Tuerck

Lincoln had it exactly right. He was right to postpone the Emancipation Proclamation until a suitable moment had arrived, for the simple reason that the preservation of the Union was more important than the freeing of slaves. Whether you agree with that interpretation of history or not, it is useful to look at Lincoln's decision this way because of how it is mirrored in the actions taken by President Bush in the aftermath of 9/11.

In 2001, as in 1861, the United States came to face and continues to face an enemy that aims to destroy the nation. The threat in 1861 came from a band of secessionists who, out of their refusal to tolerate further perceived affronts to the cherished

but doomed institution of slavery, fired on Fort Sumter. The threat in 2001 came from a band of religious zealots who attacked the World Trade Center in a pique over perceived affronts to a similarly cherished but (we must hope) doomed institution, radical Islam.

The great difference between 1861 and 2001 is that, politically, Bush faced exactly the opposite problem that Lincoln faced. Lincoln had to restrain abolitionists whose affronts to the South had led to secession. Bush had had to restrain defeatists who believe that it is America's affronts to Islam that led to 9/11. The one similarity between Lincoln and Bush is that, contrary to conventional wisdom, neither president subordinated principle to pragmatism. Both presidents acted in the name of the one principle that trumps all others, namely, that America must be preserved against the threats of its enemies, both external and internal.

This doesn't mean that we should throw pragmatism out the window. It was pragmatic for Lincoln to wait until he had a military success (Antietam) before freeing the slaves. But the act of freeing the slaves was taken primarily to win the war, not to end slavery.

Now switch back to our current situation: It was pragmatic to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. The reasons for invading Afghanistan differed from those for invading Iraq, but one reason applies to both: Success would permit the United States to establish, and to be recognized for having established, a secular, democratic state in the heart of the Arab/Muslim world. The reason why the resistance is so fierce is that our enemy understands this exactly, just as the South understood exactly what the triumph of the Union would mean.

Admittedly, it might be pragmatic at some point to give up on Afghanistan or Iraq as lost causes. What is essential, however, is that we understand both invasions for what they were: strategic efforts to crush an enemy that will not rest until it sees no hope of success. The war will go on until we are victorious—or conquered.

To extend the analogy, Lincoln's generals triumphed by making the South pay a terrible price for threatening the survival of the Union. Likewise, it will be necessary for Bush and his successors to make the Arab/Muslim world pay as high a price as needed to force the radical Islamists to abandon their war aims against the West.

Thus we must see our military setbacks in these efforts exactly as Lincoln must have seen the setbacks suffered by the Union army—that is, as temporary reverses that left unaltered the aims for which the war was fought. The earlier course of the war in Iraq was no more an indication of our “failed policies” there than were Bull Run and Chancellorsville an indication of Lincoln's failed policies in the South. In the first instance Lincoln had to stay the course until he found a general who could win. Now Petraeus has surfaced as Bush's Grant.

Where does this leave conservatives? First (and here I wish to speak to libertarians who have fallen under the spell of Ron Paul or Bob Barr) conservatism means nothing if it doesn't mean the conservation of American, and more generally, Western values. Radical Islam is dedicated to the destruction of those values and of the people who embrace them.

Yes, I understand the argument that 9/11 happened in part because of resentment over America's support of Israel and that the war in Iraq ends up making, as well as killing, enemies. My answer to these arguments, however, is that we don't have the luxury of withdrawing from the field of battle in the hope that the radical Islamists will tire of killing us. The defeatist agenda of the libertarian right and of the entire Democratic Party is akin to the wishful thinking of Lincoln's predecessor, James Buchanan, whose appeasement of the South did nothing to discourage secession.

Bush has thought it necessary to conduct surveillance methods in a manner that is troubling to libertarians. But these methods pale in comparison to the actions that other presidents,

including Lincoln, took to prosecute the wars they fought. And who would say that Lincoln failed in his most important duty, which was to defeat the foes arrayed against him at the time he was in office?

Lincoln's conduct of the Civil War provides a lesson in the use of pragmatism in the service of principle. Bush's conduct of the war against radical Islam provides a similar lesson. And as long as we understand that the preservation of the United States is the first and foremost principle, in pursuit of which all of our actions must be taken, the United States will continue to endure, along with the principles of individual liberty for which it stands.

David Tuerck is executive director of the Beacon Hill Institute. He's also chairman and professor of economics at Suffolk University in Boston.

Seventy-five Percent is Good Enough

By Lou Wangberg

Although he sought the presidency five times and was a party nominee three times, Henry Clay of Kentucky was never elected. Widely criticized within his party for his anti-slavery and pro-American system stands, he said, "I would rather be right than president." Many people who self-label themselves as conservatives are so rigid in their positions that they are comfortable in never winning the presidency or enacting any of their positions if it involves any level of compromise.

An examination of the presidents most often ranked as successful shows that it was their ability either to adapt or co-opt the ideas of others that contributed to their success. Some, like Abraham Lincoln, held strong views on subjects like slavery but understood the milieu in which he operated. As he sought the presidency, the nation was not yet ready to ban slavery in all contexts. Lincoln held back on his personal beliefs until the national consensus evolved to support the abolition of slavery. Even when the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, however,

Lincoln prudently applied it only to the rebellious states of the South. Slavery continued in the North, especially in the Border States whose continued support was essential to winning the war.

Teddy Roosevelt was a very strong and assertive president. His image of leadership and strength was real, but his actions were often tempered by realities. He demonstrated again and again a willingness to be a creative compromiser on many issues, starting with the Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902.

I have no time for those who stand at the edge of our political system and offer only carping criticism coupled with unrealistic and rigid ideology. Teddy Roosevelt said it this way:

It is not the critic who counts—not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena

Some historians rank Woodrow Wilson as one of our strongest presidents. Yet his unwillingness to compromise with the Senate led to the greatest failure of his administration, the defeat of the League of Nations.

As I listen and read the words of the opinion makers that influence the body of conservatives in this nation, I'm struck with how strident and unrealistic many of them sound. Of course it is wonderful to be so certain of the rightness of one's position that there is no entertaining another person's ideas. Yet rigidity and unwillingness to compromise are actually very un-American.

Look back to our beginning, the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 produced a document that remains one of the most marvelous written documents ever conceived. Yet from beginning to end it was a "bundle of compromises." In fact, it is the flexibility (read, ability to compromise) that the Framers designed that makes the Constitution relevant today.

In a nation of 300 million souls, we would be in eternal grid-lock without compromise. Does that mean sacrificing principles? Certainly not. However, principles can be and should be stated broadly when dealing with complicated issues in a diverse nation. There is room for the strident and uncompromising on both ends of the political spectrum, but for the vast majority of people there must be the middle ground where ideas are seriously debated, fine-tuned, and adapted to the needs of the majority.

Intelligent and thoughtful compromise always has and always will be where the action is. I would never choose to be left out of the action and decision making. It is the nature of America. Any other response is in fact irresponsible and immature—like a small child who will not share his toys.

Of course I would be remiss if I did not note that there is a time to speak without compromise. Who can forget the words of Barry Goldwater when he said, “I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice! And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue!” However, he was also quoted as saying in 1994, “Politics and governing demand compromise.”

The modern hero of conservatism is Ronald Reagan. In his autobiography, *An American Life*, he said,

When I began entering into the give and take of legislative bargaining in Sacramento, a lot of the most radical conservatives who had supported me during the election didn't like it. Compromise was a dirty word to them and they wouldn't face the fact that we couldn't get all of what we wanted today. They wanted all or nothing and they wanted it all at once. If you don't get it all, some said, don't take anything. I'd learned while negotiating union contracts that you seldom got everything you asked for. And I agreed with FDR, who said in 1933: “I have no expectations of making a hit every time I come to bat. What I seek is the highest

possible batting average.” If you got 75 or 80 percent of what you were asking for, I say, you take it and fight for the rest later, and that's what I told these radical conservatives who never got used to it.

If 75 or 80 percent of what one is asking for was good enough for Reagan, it is good enough for me.

Lou Wangberg is a teacher.

Values versus Principles

By Craig Westover

Ayn Rand, at her philosophical best in the book *The Virtue of Selfishness*, noted that the question, “Doesn't life require compromise?” is usually asked by people who fail to differentiate between what is fundamental principle and what is merely a concrete, specific wish. In the context of this symposium, we paraphrase Rand by noting that the question on the table (“What is the right balance between principle and pragmatism?”), fails to differentiate between fundamental and enduring principles and personal values.

The author of *Call to Liberty*, Stillwater resident Anthony Signorelli, provides an excellent working definition of the term “principles.” He distinguishes principles from values, which for our discussion of principle versus pragmatism is a significant distinction.

Signorelli wrote, “Principles are not values. Principles are objective and enduring: they exist outside one's personal judgment. Principles change slowly over centuries or millennia. In contrast, values are individualized and subjective, based on an individual's assessment at any given time, and reflect the individual's imperfect and changing knowledge and perspective.”

I would pick a nit with Signorelli and argue that enduring principles are self-evident truths that do not change over time, but I heartily agree with his idea that values change as we grow, as the

country changes, and as new challenges arise. Change in values is a natural and necessary force in human development. Conservatives do not adopt change for its own sake, but survival demands that one expose one's values to a constantly changing world, consequently reinforcing them, modifying them, or abandoning them altogether if one experiences a Damascus revelation.

It is not compromise of principle to advocate for a free society where others may openly express views and live lifestyles one finds morally reprehensible. It is not compromise to openly defend their right to do so or promote their ability to do so when others might restrict such liberty.

In any compromise between good and evil, only evil can profit. The pragmatic exchange of a lesser evil for a greater good would only seem to be a "good" deal. It is compromise of principle to protect one's own values at the expense of another's personal liberty.

This brings us to the questions posed by this symposium, "What course best serves Minnesota and the nation? Pursuing political aims in a ceaseless spirit of ideological purity? Or endeavoring more modestly to suffice? Are conservatives best served by resoluteness or flexibility?"

The answers to those questions depend upon whether we define conservatism in terms of changing values or in terms of enduring principles.

Values define a conservative as one who supports gun rights and the war in Iraq, is against same-sex marriage, is pro-life, opposes single-payer health care, supports school choice, pledges no new taxes, and opposes amnesty for illegal immigrants. When values-driven conservatives say John McCain is not conservative, it is because he does not have enough boxes checked on the conservative menu.

By contrast, the principled conservative is to be judged not by his positions on issues but on the

principles and reasoning he employs in arriving at his positions. When principle-driven conservatives say John McCain is not conservative, it is because they believe that he does not reason from core conservative principles. He seems to act pragmatically based on what he thinks is right or on what plays well for him politically.

If we address the questions posed by the symposium from the perspective of a values-based, menu-driven conservatism, then we must conclude that ideological purity is not necessarily a good thing. Values change over time and are conditioned by personal experience and knowledge. Conservatives have been wrong before (e.g., on civil rights) and could be wrong again (e.g., on gay rights). While values are essential in making personal decisions, such as with whom one chooses to associate (or not associate), values are shifting, frivolous grounds on which to set public policy.

If however, conservatives strive to define a principled conservatism based on enduring principles, then we must answer the symposium's questions by saying that there ought not to be any compromise.

There can be no compromise between freedom and government controls even if the outcome is more attuned to one's personal values. To accept "just a few controls" is to surrender the principle of inalienable individual rights and to substitute for it the principle of the government's unlimited, arbitrary power, thus delivering oneself into gradual enslavement.

Balancing principle and pragmatism is not required; understanding the difference is.

Craig Westover is a contributing columnist to Opinion page of the St. Paul Pioneer Press, a contributor to the online publication MinnPost.com, and a senior policy fellow at the Minnesota Free Market Institute.

Humbly Uttering “I was Wrong”

By Cheri Pierson Yecke

John Adams once described a statesman as a person who stays true to his convictions regardless of which way the political winds blow. In stark contrast, a politician regularly tests the winds and goes in their direction, with no principles to anchor his stand. The goal of a politician is to remain in power; the goal of a statesman is to govern by a set standard of principles, not to be led by the ever-changing vagaries of opinion polls. Statesman and politician, therefore, are mutually exclusive terms. It is very possible, however, for an artful statesman also to be a *pragmatist*. Abraham Lincoln is a perfect example of a statesman who made this delicate balance work.

Lincoln keenly recognized that it was one thing to support abolition and quite another to ensure that it worked. More than anything else, he considered the pros and cons of the issue of timing: Should emancipation be gradual or occur all at once? For many years he clung to the idea that slavery could be eradicated only slowly over the course of time.

However, the realities of the Kansas-Nebraska Act shook his convictions. In arguing against allowing settlers the option of permitting slavery, Lincoln took the issue beyond humanitarian arguments (“the monstrous injustice of slavery itself”) to a global level. In 1854 he stated that by allowing slavery to expand, “We were proclaiming ourselves political hypocrites before the world by fostering human slavery and proclaiming ourselves, at the same time, the sole friends of human freedom.” He strongly articulated the principle—freedom for all—that was the foundation of his beliefs, and he moved away from a belief in passive eradication of slavery. In other words, he took to heart the changing political realities of his time, and *he changed his position*.

Over the following years, his writings reveal a continuing pragmatic streak regarding how to

operationalize the emancipation of American slaves. His ideas evolved over time as with an open mind he listened to multiple perspectives, giving himself occasion to mull over the nuances and possible unintended consequences of the momentous decision.

He considered numerous courses of action, including the establishment of an African colony for freed slaves and remunerating southern states that voluntarily emancipated their slaves as a way to ease the transition of their economies. He also considered possible negative consequences to emancipation, including rebellion by northerners who thought their wages would be depressed by the presence of freed blacks; the possibility of alliances of foreign nations with the Confederacy to ensure a steady supply of cotton; secession of the Border States; and the possible mass starvation of freed slaves.

It is clear that by July 1862 Lincoln had decided to issue a proclamation of emancipation, but he waited until September 22 of that year to do so. This is where his pragmatism again played an important role.

First, by having four Border States that were loyal to the Union but which allowed slavery, Lincoln could not politically afford blanket emancipation for all slaves. Instead, by freeing the slaves only in the Confederate states, his proclamation could be spun as a *military* move against the Confederacy, not as a threat against the Border States.

Next, Lincoln waited for a military victory before issuing the proclamation. Confederate forces had secured numerous victories that spring and summer, and in this context a federal edict abolishing slavery would have looked like an act of Union desperation. However, the Union victory at Antietam placed Lincoln in a position of strength from which the Emancipation Proclamation could be declared with authority and credibility.

Third, rather than sound an immediate and total ultimatum, Lincoln gave the Confederate states a

modified Hobson’s choice of “immediate or gradual abolishment of slavery,” provided that they acted by January 1, 1863. He thus put their fate in *their* hands. This shrewd political move placed the onus on each Confederate state, forcing political energy to be diverted from other endeavors.

Finally, Lincoln made it clear that he attributed his authority to act on the basis of his role as “Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy,” thus making the case that he was *not* usurping any congressional prerogative. If emancipation failed, members of Congress could walk away with their hands clean, shaking their heads and muttering “I told you so.”

In his actions, Lincoln got what he wanted through an artful sense of both timing and stakeholder need. Border States did not rebel, Congressmen did not have to act before the November 1862 elections, and the public saw Lincoln take advantage of a military victory to make a larger and more global statement.

Lincoln changed his views over time and allowed them to evolve while simultaneously being cognizant of the need to ensure that the principle for which he stood (freedom for slaves) could be successfully enacted. Principles are worthless if they exist only in theory. It is the *enactment* of principles that makes a difference in the world.

Fast-forward to today: Were a contemporary politician to present such a nuanced proposal to a modern audience, he would most likely be called not a pragmatist but a “flip-flopper,” implying that he was insufficiently grounded in principle and unwilling to take a bold stand. Such a shallow understanding of introspective contemplation by statesmen, combined with a cynicism regarding whether elected officials really *do* listen and struggle with momentous issues, results in a divisive form of polarizing labels, as though ideas and principles are inherently frozen in time. How refreshing it is—and how rare—when a political figure humbly utters the words “I was wrong.”

One contemporary example is former Washington D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams, who changed his mind on the issue of school choice in spite of his party’s orthodox views against vouchers. According to Williams, maintaining the status quo for the poor children in his city was not an option. He deserves a great deal of credit for his political courage, which placed the plight of inner city children above his own political future.

Another example is Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, who changed his position on abortion. Instead of being respected for allowing his views to evolve, he was blasted as inconsistent by many people on the right who failed to understand that a statesman *can* change his mind. Instead of attacking his purported lack of purity on the issue, abortion foes should have been pointing to Romney as an example of an open-minded politician. If he could be won over, then why couldn’t other leaders?

It is unfortunate that contemporary pundits think simplistically by creating mutually exclusive, binary labels. In their eyes, political figures can be either statesmen or politicians, pragmatists or flip-floppers, men of principle or ideologues – there is no in-between.

But they should know better. Looking to the model of Lincoln provides us with an example of how the desire to make a profound change means more than merely proclaiming it. It means triangulating political realities within the context of the times and then acting boldly and with principled resolve.

Cheri Pierson Yecke is dean of graduate programs at Harding University in Arkansas.

To Serve, Not Rule

By Stephen B. Young

On the great moral issue of his time—chattel slavery—Lincoln actually was a trimmer. He did not support slavery, but neither did he support

abolition. He took a third position somewhere between the two extremes.

Still, he was not unprincipled.

Lincoln took his stand on the U.S. Constitution, the compact creating our national political community. The Constitution, as Wendell Philips once charged in a moment of exasperation, was a “compact with the devil” for its legitimization of slavery in the original slave states.

Later, as the debate over slavery grew more and more intense under pressure from New England abolitionists like Philips, Lincoln shaped his politics around Constitutional norms. He proposed that slavery could remain where it was but that it should not be carried to new states entering the Union. It was on the grounds of no expansion that he opposed Stephen Douglas’ senate campaign of 1858 in Illinois.

Even during the Civil War—a war first and foremost to preserve the Union—Lincoln was slow to come out against slavery as a first principle. His famous Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 was a carefully crafted and finely argued legal document, using the exigencies of the law of war to override private property rights guaranteed by the very Constitution he had sworn to preserve and protect. And his emancipation of slaves by administrative fiat applied not across all the states of the Confederacy but to only rebellious territories under Union control.

Did this stance make Lincoln a compromiser, a weak man with no principles, a man unfit to lead?

Lincoln knew well the moral principle that made slavery unjustifiable. He had his firmness. His challenge was implementing a principle within Constitutional rules and with the support of the people.

And, Lincoln could stand tough and alone when necessary. There was a famous cabinet meeting when all members of the cabinet were opposed to

Lincoln’s proposed action, but as presiding officer, Lincoln declared, “The ayes have it.”

Lincoln was, to be sure, a canny politician well versed in the art of building coalitions of supporters and letting others have pride of place in government and policy making. He was also a shrewd humanitarian, with a genius for the kind word and caring gesture. He was a man “with malice toward none, with charity for all.” At the same time, he was a man with “firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right.”

What an astute phrase this was—and is for all time. We should be firm in the right, Lincoln said. But he warned the right is only how we see it to be within some framework of personal revelation. We—sinful, arrogant, prideful, stubborn, egocentric creatures that we are—see what we think is right. Perhaps we should be more humble than we usually are in believing that our perceived right is truly God’s right.

Lincoln knew that what we believe is right is not necessarily what God believes is right, for we are far from godlike.

Lincoln saw through both the boastful conceits and the high-minded pretensions of his contemporaries. In the dedication of the cemetery for the Union dead at Gettysburg, the principal orator, Edward Everett, spoke for a couple of hours. Lincoln took only several minutes to read his Gettysburg Address. Which one is remembered?

So what was the ground of Lincoln’s political beliefs? What kept him steadily on course through terrible times?

He was a man of the law, and he knew the Constitution. He knew that, under the law as specified in the Constitution, public office was a public trust. He knew that as president he was a steward, a fiduciary—not a boss or a king. It was his place to serve, not to impose his will.

Selfishness, corruption, self-promotion, willfulness, greed, childish emotions of revenge

and meanness, enjoyment of flattery and the comforts provided by cheerful and obsequious retainers—all of these and more turn us from our duty as faithful stewards.

The Lord of Israel once spoke through the prophet Ezekiel, saying He would have His flock back from the shepherds of Israel who had fed themselves and not the flock.

Understanding that public office is a public trust and that to hold office is to serve and not to rule reflects a deep ethical reality about sinful humanity. Power can be easily abused in our hands.

Stewardship—loyalty to the law and common good, and due care for those within our charge—is the high road of political morality in all times and places. Stewardship is not standing on principle out of stubborn intellectual arrogance. Rather, it is sound judgment in the application of principles and values.

Aristotle spoke of what is needed in the ethical person as moderation—prudence and wisdom in the choice of action.

Approaching office as Lincoln did invokes both the learning of Aristotle and the best teachings of the Old and New Testaments. Too much fidelity to principle at the wrong time and in the wrong way can be a form of arrogance, while too much compromise and opportunism is but a different form of willfulness.

Steven B. Young is Global Executive Director, The Caux Round Table.



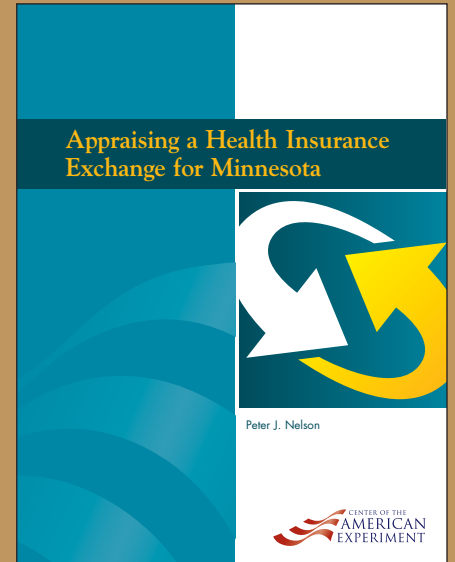
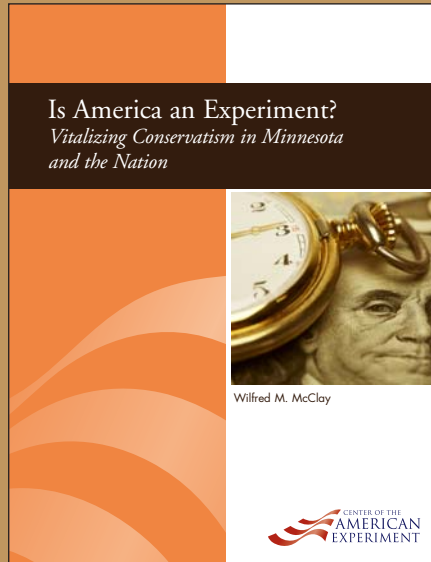
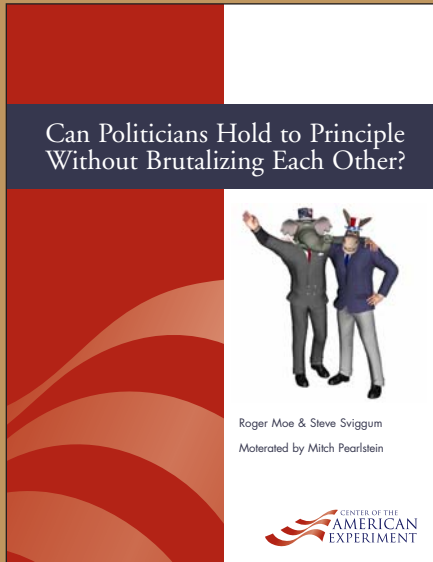
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